

Under the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law (Global IHL Initiative), **Algeria, Costa Rica, Sierra Leone, Slovenia and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** are pleased to present the:

WORKSTREAM 4

SECOND STATE CONSULTATION ON PROTECTING CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

For experts from armed forces, relevant ministries in capitals and legal and humanitarian advisers at permanent missions in Geneva

MONDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2025
9:00–18:00 (UTC+1)

FORMAT: IN PERSON (ICRC HUMANITARIUM IN GENEVA) AND ONLINE (ZOOM)

Background

International humanitarian law (IHL) balances humanity and military necessity for the purpose of providing concrete and realistic protection in armed conflict. Most principles and rules protecting civilian infrastructure, and civilian objects more generally, were codified and elaborated in 1977 during the negotiations on the Protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions. This balance considered not only the realities of conflicts immediately preceding the negotiations but also the devastation of two world wars. Notably, it was achieved against the backdrop of the looming possibility of even more intense conflicts and represented a commitment not to repeat the destruction of wars past. Today, the provisions in the Additional Protocols are binding not only on the parties to them, but also on all states and parties to armed conflict as a matter of customary international law.

The principles and rules protecting civilian infrastructure were codified at a time when there was considerably fewer resources and less technological capability and expertise available to limit the effects of military operations and spare civilians and civilian objects. Nor was there the knowledge that people have today of the direct and indirect effects that armed conflict have on civilian populations. Progress in these areas since then has generated greater potential for parties to spare the civilian population from the calamities of armed conflict.

However, this workstream is taking place amid decades of damage and destruction to civilian objects and infrastructure, with devastating consequences for civilians. More must be done to protect such infrastructure, and, by extension, the individual civilians who suffer when it is damaged or destroyed. In that sense, the workstream aims to build a shared understanding of the IHL principles and rules that protect civilian infrastructure, and the practical measures needed to apply these principles and rules in armed conflict.

During the first consultation, participants underscored the point that the essential services on which civilians depend often rely on a complex, interconnected, fragile web of infrastructure, which may be located underground, at ground level or above ground. Damage or destruction to just one part of this network can have cascading, cumulative, long-term and even irreversible consequences for civilians. Concerns were raised not only with respect to the immediate or direct impacts of attacks on infrastructure and civilians caused by a weapons' blast and fragmentation effects, but also the less visible, indirect or "reverberating" effects (often referred to as, second-, third- or higher-order effects in military doctrine) felt well beyond the impact zone of attack, and sometimes long after the attack. For example, damage to a power station can spread across many critical services, impacting the functioning of hospitals or of water-treatment stations, which may in turn lead to the death of patients, spread disease and trigger displacement. Schools, telecommunications, banking, transportation and emergency services could also be affected.

The interdependent and interconnected nature of infrastructure, and the services infrastructure enables, increases the likelihood of such indirect effects. They require uniquely tailored considerations when planning and launching an attack against a military objective. For example, damage to infrastructure that comprises the upstream component of a system will have a larger impact on the service it enables to function. The significance of a piece of infrastructure for the delivery of essential services to the civilian population may also change depending on the degree to which other infrastructure has already been damaged or destroyed by the conflict.

The aim of this consultation is to discuss how to ensure that targeting practices adequately account for these characteristics of civilian infrastructure. The first round already shed light on a handful of relevant measures, including:

- rigorous targeting procedures to determine the status under IHL of a potential target and continuously cross-check all available information
- establishing "restricted strike" and "no-strike" lists for certain objects
- requiring high-level command approval before striking certain targets
- involving legal advisers, engineers as well as water, environmental and other specialists in planning, including to conduct pre- and post-strike impact assessments to uphold the principle of distinction and minimize incidental harm
- leveraging new and emerging technologies to enhance protection of civilian infrastructure.

States will have the opportunity to discuss the measures listed above in greater depth. Moreover, several sessions will be dedicated to discussing measures not yet addressed within the framework of the global IHL initiative.

Crucially, the consultation will also serve as a space to exchange on efforts taken by states toward constantly improving and refining such measures. For example, certain states have implemented frameworks and institutions aimed at reducing civilian harm and progressively advancing their knowledge, practices, and tools to prevent, mitigate, and respond to it. Of particular interest is how these and related initiatives contribute, or could contribute, to the reduction of both direct and indirect damage to civilian infrastructure.

Objectives

Taking the characteristics of civilian infrastructure into account, this consultation seeks to:

- **provide an update on the workstream and its progress, in particular:**
 - brief participants on the findings of the first consultation reflected in the progress report and on insights gained from subsequent supporting events
 - outline the next steps towards identifying the workstream's final recommendations.
- **focus on addressing humanitarian and legal issues arising during targeting and relating to:**
 - the principle of distinction, including the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks
 - the principles of proportionality and precautions in attack, including with regard to so-called “dual-use” infrastructure
 - examples of efforts to continuously improve measures to ensure compliance with relevant IHL, and better protect civilian infrastructure and the civilians who rely on it.

Next steps

The results of this consultation will inform the broader work in the workstream on protecting civilian infrastructure and will lead to the formulation of concrete recommendations. Building on the first two rounds of consultations, one additional thematic consultation will be held in 2026 as part of this workstream, which could focus on:

- measures to protect civilian infrastructure against the effects of potential attacks by the adversary (so-called passive precautions)
- legal and humanitarian issues arising out of use that may expose infrastructure to harm from attack or military operations
- ensuring that civilians continue to have access to essential services during armed conflict
- protecting and facilitating the work of essential service providers in armed conflict
- how “demilitarized zones” or “safety zones” can contribute to protecting civilian infrastructure
- how states can improve their ability to prevent and mitigate harm to civilian objects and civilians.

This additional thematic consultation will also lead to the formulation of concrete recommendations. All recommendations will be presented in the second quarter of 2026 and will be the object of further discussions among all states.

Consultations will be complemented with expert meetings organized with Oxford University. All upcoming supporting events are announced on the [Humanity in War](#) website.

Participants

- The consultation will be held primarily in person in Geneva. Online participation is also possible.
- The consultation is **open to all interested states**. There is a strong preference for capital-based governmental representatives specializing in IHL and/or personnel with experience in

designing, refining or implementing targeting procedures and other measures, and representatives from permanent missions in Geneva.

- Other representatives with specific expertise in the subject matter (e.g. members of international organizations, civil society and academia) will also participate upon invitation.
- Kindly register no later than 27 October, using this link:
<https://forms.office.com/e/3bfDP7zw7U>

Procedure

- The working languages will be **Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish**, with simultaneous interpretation.
- We ask states to limit their statements to **four minutes** to ensure sufficient time for all participants to take the floor. At the end of each session, and after all participating entities that wish to contribute have done so, states and other participants will be given an opportunity to discuss ideas proposed by others.
- When preparing their statements, participants are requested to kindly consider the **guiding questions** provided in the agenda below.
- Given the technical challenges of hybrid meetings, we encourage delegations who are in the room to make their statements in person and in all cases to give their full attention to delegations speaking online.
- The **inclusive, constructive, non-politicized and solution-oriented** nature of the discussions will be maintained throughout the consultation. While participants are encouraged to refer to their state's domestic practice during the consultations, they are asked to kindly refrain from discussing specific contexts or the practice of other states.
- To facilitate interpretation, we invite participants to share a copy of their statements by 31 October 2025, via email at ihlinitiative@icrc.org, with "Protecting Civilian Infrastructure second consultation" in the subject line. We also encourage participants to send their full written statements by email after the meeting. **Unless confidentiality is explicitly requested, these statements will be published on the [Humanity in War](#) website.**
- The consultation will be recorded, but the recording will not be made public.

Agenda

Protecting Civilian Infrastructure Second Round of Consultations

9:00–18:00, 3 November 2025
ICRC Humanitarium, 17 avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva

** Depending on the number of statements given, all times set out below are subject to change.*

Registration and coffee / Login and connection	8:30–9:00
Opening of the meeting and introduction	9:00–9:30
Session 1: Accounting for the characteristics of civilian infrastructure and the essential services they provide	9:30–11:00
Expert presentation Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What targeting and verification procedures does your state have in place to ensure that the infrastructure, or parts thereof, that is being considered for attack is not a civilian object and not subject to specific protections?<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. Are those procedures applied differently with respect to infrastructure amounting to “objects normally dedicated to civilian purposes” pursuant to Article 52(3) of Additional Protocol I?1.2. Are those procedures applied differently with respect to “dual-use infrastructure” i.e. infrastructure used for both civilian and military purposes?2. When infrastructure, or parts thereof, has become a military objective, what can be done to anticipate:<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. the effects on other parts of that infrastructure2.2. the expected civilian harm from the attack if other infrastructure that the civilian population is relying on is already damaged, destroyed or no longer functioning2.3. the short- and long-term direct and indirect effects on other infrastructure that rely upon the targeted infrastructure, and ultimately on the civilian population, including if the targeted infrastructure is dual use?3. What measures can be taken to avoid or at least minimize the effects enumerated in question 2, and ensure that they are not excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated?	
Coffee break	11:00–11:30

Session 2: Accounting for the characteristics of civilian infrastructure and the essential services they provide (cont.)	11:30–13:00
Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Continuation of discussions from Session 1, if necessary. Does, or could, your state use “no-strike” or “restricted targeting” lists? What should determine whether an object is included on such a list? What do you see as the value in requiring higher-level command approval for targeting certain infrastructure and objects? What determines whether a target requires such approval? What expertise in addition to legal advisers, such as that of engineers or other specialists, contribute to ensuring that targeting decisions respect the relevant IHL principles and rules, including at the planning stage? Are there any other relevant protocols, tools or other measures which have not been addressed thus far? 	
Lunch (not provided)	13:00–14:00
Session 3: Towards constant improvements in planning and targeting practices	14:00–15:00
Expert presentation Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Continuation of discussions from Sessions 1 and 2, as needed. What mechanisms or procedures, if any, does your state have in place to document the planning and decision-making process relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> target selection and verification excessiveness of the foreseeable direct and indirect harm to civilians and civilian objects in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated precautions taken to avoid or at least minimize such harm? What lessons learned have, or could, be gleaned from comparing such documentation with post-strike impact assessments to determine the adequacy of targeting processes and precautionary measures? 	
Session 4: Towards constant improvements in planning and targeting practices (cont.)	15:00– 16:00
Expert presentation Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What factors or indicators would, or should, trigger a review of the measures discussed in previous sessions to ensure compliance with the IHL principles and rules protecting civilian infrastructure? What examples are there of efforts or institutions created by states to continuously consolidate, expedite, institutionalize and improve their ability 	

to prevent, mitigate and respond to harm to civilian infrastructure and civilians from attacks?	
Coffee break	16:00–16:30
Session 5: Emerging technologies for better ensuring protection of civilian infrastructure and civilians	16:30–17:30
Expert presentation Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can new technologies and advancements in military technology contribute to preventing and mitigating harm to civilian infrastructure and civilians? 2. What practical steps could be taken to incorporate these technologies and advancements into existing targeting processes and precautionary frameworks at the planning- and decision-making stage for the specific purpose of strengthening the protection of civilian infrastructure? 3. What pitfalls, dangers or risks could arise from relying on new technologies to protect civilian infrastructure? 	
Concluding remarks and next steps	17:30–18:00