

Academic workshop on sexual violence

Instructions

Overview

- Students will gain an in-depth understanding of the sexual violence issue, its causes and consequences, and of the applicable legal framework.
- Students will acquire greater knowledge of the main rules protecting civilians against sexual violence in armed conflict, and in particular of criminal repression of sexual violence.
- Students will gain a better understanding of the application of such rules in practice and of the practical consequences when they are not respected.
- Students will hone their ability to think critically about this issue and to develop their own arguments concerning the implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL) provisions on sexual violence.
- Speakers/teachers will have the opportunity to develop their skills in a specific area of international law, to raise awareness of the issue of sexual violence, and to promote action by means of additional research (*International Review of the Red Cross*), conferences, and other events and teaching opportunities within their academic institutions.

Specifics

0. Preliminary remarks for the lecturer

1) As the topic of sexual violence can be a difficult one to address in class, lecturers are advised to prepare their students for the discussion by prefacing it with a disclaimer such as the example below:

"Please be aware that the film you are going to see and the issues you are going to discuss during this workshop are sensitive and difficult topics. It is important that everybody feel as comfortable as possible with this subject matter and the way it is addressed. For this reason, feel free to leave the room at any time to take a break. Please bear in mind that all participants and speakers should listen to and respect each other's views."

2) The "workshop structure" document shows the presentation on sexual violence, humanitarian issues, and legal and humanitarian responses taking place before the group work on case studies. However, it is also possible to start with the case studies and follow up with the presentation and a final discussion on the topic.

3) In general, lecturers should feel free to adapt the workshop according to their teaching method and the time available. The most important thing is to take the time to read, prepare and master all the material beforehand.

I. Reading list

Several days before the workshop, students will receive a package of essential material to prepare before the seminar. They will in particular have the opportunity to go through the workshop structure, including the compulsory and optional reading list. Compulsory references include the case studies and fact sheets with questions, as well as the relevant legal provisions. The purpose of this is to allow students to familiarize themselves with the topic and to think about practical issues before attending the workshop. The optional reading list, on the other hand, is intended to provide students and teachers with material for further research and in-depth analysis. Finally, students will also receive a document containing all the relevant legal provisions on the topic for reference during preparation and in-class discussion.

II. Watching a film as an introduction to the topic

A visual introduction is a good way for students to get a general understanding of the issue. The film will help them to:

- visualize the topics they encountered in their reading and make them more real;
- contextualize the theoretical information they will receive throughout the subsequent presentation.

Before starting the presentation, a few minutes should be spent brainstorming about the issues touched upon in the film. The speaker could use a flipchart or a whiteboard to note down the main topics raised in the brainstorming (e.g. students' ideas could be divided into four main categories on the flipchart: issues, causes, consequences, and humanitarian response). During the subsequent presentation, the speaker should then refer back to those topics in order to encourage students to make the connection between theory and practice, abstract information and images.

III. Theory – PowerPoint presentation

The purpose of the PowerPoint (PPT) presentation is to make students understand the main legal issues surrounding sexual violence. To help the speaker convey the message effectively, the following features have been incorporated:

- Content: Part one focusses on the facts about this issue, while part two explains the applicable legal framework. The final part involves a brief discussion of the humanitarian response to acts of sexual violence. The aim is to make students understand the link between a problem and the humanitarian response (in both legal and practical terms).
- Structure: A PPT presentation helps the speaker and students to focus on the main points during the explanation.
- Speaker notes: These contain the essential information related to the slide. Their purpose is to guide the speaker, not to be the text of the presentation itself. Speakers are encouraged to conduct their own research and to adapt the content of the presentation to their academic needs.
- Audiovisual material: This helps the speaker to contextualize information and to continually link the theory to practical issues in the field. In addition, pictures help students to visualize information and to memorize the ideas linked to the pictures.
- Quizzes: The PPT contains quizzes, whose purpose is to allow students (and speakers) to take a short break from the face-to-face lesson, and to encourage students to be more involved in the presentation and to think about the reasoning behind certain rules.

IV. Questions and discussion concerning the presentation

Before moving on to the case studies, students will get the opportunity to clarify their doubts, ask questions and explore issues that have not been touched upon during the presentation.

V. Case studies

The main objective of the second part of the workshop is to allow students to apply theory to practice. Through the analysis of practical case studies, students will tackle controversial legal issues related to sexual violence and come to understand the complexity of the issue. Based on the legal approach of the IHL reference publication *How does law protect in war?*, the purpose of this workshop is to allow participants to identify which rules of international humanitarian law could or should be applied and what practical humanitarian solutions can be found.

A. Introduction to the cases and questions

To make sure that all the students are familiar with the case studies and understand the facts correctly, the speaker/teacher should briefly review the cases with the students. It is advisable to make this an interactive session and to ask for volunteers to share their understanding of the cases.

B. Group discussion (three groups)

The class is then divided into three groups; each group works on a specific case. Such small-group discussions allow students to focus on fewer questions and to have a more efficient discussion. It is easier for them to speak up and to take part in the wider discussion if they first have the opportunity to share their views with a few other classmates.

C. Group report and discussion

The results of these group discussions are then shared with the whole class so that the other students have a chance to participate in the debate and share their points of view. Each group summarizes its conclusions and invites other students to rebut them or bring new issues to the table. This plenary session allows all students to become familiar with the main legal issues surrounding the other cases that they did not address in their small groups. Moreover, the speaker/teacher and the students have the opportunity to address other issues that were not covered in the group session.

Observation

The ideal target audience for which this workshop has been conceived is students with a legal background. However, the issue of sexual violence in armed conflict could also be relevant to students of international studies (including international relations and development), health-related subjects, and gender or feminist studies. For this reason, speakers/teachers are strongly recommended to adapt the content of the workshop to their audience and to encourage students with a non-legal background to complete the ICRC's online IHL modules beforehand. The lecturer could also add a few slides about classifying armed conflicts in order to clarify which legal framework applies.