

Global IHL Initiative: Workstream 3 IHL and Peace Consultation

Geneva, 26 November 2025

United Kingdom Interventions

Session 1: Accounting for the missing and the dead

In our first intervention the United Kingdom would like to thank the ICRC for hosting these consultations and the co-chairs for leading this important workstream. We would particularly like to welcome the clear focus that co-chairs have placed on identifying areas of concrete policy action. It is vital that we use forums such as these to both share our knowledge but also develop clear recommendations that all states can take to protect IHL.

In April 2025 the UK Government, led by the National Committee on IHL, published a Practitioner's Legal Handbook on Conflict, Hunger and International Humanitarian Law to promote the relevance and significance of IHL and support its effective implementation by the UK across our Armed Forces, government officials and civil society.

The handbook includes sections on displacement, returns, and children in armed conflict, all highly relevant to today's agenda. We hope that all states and organisations can benefit from the guidance in this handbook.

Accounting for the missing and the dead in post-conflict contexts is a key obligation under IHL. The UK has adopted specific measures and mechanisms to ensure dignified management of issues surrounding the dead and to provide information to families.

There are several institutions in the UK which hold expertise in missing persons, including the UK Missing Persons Unit (within the National Crime Agency), which provides specialist support to law enforcement agencies in the UK and overseas.

Additionally, we are working to update the UK's doctrine on the National Information Bureau (NIB), which is currently contained in JDP 1-10 Captured Persons. The NIB comprises a Prisoner of War Information Bureau and a Civilian Information Bureau. This work is being undertaken in conjunction with the updating of the UK Joint Service Manual on the Law of Armed Conflict, JSP 383.

Missing people's families can also play a key role in shaping mechanisms. A clear example of this is the work that the British Red Cross are doing in the field of family tracing, working closely with affected families. Considerations to bring this issue more formally into the NIB structure is underway.

The role of missing people's families was a central consideration for the UK when supporting the establishment of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains in Northern Ireland, so we understand very directly the critical importance of this issue. Thank you.

Session 2: Detainees: Release, return and social integration

The United Kingdom remains committed to our obligations on the safe release, repatriation and resettlement of detainees. It is essential that states support each other to develop frameworks to better manage these issues following the cessation of hostilities.

Effective IHL compliance promotes an international framework with shared rules. Shared rules, in turn, encourage predictable behaviour by states, and create conditions for the adherence to the rule of law and accountability. To ensure that IHL obligations are adhered to, there is a range of legal and institutional frameworks available.

For the UK, the JDP 1-10 Captured Persons doctrine ensures that UK Armed Forces follow their legal obligations under IHL. The doctrine makes explicit reference to the 1949 Geneva Conventions which further detail the legal framework regarding release, return and social integration.

The JDP 5 sets out that all captured persons must be treated humanely at all times, including during all stages of their handling from point of capture to release or transfer.

In October 2024 the UK released the second edition of the “Voluntary Report on the Implementation of International Humanitarian law at the Domestic level” which further highlights the UK’s efforts to align with the Geneva Conventions. It covers protection for civilians, captured persons, third-party transfers and aid delivery.

On the legislative side, the UK Parliament, through the International Development Committee, monitors adherence to IHL and provides important oversight of the UK government.

In September 2025 the Committee published the fifth special report on the UK’s role in upholding IHL and supporting the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. The report recommended that the Government prioritises military-to-military training on IHL in line with our recent increase in defence spending and shows that ensuring firm adherence to IHL is a continuous but vital task for all states. Thank you.

Session 3: Safe and voluntary return of displaced people

The United Kingdom remains committed to the pressing issue of people displaced by armed conflict.

We regard the UN Global Compact on Refugees as the main framework for addressing rising global displacement, and for ensuring that refugees are supported to remain in the regions where they are currently hosted and return home safely and with dignity, when conditions allow.

This year the UK continued to provide funding for UNHCR and urged all UN Member States to do the same. We endorse UNHCR's role in upholding protection standards, including recognising the dignity of forcibly displaced persons by helping them return home safely when conditions are appropriate and safe.

The UN Global Refugee Forum provides an important platform for states to consider durable solutions to displacement and drive greater action on conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

An example of a practical measure the UK Government has taken to support people displaced by the war in Ukraine is the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, which has ensured the issuing of over 270,000 visas for vulnerable Ukrainians fleeing a brutal conflict.

In many contexts safe return is dependent upon reducing the threat posed by landmines and/or other explosive remnants of war.

The FCDO's Global Mine Action Programme (GMAP) is the UK's main programme for funding humanitarian mine action. This programme is spending over £27M this financial year on demining operations and/or explosive ordnance risk education in 12 countries, helping communities to stay safe and rebuild their lives.

GMAP's main implementing partners are the HALO Trust (HALO) and Mines Advisory Group (MAG), two British organisations jointly responsible for delivering 69% of all civilian mine clearance globally. Countries where they are supporting the safe return of displaced people through FCDO operations include Afghanistan, South Sudan and Ukraine.

GMAP works through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Gaza and Syria, both places where the safe return of displaced people is a priority. GMAP's pilot project in northeast Syria working through Danish Church Aid (DCA) also includes support for IDPs.

In 2024 the UK ratified the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (2003) which sets out a number of important obligations that aim to spare civilians from the long-term threats posed by ERW. Since 2014, the UK has invested over £120 million in mine action, resulting in over 689 million square metres of land being cleared and confirmed safe, and over 5.4 million people reached by education on mine risk. We are proud of this continued contribution. Thank you.

Session 4: Children as agents of protection and recovery

As we all sadly know, children are uniquely vulnerable and disproportionately affected by conflict. According to the UN, grave violations against children in conflict increased by 25% last year, to the highest number on record. Apart from the physical suffering and mental trauma, conflict violates the rights of children to education and healthcare, with long-term consequences for children, their families and communities.

The United Kingdom is committed to preventing and ending grave violations against children in conflict and to supporting, promoting and defending the UN Children and Armed Conflict mandate.

The UK is an active and committed member of the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which leads the international response to grave violations against children in conflict. Here, the UK plays a key role in ensuring scrutiny of conflicts where children are harmed and in holding perpetrators to account.

Using diplomatic efforts to advocate for the protection of children in post-conflict contexts, including the implementation where relevant of the recommendations from the UNSG's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict and the UNSC Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, are important steps that states can take to protect children.

The UK supports and adheres to a set of instruments that provide vital safeguards for children's rights and guide reintegration efforts for those formerly associated with armed groups. Including, the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles.

The UK continues to advocate for the integration of peace education into national curricula and the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, which the UK endorsed in 2018, to guarantee the right to education in fragile contexts.

We believe that comprehensive reintegration packages that combine education, psychosocial support and vocational training, alongside community-based approaches are key to foster acceptance and resilience post-conflict.

And it is important that children must be recognised not only as beneficiaries but as active contributors to peacebuilding. We advocate for initiatives that create formal spaces for youth participation in transitional processes and empower them through peer-led dialogue and community engagement. Their voices are critical to building sustainable peace.

The UK is committed to amplifying the voices of young people and ensuring their voices are heard as we develop and deliver policies on issues that affect them. The UK invited the first girl child to brief the UN Security Council in person in 2023, providing a platform for seventeen-year-old Violetta from Colombia to share her story and recommendations. The UK will continue to champion meaningful and safe engagement with children affected by conflict. Thank you.