

**Breakfast Meeting on Protection of Civilians:
*Upholding International Humanitarian Law in the Use of Information and Communication
Technologies during Armed Conflict***

**Jointly organized by Ghana, Switzerland and the International Committee of the Red Cross
(ICRC)**

Addis Ababa, Hilton Hotel, 3 June 2026

Report

On 3rd June 2026, the Embassy of Switzerland, the Embassy of Republic of Ghana and the ICRC Delegation to the African Union (AU) jointly convened in Addis Ababa a high-level breakfast meeting on *Upholding International Humanitarian Law in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) during Armed Conflict*.

A. Background and Objectives

The event aimed at promoting, among AU Member States, the Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law (Global IHL Initiative), and in particular its ICT workstream and the draft outcome document currently being finalized following successive rounds of all-State consultations. Discussions focused on the humanitarian and legal challenges posed by the use of ICTs during armed conflict and their implications for the protection of civilians. The meeting provided an opportunity to advance a shared understanding of these challenges, take stock of progress achieved within the ICT workstream, and reinforce collective efforts to strengthen civilian protection in an increasingly digitalized conflict environment.

The event also formed part of the ongoing collaboration between the Embassy of Switzerland and the ICRC Delegation to the African Union to convene an annual dialogue with African Union Member States on issues relating to the protection of civilians. It was linked to the Protection of Civilians (PoC) Week, held annually in May at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

More broadly, the event contributed to policy discussions within the African Union on the humanitarian implications of ICT activities during armed conflict and identified opportunities to strengthen the implementation of IHL and civilian protection in light of the Common African Position on the Application of International Law to the Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Cyberspace, adopted by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in January 2024.

The event brought together 95 participants, including high-level representatives of AU Member States, diplomats from non-African countries accredited to the African Union, representatives of United Nations agencies, members of the International Red Cross and

Red Crescent Movement, as well as experts from civil society and think tanks. The broad participation by AU member states, particularly in light of the start of the Permanent Representative Council on the same day, highlighted a growing African interest of and potential momentum for increased African ownership in the debate on a global strengthening of IHL.

B. Summary of Discussions

i. Opening remarks

The meeting was opened by H.E. Riccarda Chanda, the Ambassador of Switzerland to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union; Brigadier General Richard Edukwesi Woanya, Defence Attaché of the Embassy of Ghana in Ethiopia; H.E. Dr. Obaida Eldandarawy, the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union; and Brigadier General Abu Bakarr Conteh, representing H.E. Harold Saffa, the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone to Ethiopia and the Permanent Representative to the African Union.

Speakers emphasized the growing humanitarian consequences arising from the use of ICTs and other digital technologies during armed conflict, including their impact on civilians, civilian infrastructure and essential services. They reaffirmed the continued relevance of international humanitarian law (IHL) in addressing these challenges and highlighted the importance of strengthening its implementation in an increasingly digitalized battlespace.

Several speakers also underscored the significance of the Global IHL Initiative and welcomed growing African engagement in its workstreams. Particular reference was made to the Common African Position on the Application of International Law to the Use of ICTs in Cyberspace and ongoing efforts to promote stronger African participation in global discussions on IHL and new technologies. The representative of Ghana highlighted the increased use of ICTs by Non-State Actors, noting that the rules of IHL are applicable to all parties to an armed conflict whether states or Non-State Actors.

The representative of Sierra Leone highlighted efforts to advance an African Union Declaration on Strengthening Respect for IHL and encouraged broader African participation in the Initiative.

ii. Keynote address

In his keynote address, Mr. Patrick Youssef, ICRC Regional Director for Africa, highlighted the increasing number and complexity of contemporary armed conflicts and the growing risks posed by digital technologies to civilians. He stressed that the objective of the Global IHL Initiative is not to create new law, but to strengthen political commitment to existing IHL obligations and improve implementation in practice.

He noted the important contribution of African States to the Initiative, including through leadership roles as a founding State and in several workstreams. He further encouraged continued African engagement in the final phase of the Initiative, to support strong and

practical outcomes and participate at the highest possible level in the High-Level Conference on Humanity in War in Jordan on 7 December 2026.

iii. Panel discussion

The panel discussion was moderated by H.E. Ntisoa C. Sekete, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Lesotho to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union. The Panel discussion featured H.E. Luc Dockendorf (Ambassador for Cybersecurity and Digitalization, Luxembourg), H.E. Alejandro Ives Estivill Castro the Ambassador of Mexico to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union, Mr. Pamoussa Zakaria, from the AU Health, Humanitarian and Social Affairs Commissioner, representing Ambassador Salah Hammad (Head of AGA-APSA Secretariat, African Union) and Dr. Wen Zhou (Legal Adviser and Lead of the ICT Workstream, Global IHL Initiative, ICRC).

Panelists highlighted the importance of ensuring that the protection afforded by IHL remains effective in the face of rapid technological developments. They emphasized that ICT activities can have significant humanitarian consequences during armed conflict and stressed the need for international cooperation, capacity-building and stronger implementation of IHL.

Panelists also drew attention to the main themes emerging from the ICT workstream, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure from harmful ICT activities, safeguarding medical services and humanitarian activities, addressing harmful information activities, reducing risks associated with the military use of civilian ICT infrastructure, and promoting responsible conduct by both State and non-State actors, including hackers, hacker groups and technology companies.

Several panelists underlined the valuable contribution of African states to global discussions on the application of international law to cyberspace, including through the Common African Position adopted by the AU Peace and Security Council in 2024. The discussion highlighted opportunities for African States to make use of the workstream outcome document as a reference tool to strengthen national implementation measures, develop national positions, enhance IHL training and dissemination among the military and the wider civilian population, and engage in regional and cross-regional exchanges of experience and good practices.

C. Key themes from the plenary discussion

i. Protection of civilians and humanitarian consequences of attacks on ICT infrastructure

Participants highlighted the increasing frequency of attacks affecting ICT infrastructure and communication systems during armed conflict and their severe humanitarian consequences. Such disruptions can affect access to essential services, hinder humanitarian operations, and leave civilians without reliable means of communication. Humanitarian actors also shared operational challenges arising from the destruction,

disruption or confiscation of communication equipment, which may impair coordination, access and security management in conflict-affected areas.

ii. **Harmful information and protection risks**

Participants discussed the growing risks posed by misinformation, disinformation and other harmful information activities during armed conflict. It was noted that such activities can undermine trust in medical and humanitarian actors, facilitate violations of IHL and create harm to affected populations. The importance of strengthening efforts to prevent and mitigate information-related harm was emphasized.

iii. **Cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and emerging digital threats**

The discussion highlighted the growing exposure of governments, humanitarian organizations and civilian populations to cyber threats. Participants noted that emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, present both opportunities and risks, and stressed the need to strengthen cyber resilience through investment, capacity-building and international cooperation. Reference was also made to the increasing sophistication of cyber threats targeting humanitarian organizations and the importance of strengthening cybersecurity and data protection measures.

iv. **Protection of civilian data and humanitarian information**

Participants expressed concern regarding the protection of data collected and used for humanitarian purposes, including beneficiary registration systems, humanitarian databases, identity management systems and social protection programmes. Questions were raised regarding the risks of misuse, manipulation or tampering of such data during armed conflict and how humanitarian actors, States and other stakeholders can work together to mitigate these risks. Participants also highlighted the need for greater clarity regarding the application of existing legal frameworks, including IHL, to data-related harms in armed conflict.

v. **Accountability and responsibilities of States, non-State actors and technology companies**

Participants discussed accountability for ICT-related IHL violations during armed conflict, including available legal remedies and mechanisms for enforcement. Particular attention was paid to the role of technology companies whose products and services may be used in conflict settings, and to the importance of engaging the technology sector in efforts to reduce risks of harm. The discussion also underscored the need to strengthen implementation of existing legal obligations and to promote responsible conduct by all relevant actors.

vi. **Domestic implementation, capacity-building and future action**

Participants emphasized the importance of translating policy discussions into practical measures at the national and regional levels. Suggestions included strengthening domestic legal frameworks, enhancing military doctrine and training, developing policy guidance on ICT-related risks, and sharing good practices among States. Several participants also highlighted the need for greater African engagement in ongoing international discussions and welcomed opportunities for further cooperation and capacity-building.

D. Recommendations

- i. Participants encouraged African states to continue participating actively in the final phase of the ICT workstream, including during the fifth and final global consultation on 23 June 2026, to make their views known and help shape the final outcome document.
- i. The ICRC, together with the co-chairs, reaffirmed its commitment to supporting implementation efforts beyond the conclusion of the workstream through technical assistance, peer-to-peer exchanges, capacity-building activities, and guidance for States interested in becoming more actively involved in the Initiative.
- ii. Participants advocated for reference to the ICT workstream outcome document in future work of the African Union, such as a Peace and Security Council communiqué. Such reference could encourage Member States to use the outcome document as a reference tool to strengthen implementation of IHL in relation to ICT activities during armed conflict, while also highlighting the importance of capacity-building and regional cooperation.
- iii. Participants renewed the call for greater African participation in the Global IHL Initiative. Broader engagement will help ensure that the Initiative's outcomes reflect African realities and priorities. In this regard, African States that have not yet joined the Initiative were encouraged to do so and to engage actively in its final phase, including through participation at the High-Level Conference on Humanity in War in Jordan on 7 December 2026.
- iv. Participants highlighted the increasing use of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies in military operations. While these technologies continue to evolve, their use must remain firmly anchored in IHL. In particular, the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions must guide the development and use of AI-enabled systems and other digital capabilities to prevent civilian harm, uphold State sovereignty and preserve the rule of law.
- v. Participants recalled that IHL obligations apply to all parties to armed conflict, including non-State armed groups. All parties must be held accountable for violations of IHL, including those committed through or facilitated by ICT activities during armed conflict.
- vi. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening national implementation of IHL by empowering National IHL Committees, integrating IHL into military and security training, and developing policies that address emerging challenges in



cyberspace and digital warfare while safeguarding civilians. The ICT workstream outcome document can serve as a useful reference tool in these efforts.

- vii. Participants underlined how the Global IHL Initiative in general, and the ICT workstream in particular, can serve as a bridge between legal frameworks and operational realities across regions. The Initiative also offers opportunities to strengthen South-South cooperation, including between Africa and Latin America, around shared humanitarian challenges arising from armed conflict and technological change.
- viii. Participants encouraged consideration of references to ICTs and new technologies in the draft AU Declaration on Strengthening Respect for International Humanitarian Law, particularly in its operative provisions, in order to reflect the growing humanitarian implications of digital technologies during armed conflict.

E. Key References

- i. [Global IHL Initiative - WS6 ICT - draft outcome document V2 - June 2026 - ENGLISH.pdf](#)
- ii. <https://www.upholdhumanityinwar.org/en>
- iii. [The Common Africa Position on the application of international law in Cyberspace adopted by the African Union in January 2024.](#)