



19 Jun 2026 -11:31

Foreign Affairs works to protect all civilians through international humanitarian law

*Today, more than 130 armed conflicts are ongoing around the world, involving more than 60 countries and 120 non-state actors. Behind these figures are millions of civilians, whose lives are turned upside down on a daily base. This is why, since its signing of the first Geneva Convention in 1864, Belgium has been actively committed to the application of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the protection of all civilians affected by armed conflicts.*

Today June 19th, the FPS Foreign Affairs is hosting the conference "*Diverse impacts of armed conflicts: the need to protect all civilians under the Fourth Geneva Convention - Launch of the Updated ICRC Commentary*" at the Egmont Palace, organised by the Interministerial Commission on Humanitarian Law (ICHR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Belgian Red Cross and the Belgian Society of International Law. It brings together 150 participants, with representatives from other countries, the judiciary, international organisations, civil society and the academic world, to address the crucial issue of the protection of civilians and seek solutions.

With forced displacement, the disruption of essential services, hunger, permanent insecurity and lack of medical care, armed conflicts affect civilians in multiple and systemic ways, far beyond the direct hostilities. Thus, the number of missing persons has increased by 70% in the last 5 years, totaling more than 284,000 people.

However, not everyone is affected in the same way: certain categories of people are more vulnerable. As such, children are more strongly impacted in their education, development and well-being, while women and girls are more at risk of being victims of sexual violence, on top of having specific needs in terms of health care, hygiene and sanitation. It is therefore important to take into account the diversity of each person's experiences and needs, and to seek together, inter alia on the basis of the ICRC's updated commentary on the 4th Geneva Convention, solutions that will allow for a better diversified, contemporary and practical application of international humanitarian law.

Today, the main challenge is not the absence of rules or their lack of relevance, but the lack of political will to implement them. Maxime Prévot, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation, who closes the conference, insists on this point: "In a context of increasing conflicts, respect for IHL is more essential than ever to preserve humanity in the midst of war, limit suffering and protect human dignity. This is a collective responsibility, and the credibility of States depends on it. This is why Foreign Affairs, through the ICHR and with its partners, continues to work actively to promote and enforce these essential rules of international humanitarian law, in order to protect every civilian involved in armed conflict."

Would you like to learn more about the important work of the Interministerial Commission on Humanitarian Law? Do not hesitate to visit its website: [Interministerial Commission on Humanitarian Law · IACHR](#).





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