

National Society worldwide consultations in  
support of the Global Initiative to Galvanise  
Political Commitment to International  
Humanitarian Law  
(Prevention Good Practices – Workstream 1)

Report

May 2026



## Background

In September 2024, together with Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) launched a [global initiative](#) aimed at galvanising political commitment to international humanitarian law (IHL). A part of this work, the prevention good practices workstream, is about the sharing of effective measures to prevent IHL violations before they occur. It is premised on the understanding that all States are generally convinced that disseminating and implementing IHL at the domestic level is an essential step towards achieving better respect for IHL.

The ICRC has called on all High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions to join this initiative. Additionally, and recognising the crucial role that National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) play in creating conditions conducive to IHL compliance (including through IHL training and dissemination), Australian Red Cross, Costa Rican Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Qatar Red Crescent and Senegalese Red Cross came together to organise online consultations to provide the opportunity to bring forward the perspectives of National Societies to this workstream.

The February 2026 consultations were open to all interested National Societies. They were conducted in Arabic, English, French and Spanish and accommodated a range of time zones. National Societies were invited to contribute to the discussions on as many or as few points as are relevant and of interest (orally or in writing if preferred). This included noting that, in the case of National Societies that do not have a significant IHL training capacity, they may work in other ways to help prevent IHL violations. National Societies were invited to reflect on the [Progress Report](#), and to particularly consider five questions:

1. If your National Society has had a role to play in your State improving its approach to IHL training or dissemination activities, both in terms of content, methodology and/or audiences to be involved and targeted (e.g. military, government, the broader community, schools), can you share what you see as good practice approaches?
2. How do you think IHL training can best be organised effectively to socialise the underlying norms of IHL? Do you have any examples you can share of how your National Society has sought to approach this?
3. How does your National Society approach measuring the impact of IHL training or dissemination? Do you have any advice that you can share?
4. Do you have any good practice examples of how your National Society has provided support or advice to your State for the universalisation and effective implementation of relevant IHL/disarmament treaties?
5. Do you see respect for IHL as part of the national identity in your country and do you have any stories or examples which illustrate this? Do you see your National Society as having any role in this?

## Introduction

The consultations provided the opportunity to bring forward the practice and expertise of National Societies when it comes to IHL training and dissemination.

National Societies, through their mandate and mission, play a unique and valuable role in IHL training and dissemination, thereby contributing to the prevention of violations of IHL. In addition to IHL training that many National Societies provide for, and often jointly with, their respective armed forces (including those deploying with multi-national or UN forces), National Societies work with a wide range of actors responsible for implementing IHL in practice. These include National IHL Committees, relevant professional bodies, diplomats, civil servants, parliamentarians, medical and health professionals, humanitarian actors, journalists and media professionals, legal professionals (including judges) and other security forces (e.g. police). Many National Societies also place particular emphasis on educational institutions and young people, recognizing them as key players in fostering a culture of compliance with IHL among future decision-makers.

National Societies have a broad range of tools for working with and across these varied audiences and significant expertise in tailoring both the focus and complexity of their activities to different audiences. These tools include using role play, practice-oriented and scenario-based learning, peer-to-peer exchanges, training of trainers courses, digital tools - including online modules and virtual reality. Other approaches include IHL competitions based on role-playing or similar initiatives, radio broadcasts, public lectures and dialogue-based methods. Across all regions, the adaptivity of the training to the specific target audience and to the role that participants play in society has been identified as a key element to effective socialisation of IHL norms, ensuring that participants understand how IHL applies to their specific professional responsibilities or operational contexts.

Recognising this role and the distinctive approach of National Societies, **six key recommendations and four overarching themes** of particular relevance to States emerged from the discussions. These are summarised below and outline how States can best harness the value that National Societies have to offer in IHL training and dissemination.

## Recommendations to States to best harness the value that National Societies have to offer in IHL training and dissemination

1. States are encouraged to ensure a clear normative and institutional framework that enables the existence and functioning of National Societies, including through recognition of their auxiliary role to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, based on which they disseminate and assist their governments in disseminating IHL, and they cooperate with them to promote respect for IHL.
2. States are encouraged to formalise cooperation arrangements between National IHL Committees, relevant Ministries, and National Societies for collaboration on IHL initiatives. This may include technical working groups, designated focal points, and the involvement of National Societies in National IHL Committees as members or observers.
3. States are encouraged to include National Societies in discussions related to IHL and other relevant international law treaties and their implementation, including through National IHL Committees (or equivalent) and relevant international fora, such as the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Where appropriate, States may also draw on National Society expertise in the development of national implementing measures and voluntary IHL reporting.
4. States are encouraged to ensure that humanitarian diplomacy efforts are informed by IHL and, where appropriate, include IHL themes. National Societies can contribute to informing States' views on IHL-related matters, as well as supporting training and dissemination for those engaged in such activities.
5. National Societies play an essential role in ensuring that IHL is not conceived only as a set of international norms, but as a principled framework that should be part of the national humanitarian culture and narrative. States are encouraged to support National Society-led IHL training and dissemination activities to a wide range of actors, including professional groups, civil society and the general public. Particular consideration might be given to youth engagement and locally led initiatives that are able to link cultural and ethical norms to IHL.
6. Where appropriate, States are encouraged to support National Societies' efforts to assess the impact of IHL training and dissemination, including through access to relevant data and beneficiaries, and to be cognisant of the resources and capacities that such analysis requires.

**Main themes of particular relevance to States based on the overview of National Societies' approaches to IHL training and dissemination activities (summary of discussions):**

*1. Formal recognition of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' status and role: a vital element for IHL dissemination and training*

A consistent theme across the consultations was the value of the formal institutional and normative processes through which National Societies are established in domestic jurisdictions, and through which their work with governments is regulated. These frameworks include the formal recognition of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, the establishment and good functioning of National IHL Committees or, where available, equivalent mechanisms (including arrangements that allow for National Societies to engage in these Committees, preferably as members and otherwise as observers). Regular and collaborative IHL reporting was also highlighted. Examples included voluntary reports on the domestic implementation of IHL being prepared in discussion with the National Society and dedicated and collaborative cooperation and contributions to the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and its associated resolutions and through joint pledges. Through such formal recognition and structured cooperation, National Societies are both empowered and better placed to contribute to IHL dissemination and training.

The way in which these frameworks are implemented in practice varies across countries. Examples shared during the consultations illustrate different approaches adopted at the national level. One National Society highlighted the formalisation, within their National IHL Committee, of a technical-advisory body in which it participates as a member, as a good practice for institutionalising its auxiliary role. This auxiliary role enables National Societies to act as a stable bridge between civil society and State institutions, and to support the translation of humanitarian norms into concrete and sustainable policies. The value of formal cooperation agreements with relevant ministries

(such as Defence and Foreign Affairs) was also emphasised as a means of ensuring continuity of collaboration between the National Society and its governmental counterparts, including on IHL dissemination and training. Ensuring continuity beyond changes of personnel and government posture and ensuring that any gaps in IHL training and dissemination can be identified and filled were particularly discussed as valuable outcomes of formalised agreements. Several National Societies referred to formalised arrangements with their armed forces on collaborative IHL training, and to recurring annual training for officials in ministries with IHL-related advisory roles. One National Society further shared an example of how engagement through the National IHL Committee led to tailored IHL training for diplomats involved in mediation and conflict resolution processes.

The role of National Society voices in National IHL Committee discussions (or equivalent mechanisms) was also highlighted, particularly in relation to the provision of advice and support to States on the universalization and effective implementation of IHL and IHL-related treaties. Examples of such engagement were shared, including involvement in treaty-related consultations through National IHL Committees dating back to the adoption of the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. The majority of National Societies represented in the consultation spoke to National IHL Committees in some way. Overall, participation in National IHL Committees represents a common channel through which National Societies engage with States on IHL-related matters, including on international law-making processes, treaty review conferences, and other relevant international developments. Several National Societies indicated that this modality functions effectively in their context, and examples were shared of National IHL Committees acting as an important catalyst for State accession to specific IHL treaties.

*2. Collaborative processes: States and National Societies capitalising on opportunities to support each other in IHL dissemination*

In addition to the formalised and regular structures described above, the importance of more ad-hoc (context or thematically specific) but ongoing collaboration was noted by those who have established strong and regular dialogue with offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Defence and/or other relevant Ministries. Where such dialogue is established on a regular basis, it was underlined as beneficial for a range of IHL objectives, including the quality and consistency of training and dissemination. Maintaining a consistent focus on IHL within humanitarian-related policy and diplomatic discussions, at both national and international levels, and engaging with civil society, was seen as an effective way to ensure that national positions on civilian protection are well-informed and grounded in IHL. This approach was also considered to support better understanding and application of relevant IHL rules in practice. In particular:

- A number of National Societies mentioned their participation in various national expert groups, including groups on national preparedness, cultural property protection and military law.
  - One National Society shared an example of a noticeable change towards an IHL-informed perspective reflected in the statements of a government minister, following a series of briefings provided by the National Society.
  - Another referred to the launch of strategic initiatives within the framework of the National Development Strategy as a way of reflecting the integration of IHL into national discourse and policies.
  - Several National Societies provided examples of publications that they had developed for engagement with key actors, such as parliamentarians or government officials, addressing both IHL and the Movement.
  - Many National Societies described making regular interventions in public hearings on government policy, reports, draft legislation and/or legislative proposals as an effective way to draw attention to specific IHL-related issues.
- Collaboration with academics was also identified as an important factor in strengthening approaches to IHL training and dissemination, including through ad hoc memoranda of understanding with universities and/or the establishment of academic networks able to provide technical advice to National Societies and National IHL Committees on IHL-related matters.

### *3. Bringing IHL local: supporting National Societies in IHL dissemination and training at the community level*

Multiple National Societies mentioned that their countries have a strong and long-standing tradition of respect for IHL and that this is a part of the national identity. In many contexts, the National Society is perceived as playing an important role in contributing to the public's understanding of rules in armed conflict. At the same time, some observed that the tradition of respect for IHL is being challenged by current events.

Against this backdrop, National Societies highlighted the importance of linking IHL to specific cultural and ethical norms, including at the community level, as a way of reinforcing understanding of and respect for IHL. The following examples were given:

- Dissemination of key IHL principles should be carried out in local languages.
- Storytelling, including hearing from persons affected by armed conflict, among others, is a valuable technique to connect IHL norms and principles with concepts familiar to the community, including local experiences. Linking such stories to other key Movement activities, such as emergency response in cases of natural disasters or Restoring Family Links work, was also considered helpful.
- Religious and community leaders should be encouraged to support the sharing of IHL core messages and principles.
- Integrating IHL topics, such as the protection of healthcare in times of

armed conflict, into community resilience programs can help promote a culture of respect for humanitarian and healthcare professionals.

- One National Society emphasised that, in countries directly affected by armed conflict, teaching IHL through a values-based approach, thus focusing on its protective value for human dignity, humanity, and civilisation (rather than only on prohibitions), has proved to be more effective.
- Several National Societies also highlighted the importance of socialising IHL norms from an early stage, for example, within family life and school curricula.
- National Societies further underlined the value of grassroots-level dissemination, notably through National Society volunteers specialised in IHL who carry out these activities within their communities.

The challenge of ensuring the continued relevance of IHL in the public discourse in countries not experiencing armed conflict was also raised by several National Societies. At the same time, it was noted that, due to broader challenges to international law, and renewed concerns about IHL compliance, there has, at the time of this consultation (early 2026), been greater visibility and significance of IHL concepts in public debate than at some other points in recent history. Several National Societies also highlighted the importance of preparedness for the risk of large-scale conflict and their role in this process. In this regard, National Societies play an essential role in ensuring that IHL is not understood solely as an international legal framework, but as an integral part of national humanitarian culture. Efforts undertaken by National Societies towards this objective were considered to merit support from States, including through ensuring that appropriate preparedness measures are in place to promote respect for IHL in the event of armed conflict.

Another related point highlighted by several National Societies was the importance of

ensuring that IHL dissemination to the general public is carried out as locally as possible. National Society volunteers were identified as a particular asset in this respect, as they are able to deliver IHL dissemination and awareness-raising activities within their own communities, fostering a bottom-up approach and helping to root the international nature of IHL in local contexts. Collaboration between National Societies and municipalities on humanitarian issues of shared relevance was also mentioned as an important factor in facilitating community outreach. As one example, a National Society shared that local IHL volunteers specialising in the protection of cultural property in times of armed conflict provide support to the local authorities in affixing the “Blue Shield” on identified cultural objects within their territories, in accordance with Articles 16 and 17 of the 1954 Hague Convention.

#### *4. Monitoring and evaluation: recognising both the value and the challenges*

The consultations also included reflection on effective monitoring and evaluation of IHL training and dissemination. Measuring the impact of such activities remains a challenge for many National Societies, although there is a clear understanding of their value and of their importance to States.

While efforts are increasingly being made to move beyond purely quantitative monitoring and to engage more systematically in qualitative assessment, it is widely recognised that meaningful qualitative monitoring is challenging. National Societies are keen to reiterate that meaningful analysis of the impact of IHL training and dissemination requires a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Attention was also drawn to measuring impact through changes in institutional behaviour, and the extent to which IHL rules are integrated into policies and applied in practice. A number of National Societies further highlighted the compilation and existence of voluntary IHL reports, often prepared under the auspices of the National IHL Committee, as a useful tool for assessing progress in the implementation of IHL at the national level.

Post-course assessment questionnaires designed to capture feedback on the quality and relevance of training are widely used. In some cases, the completion of such questionnaires is required for the issuance of certificates. More broadly, National Societies reported using a range of surveys, questionnaires and consultations as part of their evaluation practices. Increased internal staff knowledge of IHL, as well as the incorporation of IHL principles into operational programs within the Movement, were also cited as indicators of the impact of internal training.

External feedback was recognised as essential to measuring significant long-term meaningful impact, although National Societies also noted the resource implications and practical challenges involved in obtaining such feedback. A small number of National Societies described more comprehensive approaches, including the use of specific questions in post-course surveys aimed not only at assessing perceived improvements in knowledge but also at understanding how participants intend to apply IHL in their professional roles.

One National Society also referred to undertaking monitoring and evaluation collaboratively with its armed forces, including through regular surveys assessing soldiers' knowledge of, and attitudes towards, IHL. Such outreach activities were

noted to have the added value of supporting the development and maintenance of professional networks. The possibility of conducting follow-up surveys with participants in significant National Society IHL engagements, some years after the event (IHL Moot Court Competition or multi-day trainings) was also raised as a possible approach (for example, surveying participants 5 years later to follow career trajectory and the extent to which they apply IHL in their work). Follow-up efforts to assess whether concepts disseminated had been incorporated into institutional practice were similarly suggested.

Surveys aimed at gauging the general public's understanding of IHL were also mentioned as being used in some contexts. Analysis of the National Society website traffic was also cited as a tool for identifying areas of greatest public interest and for informing adjustments to dissemination strategies. In addition, the performance of students studying IHL nationally, as well as academic outputs (including articles and books), were mentioned as indicators of the extent to which IHL has been mainstreamed within universities and military academies. Cooperation with academic institutions to strengthen qualitative impact analysis was also mentioned.



## Conclusion

The 45 National Societies, from all regions of the world, represented either in the online consultations, and/or through written representations, hope that this report will be of value to States and to the ICRC as they work towards the Conference on Humanity in War in late 2026. It is also hoped that highlighting the value of the diverse work of National Societies in contributing to preventing IHL violations, together with the recommendations set out in this report, will help inform the outcomes and recommendations of the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to IHL.

### **List of contributing National Societies (through oral and/or written submissions)**

American Red Cross; Australian Red Cross; Belgian Red Cross; British Red Cross; Bulgarian Red Cross; Canadian Red Cross Society; Chilean Red Cross; Colombian Red Cross Society; Costa Rican Red Cross; Cuban Red Cross; Ecuadorian Red Cross; Fiji Red Cross Society; French Red Cross; Honduran Red Cross; Irish Red Cross Society; Italian Red Cross; Lithuanian Red Cross Society; New Zealand Red Cross; Norwegian Red Cross; Paraguayan Red Cross; Polish Red Cross; Qatar Red Crescent Society; Red Crescent Society of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Red Cross of Montenegro; Red Cross Society of Panama; Romanian Red Cross; Saudi Red Crescent Authority; Senegalese Red Cross Society; Spanish Red Cross; Swedish Red Cross; Swiss Red Cross; The Bahamas Red Cross Society; Turkish Red Crescent Society; Ukrainian Red Cross Society; Zambia Red Cross Society.

### **List of other National Societies that joined the consultation calls**

Austrian Red Cross; German Red Cross; Guatemalan Red Cross; Red Crescent Society of Azerbaijan; Red Cross of Serbia; Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia; Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Russian Red Cross; Sri Lanka Red Cross; The Comoros Red Crescent.