

FINDINGS OF SURVEY ON THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

Methodology: Telephone survey of 500 men and women, constituting a nation-wide sample representing the adult population in the Israeli Jewish population centres.

The survey was carried out during the last week of July 2009.

There is a statistical maximum error margin under the conditions of this sample of about 4.4%, with a statistical significance level of 95%.

Have you ever heard of the Geneva Conventions?		
		Total
	Yes (heard)	82.1%
	No (not heard)	17.9%
Total		100.0%
	N	N=500

Evidently, most of the public is aware of the Geneva Conventions. Awareness is high among average and upper-income earners and low among new immigrants (Jewish).

The level of awareness is much higher than in other countries surveyed by the ICRC,¹ where the average was 42%.

<i>The Geneva Conventions are international treaties setting out rules of war relating to such matters as the treatment of civilians during war, of wounded soldiers and of prisoners of war. All countries in the world have signed these treaties. In today's conflicts, do you think the Geneva Conventions can prevent wars from getting worse or do they make no real difference?</i>		
		Total
	Prevent wars from getting worse	41.2%
	Make no real difference	46.2%
	I don't know	12.6%
Total		100.0%
	N	N=500

Almost half of the respondents (46%) said that the Geneva Conventions do not prevent wars from getting worse, and 41% said the opposite. In other words, the public is ambivalent about the ability of the Geneva Conventions to influence the way war is conducted.

¹ Survey of Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and the Philippines, see: www.icrc.org/eng/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/section-ourworld-yourmove

<i>To weaken an enemy, should fighters:</i>		
		Total
	Attack enemy fighters and civilians	14.5%
	Attack enemy fighters and avoid civilians as much as possible	56.1%
	Attack only enemy fighters and leave the civilians alone at all costs	24.5%
	I don't know	5.0%
Total		100.0%
	N	N=500

Most people (56%) think that, in time of war, fighters should attack enemy fighters and avoid civilians as much as possible. The higher the level of education they have, the more people are likely to hold this opinion. Compared with the results of a similar survey carried out in Israel 10 years ago,² the proportion of respondents saying that fighters should attack enemy fighters **and civilians** has more than doubled, from 7% to 14.5%.

What IHL says:

Fighters must at all times distinguish between civilians and fighters and between civilian objects and military objectives. Civilians and civilian objects must not be targeted. Fighters must take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack with a view to avoiding, and in any event to minimizing, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.

Here are some things that fighters do to weaken an enemy they are fighting against. For each of these things, please express your opinion about whether it is allowed in war or prohibited even in war.

	Preventing water, food & medical treatment from reaching the civilian population	Preventing contact between people separated by war/conflict	Attacking enemy fighters in populated areas knowing that women & children would be killed, to avoid risking their lives or the lives of their fellow soldiers	Attacking enemy fighters in populated areas knowing that women & children would be killed	Attacking medical or religious or educational institutions
Allowed	13.6%	29.8%	29.9%	33.3%	13.7%
Prohibited but sometimes there is no choice	30.0%	36.3%	49.3%	50.0%	44.8%
Strictly prohibited	52.6%	28.1%	14.7%	12.0%	36.3%
Don't know	3.8%	5.8%	6.2%	4.6%	5.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	N 500	500	500	500	500

A majority of respondents said that although most of the examples given are not legitimate methods of warfare sometimes there is no choice but to use them.

A third of the respondents (33%) believe that attacking enemy fighters in populated areas, knowing that many women and children would be killed, is allowed. However, denying the civilian population water, food and medical treatment is viewed by over half of the respondents (about 52%) as forbidden, even during fighting.

² See People on War Country report on Israel, the occupied territories and autonomous territories [http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/Greenberg_reports/\\$File/israel.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/Greenberg_reports/$File/israel.pdf)

Furthermore, there is ambivalence in the public's perception of denying communication between family members separated by war or conflict as a means of weakening the enemy. Close to a third of the respondents (30%) said this means is allowed, over a third (36%) that it is prohibited but sometimes there is no choice, and almost a third (28%) that it is strictly prohibited.

What IHL says:

Starvation of the civilian population is prohibited. It is similarly prohibited to attack, destroy or otherwise deny the civilian population objects necessary for their survival, such as food, drinking water, livestock, crops, humanitarian relief items and medical supplies.

Parties to a conflict must facilitate the reunion of families dispersed as a result of conflict. Persons deprived of their liberty during armed conflict must be allowed to maintain contact with their families.

Civilians and civilian objects must not be targeted. Every feasible precaution must be taken to avoid harming civilians and civilian property.

Attacks are permitted only against military objectives, It is prohibited to attack civilian buildings or institutions. Cultural and religious objects and medical facilities must especially be protected.

(Among those who mentioned at least one action as strictly prohibited)

You say some things are prohibited in times of war. Do you think they are prohibited primarily because they are:

		Total
	Against your religion	1.1%
	Against national laws	3.2%
	Against your personal values and principles	32.4%
	Against human rights	51.5%
	Against rules of international law, such as those set out in the Geneva Conventions	7.3%
	Other	2.2%
	I don't know	2.3%
Total		100.0%
	N	N=316

The main reasons given for believing that certain actions are prohibited were that they are "Against human rights" (51.5%) and "Against one's values and principles" (32.4%). Only 7.3% of respondents said they thought certain actions are prohibited because they violate the Geneva Conventions.

What IHL says:

International humanitarian law is a body of rules that places limits on the methods and means of warfare in order to limit the death and destruction caused by war. It prohibits certain actions by both sides in an armed conflict, such as attacking civilians, using human shields or attacking medical personnel or facilities. It also imposes obligations, for example concerning the treatment of civilians under occupation, of detainees and of wounded persons, be they friend or foe.

In war, fighters sometimes attack or otherwise harm civilians, even though many people say it is not OK and may even be against the law. Why do you think fighters attack or otherwise harm civilians regardless? Is it because they...?

		Total
	Don't know about the law	1.1%

	Know the other side is doing the same thing	7.1%
	Don't care about the law	2.8%
	Are told to do so	27.9%
	Don't want to risk their lives or the lives of their fellow fighters	49.1%
	None of the reasons mentioned	3.1%
	All of the reasons mentioned	2.1%
	I don't know	6.7%
Total		100.0%
	N	N=500

About half the people (49%) believe that fighters attack and harm civilians because they do not want to endanger their own lives or the lives of their fellow fighters.

Over a quarter of the respondents (28%) believe that the main reason is that fighters are told to do so.

The lower their level of income, the more likely people are to hold one of these opinions. It is rare that religious people subscribe to these views.

What IHL says:

The principles of distinction and proportionality are fundamental and must be upheld in all circumstances. They cannot be ignored or deemed of lesser importance merely because the other side violates its IHL obligations, or to protect one's own forces. Although the protection of one's own fighters is a valid aim in armed conflict, it cannot be used as an excuse not to follow all relevant rules of IHL, especially those designed to protect the civilian population.

Fighters have an obligation to disobey illegal orders. Fighters that follow clearly illegal orders and commit violations of IHL are accountable for their actions and may be prosecuted. The commander that orders the commission of a war crime or other violation of IHL will also be liable for prosecution, under the doctrine of command responsibility.

In a combat situation, if a fighter sees someone coming towards him and is not sure whether the person is an unarmed civilian or an enemy fighter who could endanger him and his fellow fighters, what must the fighter do?

		Total
	Shoot to avoid any risk	28.6%
	Take a risk and refrain from shooting	12.0%
	Decide whether to shoot or not to shoot at his own discretion	50.6%
	I don't know	8.8%
Total		100.0%
	N	N=500

Over a quarter of the respondents (28.6%) believe that fighters should shoot to avoid any risk, and about half (50.6%) believe that the decision to shoot or not shoot should be taken at the fighter's discretion.

What IHL says:

Fighters must take constant care and do everything feasible to verify whether a person is a civilian and therefore protected, or a fighter who may be attacked. In case of doubt whether a person is a civilian or a fighter, that person must be considered to be a civilian.