

Speech Launch IPU Handbook

ICRC – Mme Beerli

135th IPU Assembly – 27 October 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) remains a very important partner for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and I appreciate your continued interest for humanitarian affairs worldwide, including through the work of the Committee to promote respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL). With this regard, I wish to take the opportunity to congratulate Ms. Assegaf for her election as the new Chair of that Committee, and to wish her a lot of success in that role.

In 1901, the first Nobel Peace Prize was jointly awarded to the co-founder of the IPU, French Member of Parliament Frédéric Passy, and the founder of the ICRC, Henry Dunant. I am particularly pleased to see that one hundred year later the cooperation between our organizations continues to bear fruit and that we are today able to launch an updated version of the ICRC-IPU IHL Handbook for Parliamentarians.

International humanitarian law is not an abstract concept. From Henry Dunant's noble idea that wars have limits and that those who do not participate to the fighting must be respected and protected, IHL has developed over the years into a strong protective framework that matters every day in many countries around the world. Just look at the situation in Syria, in Somalia, in South Sudan, and in many other places that are less under the spotlight...

We, at the ICRC, strongly believe that strengthening respect for international humanitarian law is in fact the single most important way to improve the lives of all the people that are directly affected by armed conflicts.

The depositories of the legislative power and representatives of the people – Parliaments and Parliamentarians - are key actors in this pursuit. By the very nature of your role and your influence, you are indeed at the forefront of efforts to ensure that humanitarian law is correctly implemented.

The Handbook that we are presenting today intends to give you practical guidance on how to play such a role. It offers a synopsis – in about 130 pages – of all the tools that are available to you to better implement IHL and therefore foster the protection of victims of armed conflicts.

It provides for instance a number of model instruments and reference materials to help parliamentarians in their efforts to have their country accede to IHL treaties and carry out the legislative work necessary to properly apply and enforce these treaties domestically. The updated version also aims at capturing the evolution of armed conflicts and technologies in addressing key issues that are prevalent in today's armed conflicts.

The handbook addresses the needs of countries affected by armed conflicts but not only. Peacetime measures are also of primary importance. If the concepts underpinning IHL are known and understood in peacetime, they are more likely to be applied in wartime.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having been myself Member of Parliament for more than 10 years, I understand the challenges that such position entails but also appreciate the power of change that it carries.

The possibilities for action are numerous. Through their legislative powers, Parliamentarians can vote the ratification of IHL instruments and pass effective implementing legislations.

Through their oversight responsibilities, they can ensure that the military and security forces are properly trained and knowledgeable on IHL. Through their leadership and advocacy, they can also raise greater awareness of IHL among the public. Through their budgetary power, they can provide the necessary resources for implementation programmes and activities.

Victims of armed conflicts worldwide are a daily reminder that the responsibility to protect the most vulnerable people and to end human suffering is a collective one. I hope that you will rely on this handbook to consider how you can make a difference in your sphere of influence, so as to translate it into concrete actions. You can be assured that the ICRC will stand on your side to help you achieve that.

I thank you for your attention.