



**Intervention of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio,
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva,
at the High-Level Launch Event on the Progress Report for the Global Initiative
to Galvanize Political Commitment to IHL
*Geneva, 16 October 2025***

Mr. Chair,

- At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the ICRC for convening this important event. I also wish to extend my gratitude to the distinguished panelists for highlighting the progress and the initial findings from the first round of consultations and of course to the 6 founding States of this landmark initiative.
- The Holy See has been following with particular attention the ongoing workstreams related to the protection of civilian infrastructure, protection of hospitals and IHL and peace. From the perspective of the Holy See, IHL should not be regarded merely as a set of legal obligations. It must also be understood and embraced as an ethical charter, rooted in the values of humanity that inspire it.
- It is precisely in today's troubling context that the need to galvanize political commitment to IHL - and its ethical foundation - becomes even more urgent. For the Holy See, the ultimate objective, which is truly worthy of our "calling" as a human family, besides the respect for IHL, is the active cultivation of a culture of justice and peace. Such peace is not simply the absence of conflict; it is a deliberate and active pursuit of the common good!
- Yet, it is extremely alarming that, despite the strict obligation to distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects, there is no conflict that does not end up in some way indiscriminately striking the civilian population, leaving behind a trail of death and destruction, "especially in the hearts of those who have brutally lost their children, their parents, their friends"¹ - everything. In this regard, despite existing legal protection enshrined in IHL, it is with deep sorrow that we continue to witness violent attacks on civilian infrastructure time and time again.

¹ Pope Leo XIV, *Appeal after the Angelus*, 12 October 2025.

- As regards the path ahead for this important initiative, the Holy See believes that some elements of further reflection should relate to the protection of places of worship. Indeed, these too are not spared and are rather targeted and exploited for military purposes. We often see it, and it is important to keep this awareness alive. Over the past decade, we have witnessed thousands of religious sites pertaining to different religious denominations being damaged or destroyed. The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, which are recognized by treaty and by customary international law, have been completely disregarded and seriously outraged. Such attacks have devastating long-term consequences for IHL, but even more for peace, reconciliation, and the cultural and spiritual identity of affected communities for generations to come, fueling a cycle of hatred and violence. Indeed, the deliberate destruction of places of worship goes beyond material loss – as it strikes at the very “soul” of the affected peoples.
- Indeed, when IHL is gravely and repeatedly violated and the wounds are not only physical but also moral and spiritual because religious places have been targeted, the road to reconciliation becomes far more difficult. **Therefore, in the framework of this initiative, the Holy See considers that – in order to strengthen a holistic and practical approach to IHL – events, recommendations and good practices related to the protection of places of worship should be included and put in evidence, in the efforts to galvanize support for IHL.** Indeed, the true measure of our humanity is not so much in how we treat our friends, but in how we treat those whom we consider adversaries and how we respect their most inner and cherished beliefs and the places where they can express them.

Thank you.