

Under the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law (Global IHL Initiative), Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are pleased to present the:

WORKSTREAM 3

THIRD STATE CONSULTATION ON IHL AND PEACE

For legal advisers from relevant ministries in capitals and legal and humanitarian advisers at Permanent Missions in Geneva

THURSDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2026

13:00–16:00 (UTC+1)

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

Background

Disarmament has historically been framed primarily as a matter of international security, supporting peace by building stability and confidence between states. Yet disarmament also supports peace in another important way: from the perspective of international humanitarian law (IHL), disarmament protects civilians and civilian objects, reinforces humanitarian norms and lays the foundations for reconciliation and recovery.

In this context, “disarmament” is understood broadly to encompass both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, including efforts related to non-proliferation.

By limiting or prohibiting weapons that cause indiscriminate or inhumane harm, through treaties or customary law, states can reduce the humanitarian consequences and strengthen compliance with IHL in case they find themselves at war. Humanitarian disarmament treaties (e.g. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological and Chemical Weapons Convention, the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Arms Trade Treaty) have illustrated how restrictions on weapons can both provide significant humanitarian benefits and serve as pathways to peace.

Yet troubling developments threaten these gains: unrestrained use of weapons in contemporary armed conflict, illicit arms transfers, withdrawals from or suspensions of disarmament treaties, disengagement from multilateral frameworks, and the spread of new technologies with unclear humanitarian implications and little regulation. The sheer number of weapons used across the globe today, combined with the way they are used, also creates disastrous consequences for the environment. Large-scale explosive bombardments and the use of cluster munitions, mines or other explosive

devices, incendiary weapons and many others increasingly damage ecosystems, contaminate land and water, and leave toxic remnants of war that endanger public health and resilience for generations. Addressing these humanitarian consequences is indispensable to building and sustaining peace.

Against this backdrop, the third consultation of the IHL and Peace workstream will examine the role of disarmament across the conflict cycle: in preserving peace and upholding IHL, in mediation processes, and in transitions from war back to peace.

1. Disarmament in preserving peace and upholding IHL

Disarmament plays a critical role in upholding humanitarian norms and reducing the risk of escalation. As recent discussions at the UN have emphasized, more weapons mean heightened threats to peace. By restricting access to weapons that cause indiscriminate or disproportionate harm, states can reduce the likelihood of IHL violations before they occur. For this to happen, states must take concrete steps to implement and apply their legal obligations, including obligations on disarmament and on refraining from using prohibited weapons and from using weapons in an unlawful manner.

In parallel, treaty universalization remains essential: withdrawals or suspensions from instruments such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and Convention on Cluster Munitions weaken the collective humanitarian framework and erode confidence in international commitments.

Obligations related to arms transfers also help limit the circulation of weapons and maintain international peace and security. Effective national arms transfer controls, and regional mechanisms help prevent diversion and illicit flows of weapons, thereby protecting civilians and civilian objects, including the natural environment. Strengthening disarmament not only safeguards humanitarian protections but also reinforces stability and conflict prevention.

If disarmament, including arms control and non-proliferation, is a necessary and effective tool to prevent war and minimize human suffering, the reverse is also true: increasing armament heightens the risks of war and of IHL violations being committed. At a time when military spending is growing to extraordinary levels across the globe, it is therefore vital – in addition to strengthening arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament efforts – to ensure that investment in IHL compliance keeps pace. States must ensure that investment in IHL training and implementation increases accordingly, including in measures to ensure respect for IHL obligations related to weapons.

2. Disarmament in mediation processes

The continued presence and circulation of weapons is a major obstacle to peace in any armed conflict. Disarmament measures are therefore frequently incorporated into peace negotiations as confidence-building steps that allow parties to move from confrontation to dialogue. Mediation processes often aim to initiate dialogue between parties on practical steps that can be taken, including on weapons collection, clearance and destruction, and on integrating these steps into clear provisions in peace agreements.

When grounded in humanitarian principles, these provisions help promote compliance with IHL and make agreements longer lasting. Explicitly addressing disarmament can reduce mistrust, ease security dilemmas and demonstrate good faith to affected populations. When articulated alongside clear humanitarian guarantees – such as the protection of civilians and civilian objects and safeguards for humanitarian access – disarmament provisions can reinforce respect for IHL and help ensure that peace accords address both security and humanitarian imperatives. In this way, disarmament provisions move beyond technical or military arrangements to serve as a humanitarian tool that strengthens the credibility and resilience of peace processes.

3. Disarmament in transitions from war back to peace

In the aftermath of armed conflict, disarmament is indispensable for recovery, reconciliation and sustainable peace. The continued presence of weapons, such as landmines, explosive remnants of war, and toxic residues – known as weapon contamination – claims lives, obstructs reconstruction and prevents displaced people from returning home. Humanitarian demining, safe stockpile destruction, and arms collection are therefore vital to restoring livelihoods, rebuilding infrastructure and reducing the risk of renewed violence. These efforts are often linked to broader disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, which aim to remove weapons from combatants, support their transition to civilian life and strengthen community resilience, laying the groundwork for long-term peace and security. These visible steps also help rebuild trust between communities and signal a genuine commitment to peace. Addressing the environmental legacy of conflict – by clearing contaminated land, preventing further degradation and protecting ecosystems – further supports resilience and long-term development. Integrated into post-conflict strategies, disarmament therefore ensures that peace is not only achieved but sustained.

Objectives

This consultation aims to:

- reaffirm the intrinsic link between IHL, disarmament and peace
- identify practical steps states can take to uphold humanitarian disarmament norms in times of crisis and prevent treaty withdrawals
- highlight how disarmament can be integrated into mediation and peace processes to strengthen protection, trust and compliance with IHL
- explore how post-conflict disarmament enables recovery, reconciliation, environmental remediation and sustainable peace
- enable participants to share practices and lessons learned, focusing on legal, institutional and policy measures that have supported implementation at the national level
- identify obstacles and gaps that hinder fulfilment of disarmament commitments and consider ways to overcome them.

Next steps

Following the three rounds of consultations, the co-chairing states and the ICRC will formulate concrete recommendations, which will be presented to all states for further discussion:

- On **1 April 2026**, the first versions of the recommendations for all workstreams will be sent to all Permanent Missions in Geneva and published on the [Humanity in War](#) website.
- The **fourth round of consultations** will be held between **4 and 6 May 2026**, in a **hybrid format**. During this round, all states will be invited to share comments on the first versions of the recommendations for each workstream, which will be discussed sequentially.
- On **1 June 2026**, the second versions of the recommendations for all workstreams will be sent to all states and published on the [Humanity in War](#) website.
- The **fifth round of consultations** will be held between **22 and 26 June 2026**, in a **hybrid format**. All states will be invited to provide final comments on the recommendations. Following this round, the co-chairing States and the ICRC will finalize the recommendations for each workstream, which will be presented to all states in the second part of 2026.

Participants

- The consultation will be held in a hybrid format with participation in person and online.
- The consultation is **open to all states that are interested**. There is a strong preference for capital-based government representatives specializing in IHL and humanitarian affairs, and for 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.
- Please register no later than **Friday, 30 January 2026**, using the [registration form](#).

Procedure

- The working languages will be **Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish**, with simultaneous interpretation.
- We ask participants to limit their statements to **four minutes** to ensure sufficient time for all participants to take the floor. At the end of the consultation, and after all participants 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.
- 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 30 January 2026, via email at ihlinitiative@icrc.org, with "IHL and peace third 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

IHL and Peace Third Round of Consultations

13:00–16:00, 5 February 2026
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 / Login and connection	12:30–13:00
Opening discussion: “Disarmament and IHL – Promoting peace by reinforcing humanitarian protections”	13:00–13:45
This opening session will set the scene by highlighting how disarmament, when framed through the lens of IHL, reinforces humanitarian protections and contributes to sustainable peace. Panellists will reflect on current challenges, including unlawful uses of weapons, increases in military spending and rearmament, treaty withdrawals, environmental impacts, and emerging technologies, while underscoring the enduring relevance of humanitarian disarmament frameworks.	
Discussion States are invited to share views on the guiding questions proposed below. Breaks will be taken as needed depending on the number of requests for the floor. Guiding questions <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How can states strengthen adherence to humanitarian disarmament norms – including arms transfer controls, prohibitions, and legal reviews of weapons – to reduce the risk of IHL violations and prevent escalation?2. What good practices exist for integrating disarmament commitments (such as weapons control measures or provisions related to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) into peace negotiations in a way that builds trust, protects civilians and supports lasting agreements?3. How can disarmament measures, such as demining, stockpile destruction, weapons collection and environmental remediation, support recovery, safe return of displaced people, and long-term resilience?4. What national approaches or institutional safeguards help ensure continued adherence to disarmament treaties and avoid treaty withdrawals or suspensions, so that commitments made in time of peace stand the test of armed conflict, which they are intended to mitigate?	13:45–15:45
Concluding remarks and next steps	15:45–16:00