

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the League of Arab States and the National Committee on International Humanitarian Law in the Kingdom of Morocco for our continuous cooperation and for the support they provided for the success of this panel, which brings together a group of the most prominent experts of international humanitarian law in our Arab region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over 70 years since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, they continue to constitute the bedrock of IHL and are critical for the protection of victims of armed conflict. The basic principle underlying all four Geneva Conventions is humane treatment of persons. The Third Geneva Convention deals in particular with respect and protection of prisoners of war.

As the guardian of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the ICRC has a long history in interpreting IHL as it applies to those who do not participate, or ceased to participate, in hostilities. Nevertheless, since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions (GCs) in 1949, they have been put to the test and their application has proved to be challenging on the battlefield. The ICRC had foreseen such struggles and thus quickly published the first set of article-by-article commentaries to the GCs in the 1950s in order to provide for practical guidance on the implementation of the Conventions. These proved to be vital and well accepted on the field by practitioners from governmental and non-governmental entities.

However, since the 1950s commentaries, there have been significant developments in how the GCs are applied and interpreted in practice. Thus, in 2011, the ICRC embarked on a new project to update the Commentaries on the GCs of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977. To do so, the ICRC reached out to various renowned international experts and peer reviewers from each context, including the Arab region, to review and validate the updates. In 2016 and 2017, they eventually published the updated Commentary on the First and Second GCs, respectively, to reflect these developments in law and practice. And this year, they commissioned the new updated Commentary of the Third GC relative to Prisoners of War (POWs), which was launched in Geneva on 16 June 2020.

Unfortunately, the concept of “commentaries” is not one that the Arab region is familiar with. This has made the ICRC translate the Commentary of the First Geneva Convention into Arabic, the translation of the remaining commentaries is to follow. Thus, this will allow the ICRC to better promote the commentaries through various activities and events.

Moreover, on the occasion of the launching of the updated Commentary on the Third Geneva Convention, the ICRC has decided to utilize the various Arab experts that have

contributed to the updating process through organizing a panel discussion to promote the concept of commentaries, and the commentaries themselves, in the Arab region.

We look forward to hearing from our Arab experts about their contribution to the updating process of GCs as well as their insights on the role of the Conventions in providing the necessary protection and humane treatment to the sick, wounded and shipwrecked that are not taking part in hostilities as well as prisoners of war.