

Academic workshop on sexual violence

International legal framework affording protection against sexual violence in armed conflicts and other situations of violence

International humanitarian law

Treaty law

Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions: Conflicts not of an international character

[Convention \(III\) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949](#)

[Convention \(IV\) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949](#)

[Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol I\), 8 June 1977](#)

[Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol II\), 8 June 1977](#)

Customary law

[ICRC, Customary International Law Database](#)

International human rights law

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights)

Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1951

International criminal law

Statute of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 1993

Statute of the International Tribunal for Rwanda, 1994

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 2002

Text of main provisions

International humanitarian law

Treaty law

Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions: Conflicts not of an international character
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In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

- (1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture; (b) taking of hostages;
- (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.

- (2) The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for.

An impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict.

The Parties to the conflict should further endeavour to bring into force, by means of special agreements, all or part of the other provisions of the present Convention.

The application of the preceding provisions shall not affect the legal status of the Parties to the conflict.

<u>Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949</u>
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Article 14 – Respect for the person of prisoners

Prisoners of war are entitled in all circumstances to respect for their persons and their honour. Women shall be treated with all the regard due to their sex and shall in all cases benefit by treatment as favourable as that granted to men.

Prisoners of war shall retain the full civil capacity which they enjoyed at the time of their capture. The Detaining Power may not restrict the exercise, either within or without its own territory, of the rights such capacity confers except in so far as the captivity requires.

Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949

Article 27 – Treatment I. General observations

Protected persons are entitled, in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honour, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insults and public curiosity.

Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.

Without prejudice to the provisions relating to their state of health, age and sex, all protected persons shall be treated with the same consideration by the Party to the conflict in whose power they are, without any adverse distinction based, in particular, on race, religion or political opinion.

However, the Parties to the conflict may take such measures of control and security in regard to protected persons as may be necessary as a result of the war.

Article 146 – Penal sanctions I. General observations

The High Contracting Parties undertake to enact any legislation necessary to provide effective penal sanctions for persons committing, or ordering to be committed, any of the grave breaches of the present Convention defined in the following Article.

Each High Contracting Party shall be under the obligation to search for persons alleged to have committed, or to have ordered to be committed, such grave breaches, and shall bring such persons, regardless of their nationality, before its own courts. It may also, if it prefers, and in accordance with the provisions of its own legislation, hand such persons over for trial to another High Contracting Party concerned, provided such High Contracting Party has made out a 'prima facie' case.

Each High Contracting Party shall take measures necessary for the suppression of all acts contrary to the provisions of the present Convention other than the grave breaches defined in the following Article.

In all circumstances, the accused persons shall benefit by safeguards of proper trial and defence, which shall not be less favourable than those provided by Article 105 and those following of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of August 12, 1949.

Article 147 – Penal sanctions II. Grave breaches

Grave breaches to which the preceding Article [Link] relates shall be those involving any of the following acts, if committed against persons or property protected by the present Convention: wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person, compelling a protected person to serve in the forces of a hostile Power, or wilfully depriving a protected person of the rights of fair and regular trial prescribed in the present Convention, taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly.

[Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol I\), 8 June 1977](#)

Article 75(2) – Fundamental guarantees

The following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever, whether committed by civilian or by military agents:

- (a) violence to the life, health, or physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular:
 - (i) murder;
 - (ii) torture of all kinds, whether physical or mental;
 - (iii) corporal punishment; and
 - (iv) mutilation;

- (b) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault;

Article 76(1) – Protection of women

Women shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected in particular against rape, forced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault.

Article 77(1) – Protection of children

Children shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected against any form of indecent assault. The Parties to the conflict shall provide them with the care and aid they require, whether because of their age or for any other reason.

[Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts \(Protocol II\), 8 June 1977](#)

Article 4(2) – Fundamental guarantees

Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, the following acts against the persons referred to in paragraph 1 are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever:

- (a) violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation or any form of corporal punishment;
- (b) collective punishments;
- (c) taking of hostages;
- (d) acts of terrorism;
- (e) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault;
- (f) slavery and the slave trade in all their forms;
- (g) pillage;
- (h) threats to commit any of the foregoing acts.

Customary law

[ICRC, Customary International Law Database](#)

Rule 93

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are prohibited.

International human rights law

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 16 December 1966

Article 7

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

European Convention on Human Rights

Article 3 – Prohibition of torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1951

Article 1

The Parties to the present Convention agree to punish any person who, to gratify the passions of another:

- (1) Procures, entices or leads away, for purposes of prostitution, another person, even with the consent of that person;
- (2) Exploits the prostitution of another person, even with the consent of that person.

International criminal law

Statute of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 1993

Article 2 – Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949

The International Tribunal shall have the power to prosecute persons committing or ordering to be committed grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely the following acts against persons or property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention:

[...]

- (b) torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments;
- (c) wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health; [...]

Article 3 – Violations of the laws or customs of war

The International Tribunal shall have the power to prosecute persons violating the laws or customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to:

- (a) employment of poisonous weapons or other weapons calculated to cause unnecessary suffering;
- (b) wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity;
- (c) attack, or bombardment, by whatever means, of undefended towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings;
- (d) seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions dedicated to religion, charity and education, the arts and sciences, historic monuments and works of art and science;
- (e) plunder of public or private property.

Article 4 – Genocide

[...]

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

[...]

- (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

Article 5 – Crimes against humanity

The International Tribunal shall have the power to prosecute persons responsible for the following crimes when committed in armed conflict, whether international or internal in character, and directed against any civilian population:

[...]

- (f) torture;
- (g) rape; [...]

Statute of the International Tribunal for Rwanda, 1994

Article 2 – Genocide

[...]

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

[...]

- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

Article 3 – Crimes against humanity

The International Tribunal for Rwanda shall have the power to prosecute persons responsible for the following crimes when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population on national, political, ethnic, racial or religious grounds:

[...]

- (f) Torture;
- (g) Rape; [...]

Article 4 - Violations of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and of Additional Protocol II

The International Tribunal for Rwanda shall have the power to prosecute persons committing or ordering to be committed serious violations of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 for the Protection of War Victims, and of Additional Protocol II thereto of 8 June 1977. These violations shall include, but shall not be limited to:

[...]

- (e) Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault; [...]

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 2002

Article 6 – Genocide

For the purpose of this Statute, ‘genocide’ means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

[...]

- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; [...] (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [...]

Article 7 – Crimes against humanity

1. For the purpose of this Statute, ‘crime against humanity’ means any of the following acts when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack:

[...]

- (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; [...]

2. For the purpose of paragraph 1:

[...]

- (f) ‘Forced pregnancy’ means the unlawful confinement of a woman forcibly made pregnant, with the intent of affecting the ethnic composition of any population or carrying out other grave violations of international law. This definition shall not in any way be interpreted as affecting national laws relating to pregnancy; [...]

Article 8 – War crimes

1. The Court shall have jurisdiction in respect of war crimes in particular when committed as part of a plan or policy or as part of a large-scale commission of such crimes.

2. For the purpose of this Statute, ‘war crimes’ means:

- (a) Grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, namely, any of the following acts against persons or property protected under the provisions of the relevant Geneva Convention:

[...]

- (ii) Torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments;

[...]

- (b) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts:

[...]

- (xxii) Committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, as defined in article 7, paragraph 2 (f), enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence also constituting a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions; [...]

- (c) In the case of an armed conflict not of an international character, serious violations of article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949,

namely, any of the following acts committed against persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention or any other cause:

- (i) Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (ii) Committing outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment; [...]

(e) Other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts not of an international character, within the established framework of international law, namely, any of the following acts:

[...]

- (vi) Committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, as defined in article 7, paragraph 2 (f), enforced sterilization, and any other form of sexual violence also constituting a serious violation of article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions; [...]

Article 25 – Individual criminal responsibility

1. The Court shall have jurisdiction over natural persons pursuant to this Statute.
2. A person who commits a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court shall be individually responsible and liable for punishment in accordance with this Statute.
3. In accordance with this Statute, a person shall be criminally responsible and liable for punishment for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court if that person:
 - (a) Commits such a crime, whether as an individual, jointly with another or through another person, regardless of whether that other person is criminally responsible;
 - (b) Orders, solicits or induces the commission of such a crime which in fact occurs or is attempted;
 - (c) For the purpose of facilitating the commission of such a crime, aids, abets or otherwise assists in its commission or its attempted commission, including providing the means for its commission; [...]

Article 27 – Irrelevance of official capacity

1. This Statute shall apply equally to all persons without any distinction based on official capacity. In particular, official capacity as a Head of State or Government, a member of a Government or parliament, an elected representative or a government official shall in no case exempt a person from criminal responsibility under this Statute, nor shall it, in and of itself, constitute a ground for reduction of sentence.
2. Immunities or special procedural rules which may attach to the official capacity of a person, whether under national or international law, shall not bar the Court from exercising its jurisdiction over such a person.

Article 28 – Responsibility of commanders and other superiors

In addition to other grounds of criminal responsibility under this Statute for crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court:

- (a) A military commander or person effectively acting as a military commander shall be criminally responsible for crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court committed by forces under his or her effective command and control, or effective authority and control as the case may be, as a result of his or her failure to exercise control properly over such forces, where:
 - (i) That military commander or person either knew or, owing to the circumstances at the time, should have known that the forces were committing or about to commit such crimes; and
 - (ii) That military commander or person failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures within his or her power to prevent or repress their commission or to submit the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.

- (b) With respect to superior and subordinate relationships not described in paragraph (a), a superior shall be criminally responsible for crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court committed by subordinates under his or her effective authority and control, as a result of his or her failure to exercise control properly over such subordinates, where:
 - (i) The superior either knew, or consciously disregarded information which clearly indicated, that the subordinates were committing or about to commit such crimes;
 - (ii) The crimes concerned activities that were within the effective responsibility and control of the superior; and
 - (iii) The superior failed to take all necessary and reasonable measures within his or her power to prevent or repress their commission or to submit the matter to the competent authorities for investigation and prosecution.