

# ONLINE COMMUNITY FOR NATIONAL COMMITTEES AND SIMILAR ENTITIES ON INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW



In order to ensure the effective application of international humanitarian law (IHL), many states have created national interministerial working groups, often called committees for the implementation of IHL or national IHL committees or commissions.<sup>1</sup> Their purpose is to advise and assist the government in implementing and spreading knowledge of IHL. Since these committees are usually very similar in composition and functions and are often involved in the same kinds of activities, they can find it beneficial to share information and experiences with one another. It is therefore important that national IHL committees and similar entities establish and maintain relations with their counterparts through regular cooperation and exchanges.

<sup>1</sup> These structures are referred to as “national IHL committees” for short throughout the remainder of this document. To learn more about these structures, see: ICRC, “National Committees for the implementation of international humanitarian law”, 21 May 2021: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/national-committees-implementation-international-humanitarian-law-0>, all web addresses accessed 25 February 2022.

## WHAT LED TO THE ONLINE COMMUNITY?

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), through its Advisory Service on IHL, has long encouraged exchanges among national IHL committees.

Representatives of many national IHL committees had repeatedly called for the creation of an online platform to facilitate exchanges among them. This appeal was reiterated in strong terms at their universal meeting in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Following these calls, the ICRC's Advisory Service on IHL launched

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the online community to coincide with the adoption of Resolution 1 of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2019, "Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law".<sup>3</sup> With the main aim of re-energizing national commitments and boosting efforts to implement IHL, paragraph 6 of Resolution 1 called for "the strengthening of cooperation between such entities" through "regular meetings", as well as through the "new digital community for national committees and similar entities on IHL, created on the basis of the recommendations made by the participants in the 2016 universal meeting".

## WHAT IS IT?

The community is an interactive online tool that aims to facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges and cooperation among national IHL committees.

The community is quite unique, since it is the only tool that enables direct and regular online exchanges among national IHL committees at the universal level. Although there are similar, regional communication and cooperation forums for these committees, the community aims to facilitate exchanges beyond national and regional borders.

The online community is a private group managed and facilitated by the ICRC. It works on a secured access and is protected by appropriate technical safeguards and information security measures in order to prevent unauthorized access and data breaches. Membership is restricted to national IHL committees and ICRC legal advisers. Participation is entirely voluntary and members are free to decide how to use the community and what to share with others. As a result, it is a safe space for open dialogue and sharing of experiences and practices.

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<sup>2</sup> ICRC, "Universal Meeting of National IHL Committees: At the heart of efforts towards better respect for the law", 15 December 2016: <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2016/12/15/universal-meeting-national-ihl-committees-promoting-respect-law/>.

<sup>3</sup> International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, "Bringing IHL home: A road map for better national implementation of international humanitarian law", Resolution 1, 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, 2019: [https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/12/33IC-R1-Bringing-IHL-home-CLEAN\\_ADOPTED\\_FINAL-171219.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/12/33IC-R1-Bringing-IHL-home-CLEAN_ADOPTED_FINAL-171219.pdf).

## WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

The idea behind the community was to create an interesting, dynamic and less formal sharing space for national IHL committees that would encourage them to participate in mutual exchanges more openly and directly. It was also intended to save some of the time and energy that is usually spent on formal, official communication. Another aim was to bridge the gap between universal meetings, which usually take place every four years, since many committees lacked the opportunity to interact with their peers from other parts of the world in the interim.

Moreover, as a “community” – variously defined as “a group of people who are similar in some way”, “a sense of having certain characteristics or interests in common” or “the feeling of sharing things and belonging to a group” – its purpose is to strengthen connections between national IHL committees and to build a sense of togetherness and belonging among them, with the ultimate aim of supporting their work and increasing respect for IHL worldwide.

## WHAT CAN IT BE USED FOR?

The online community offers its members a wide range of possibilities. For instance, national IHL committees can use it to:

- share various types of information and documents about their functioning and structure (such as mandates, legal bases or statutes, working arrangements, action plans, programmes and activity reports)
- discuss substantive aspects of their work and specific IHL topics (such as relevant laws and regulations, including in-progress national legislation they are currently working on, as well as information on other measures, developments, activities or initiatives they are engaged in)
- identify examples of good practice and common challenges in national implementation of IHL, and work together to find solutions to these challenges
- find important documentation and useful IHL tools, as well as up-to-date information on current IHL issues, developments and trends
- promote or highlight key events (such as conferences, meetings, courses, workshops or training sessions)
- prepare for regional and universal meetings and continue the conversation after these events.

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In conclusion, the online community gives national IHL committees an opportunity to share information and achievements, network with their counterparts, and gain exposure for the good work they are doing all around the world. By participating, committees can gain a clearer picture of their role and strengthen their contribution to promoting greater respect for IHL, both domestically and beyond.




## HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER

All national IHL committees and similar entities are welcome – and, indeed, strongly encouraged – to join the online community.

If you are a member of a committee or similar entity that is ready and willing to join the community, or if you would like more information, please write to the ICRC’s Advisory Service on IHL at: [GVA\\_advisoryservice@icrc.org](mailto:GVA_advisoryservice@icrc.org).

## **MISSION**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

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**ICRC**

**International Committee of the Red Cross**  
19, avenue de la Paix  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
T +41 22 734 60 01  
[shop.icrc.org](https://shop.icrc.org)  
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