



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC)

WARSAW REGIONAL DELEGATION NEWSLETTER

January – June 2026

Dear Reader,

It is my pleasure to present to you the newest edition of the ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation newsletter.

Throughout the last six months, we have continued our efforts to promote respect for international humanitarian law (IHL), strengthen our acceptance, support Red Cross National Societies' work and development efforts and improve crisis preparedness across the region.

I would particularly recommend reading our entry on the visit of the ICRC Chief Legal Officer and Head of the Legal Division, Dr Cordula Droege, in Warsaw, which marked an important milestone in our relations and engagement with Polish authorities. During her visit, Dr Droege met with the Deputy Minister of Defence and the Chair of the Parliamentary National Defence Committee, and briefed representatives from several ministries at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the challenges facing humanitarian work and the implementation of IHL.

Our presence in the region is beginning to bear more fruit, with meetings with interlocutors, exchanges, and cooperation providing valuable feedback on our efforts. I am also happy about our cooperation with Red Cross National Societies and their initiatives, especially in the areas of Protection of Family Links (PFL) and IHL.

I hope you will find this newsletter informative and interesting.

With best regards,

Séverine Chappaz
Head of ICRC Regional Delegation, Warsaw



ICRC



WHY ARE WE HERE?

Following the escalation of the international armed conflict (IAC) between the Russian Federation and Ukraine in February 2022, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) opened its regional delegation in Budapest. Relocated to Warsaw in December 2023, we aim to alleviate the suffering of people fleeing the armed conflict, support our delegations in Kyiv and Moscow, raise awareness and acceptance of neutral, impartial, humanitarian work, promote IHL, and cooperate with the National Red Cross Societies, also referred to as National Societies – “NSs”. We cover nine countries: Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- The ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation, together with the ICRC Delegation in Kyiv, organised a visit to Ukraine for diplomats. The visit showcased the ICRC's neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian action through examples of its work in Lviv, Kyiv and Chernihiv, supporting Prisoners of War (PoWs), families of the missing, wounded and amputees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and local authorities delivering healthcare and other essential services.
- On 19 June, the Head of the ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation met with the Deputy Speaker of the Sejm – Szymon Hołownia – Poland's lower house of parliament, to discuss humanitarian challenges arising from contemporary conflicts, IHL, the impact of new technologies of warfare, and the humanitarian work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the region, as well as its ongoing dialogue with Polish authorities.
- The ICRC participated in the command post exercise “Loyal Leda 2026” at the NATO Joint Force Training Centre in Poland. The ICRC engaged with Command Groups and staff of the training audience, challenging them with humanitarian concerns and dilemmas related to PoWs, mass displacement, and the protection of the civilian population.
- On 17 April, the ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation participated in the 3rd Scientific Conference “International Humanitarian Law in the Protection of Civilians in Contemporary Armed Conflicts”, organised by the Polish Red Cross Koszalin branch. Bringing together academic, operational, and public stakeholders, the conference explored challenges related to civilian protection, crisis preparedness, and the application of IHL. The ICRC presented its mandate and operational activities, contributing to discussions on strengthening preparedness and promoting greater awareness of IHL.

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW WITH POLISH MINISTRIES



On 12 May, the ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation, at the invitation of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), held a briefing for representatives of Polish ministries. During this event, representatives of different ministries – and members of the National Committee on IHL – could learn more about the ICRC, the Movement and IHL, and receive answers to their questions on the ICRC's mandate and IHL.

40 officials from the MFA, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice and other ministries and institutions were briefed by Cordula Droege, the ICRC's Chief Legal Officer and Head of the Legal Division, about the ICRC mandate and role, international humanitarian law, and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts. The event provided a useful platform for a high-level exchange of views between Poland and the ICRC.

Dr Droege referred to the long history that the ICRC shares with Poland, starting from WWI, when delegates were active in Warsaw until 1925, „helping, among others, in the repatriation of former PoWs held in Germany and Russia”. She mentioned the ICRC's activity in Poland during WWII, as well as visits to leaders and members of the Solidarność movement who were deprived of liberty during the martial law period between 1981-1983, as well as the relief work that was conducted with and by the Polish Red Cross (PRC) in that period.

As the ICRC returned to Poland in 2022, following the escalation of the IAC between Russia and Ukraine, its work has continued. With the PRC as the convenor in Poland, common activities include work on restoring family links, National Society Development, communication, prevention and crisis preparedness.

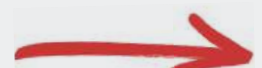
Speaking about the current IHL challenges, Dr Droege focused on the changing nature of weapons used in hostilities and dangers of extensive reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) and development of autonomous weapon systems. Such systems may be incompatible with IHL, when it comes to principles of distinction and proportionality.



ICRC REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR EURASIA IN POLAND FOR UKRAINE RECOVERY CONFERENCE FOR NATIONAL SOCIETIES

Ariane Bauer, the ICRC's Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, arrived in Poland for the Ukraine Recovery Conference (25 to 26 June), held in Gdansk, northern Poland. There, Ms. Bauer met a number of Polish and Ukrainian officials, discussing the ICRC's work and challenges, including Warsaw Regional Delegation's headquarters agreement.

Ms. Bauer gave two press interviews, one to the Polish Press Agency and another to TVP World, which you can watch [here](#). During the interviews, she spoke about the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, as well as ongoing issues that affect our work.



2ND EDITION OF THE FIELD TRIP TO UKRAINE FOR DIPLOMATS



Following strong interest expressed by States after the first field visit organised by the ICRC Regional Delegation in Warsaw, in cooperation with the ICRC Delegation in Ukraine, in November 2024, a second field visit, organised under a changed concept, took place from 17 to 22 May.

The visit offered participants a closer look at the ICRC's work in the context of the international armed conflict and highlighted the added value of its unique humanitarian mandate. Through operational briefings, site visits, and exchanges with Ukrainian counterparts, participants gained deeper insight into both the realities on the ground and the ICRC's response.

The trip provided an opportunity to witness firsthand the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Ukraine. Participants met civilians affected by hostilities in northern Ukraine, visited energy infrastructure sites, and learned more about the complex processes surrounding the care of wounded combatants and the identification of those killed in action.

Discussions and briefings throughout the visit also explored the ICRC's work related to Russian PoWs, civilians stranded in enemy-controlled territory, and the international accounting system for captured servicemen. Ukrainian authorities shared their perspectives, contributing to a broader understanding of the operational and humanitarian challenges at stake.

"THEN IT'S ALREADY TOO LATE": PROMOTING PREPAREDNESS THROUGH IHL AWARENESS – ROMANIA

In May 2026, the year of its 150th anniversary, the Romanian Red Cross organised the 2nd edition of their conference "International Humanitarian Law – Beyond the Image of Humanity" at the Palace of Parliament in Bucharest, bringing together representatives from institutions, humanitarian organisations, and other stakeholders to discuss the relevance of IHL in contemporary contexts.

The event also marked the opening of the photography exhibition "Then it's already too late". Developed with contributions from the Ukrainian Red Cross, the Russian Red Cross, Magen David Adom, ICRC delegations from Israel and Gaza, the exhibition highlighted the importance of preparedness and respect for IHL before the outbreak of armed conflict.

The ICRC participated in the conference through opening remarks delivered by Head of Regional Delegation Séverine Chappaz, who highlighted the growing number and complexity of armed conflicts and stressed that stronger respect for IHL, civilian protection, and preparedness measures must begin long before crises emerge. The delegation also presented on IHL and humanitarian access, offering practical insights into the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict and the conditions required to ensure safe and impartial humanitarian action.



INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL)



IHL is a set of rules that seeks, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects persons who are not, or are no longer, directly or actively participating in hostilities, and imposes limits on the means and methods of warfare. The ICRC has been mandated by the community of states to promote compliance with IHL.

2ND SUB-REGIONAL PROTECTION OF FAMILY LINKS (PFL) / RESTORING FAMILY LINKS (RFL) MEETING



The 2nd sub-regional PFL/RFL meeting – co-organised with the Polish Red Cross – took place in Warsaw, Poland at the beginning of June. Participants from nine National Societies covered by the Warsaw Regional Delegation discussed and agreed on the next steps to strengthen emergency preparedness, ensure the sustainability of services through resource mobilisation, and address a range of technical topics, including innovative approaches to information preservation and archiving.

In addition, discussions focused on the current caseload related to World War II and ongoing international armed conflicts, as well as on ways to further strengthen support for families of missing persons living in countries across the sub-region.

STRENGTHENING DIALOGUE ON HUMANITARIAN PREPAREDNESS ACROSS THE BALTIC STATES

Throughout the first half of the year, the ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation carried out numerous field visits to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, meeting with national authorities, National Red Cross Societies, government security advisors, and National Crisis Management Centres to exchange views on humanitarian challenges in an increasingly complex security environment and discuss preparedness for responding to crises, including in situations of international armed conflict.



The visits provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen dialogue on preparedness to comply with IHL and humanitarian coordination across the region. Authorities expressed a strong interest in the ICRC's expertise and operational experience, leading to constructive discussions on practical preparedness measures, the ICRC's crisis response capacity, and opportunities for closer cooperation.

The exchanges also offered an opportunity to learn more about national preparedness efforts and share experiences on integrating humanitarian considerations into crisis planning. The meetings have already led to follow-up discussions and meetings on preparedness related issues, while the ICRC was also invited to participate in future preparedness exercises organised by the National Crisis Management Centres, creating further opportunities to strengthen cooperation and exchange expertise.

ROLE AND MANDATE OF THE ICRC AND THE POLISH RED CROSS: BRIEFING FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY DEFENCE COMMITTEE

On 21 January, representatives of the ICRC and the PRC delivered presentations to members of the Parliamentary Committee for National Defence on their respective mandates and roles in situations of IAC, as well as their key activities and areas of cooperation in Poland.

The session provided an opportunity to exchange perspectives on preparedness to comply with IHL and broader humanitarian considerations related to armed conflict. Discussions focused on strengthening awareness and implementation of IHL, the protection of civilians, and the importance of ensuring that relevant legal and institutional frameworks are fit for purpose in times of crisis. The exchange also contributed to ongoing dialogue between humanitarian and governmental actors on preparedness and the application of IHL in contemporary security contexts. It opened the way for further engagements at Parliament.



WORKSHOP FOR THE NATIONAL IHL COMMISSION OF MOLDOVA

On 29 April, the ICRC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, co-organised a workshop for members of the National Commission on International Humanitarian Law, representing seven ministries. The event presented the preliminary results of a 2026 compatibility study between the national legislation and international humanitarian law, followed by discussions on its findings, implementation priorities, and practical measures to strengthen respect for IHL in Moldova.



The programme highlighted the Czech Red Cross Tracing Service's activities and results in 2025, offering insights into both national and international casework. Participants also explored the practical links between tracing activities and IHL through interactive discussions.

INFORMATION SESSION ON THE GLOBAL IHL INITIATIVE FOR THE DIPLOMATIC INSTITUTE

On 28 April, the ICRC, in collaboration with the Diplomatic Institute under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova, organised an information session dedicated to the Global Initiative to galvanise political commitment to international humanitarian law, which Moldova joined in December 2025.



The session provided participants with an in-depth understanding of current challenges in the implementation of international humanitarian law, the objectives and seven workstreams of the Global Initiative, and the role of the diplomatic corps in its dissemination.

SAFE CROSS BORDER PASSAGE (SCBP) PROGRAMME – MOLDOVA

In the framework of the SCBP Programme, in the first half of the year, the ICRC in Moldova facilitated the return of almost 350 individuals from various countries without valid travel documents who intended to return to their home countries from Ukraine. The programme includes issuance of ICRC Emergency Travel Documents (by the ICRC Delegation in Ukraine) and the provision of flight tickets and accommodation while transiting via Moldova. Through this programme, the ICRC continues to support individuals in safely reaching their destination and reconnecting with their families.



IHL IN A CHANGING BATTLESPACE: POLISH NAVAL ACADEMY XVIII SCIENTIFIC IHL CONFERENCE – GDYNIA, POLAND

Representatives of the ICRC Warsaw Regional Delegation participated in the XVIII Scientific Conference on IHL, held at the Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia on 15 and 16 June 2026. The conference brought together military practitioners, academics, legal experts, and representatives of humanitarian organisations to discuss contemporary challenges facing IHL and human rights protection in armed conflict.

PARTNER MEETING OF THE CZECH RED CROSS TRACING SERVICES

On 23 April, the Department of Investigation and Foreign Relations of the Czech Red Cross convened its fourth annual meeting with institutional partners supporting its Tracing Service. The gathering brought together representatives from archives, ministries, museums, police services, and other key institutions whose collaboration helps reunite families and clarify the fate of missing persons.



Presentations and discussions highlighted the implications of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapon systems for compliance with IHL, including the role of human judgement and control in the use of force. The conference also examined the relationship between IHL and international human rights law, the challenges of applying the Geneva Conventions to contemporary conflicts, the protection of mental health during armed conflict, and the role of preparedness and civil defence in strengthening civilian resilience, among many other topics.

The ICRC contributed to the programme with a presentation on preventing the arbitrary deprivation of liberty of civilians under the updated Commentary on the IV Geneva Convention. The presentation explored the exceptional nature of civilian internment in international armed conflicts and the importance of oversight mechanisms in preventing arbitrary detention.

THE 7 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality: these seven Fundamental Principles provide an ethical, operational and institutional framework to the work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. They are at the core of its approach to helping people in need during armed conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies. These principles unite the components of the Movement – the ICRC, the National Societies and the International Federation – and are key to its distinct identity. Adherence to these principles ensures the humanitarian nature of the Movement's work and brings consistency to the broad range of activities it undertakes around the world.



ICRC ACTIVITIES ON IHL DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION WITH THE MOLDOVAN NATIONAL ARMY

In the first half of this year, the ICRC Mission in Moldova conducted a series of activities aimed at strengthening the dissemination and implementation of IHL within the armed forces. These activities included a roundtable for senior Moldova National Army (MNA) officers and legal advisers from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), a training for Moldovan peacekeepers, and information sessions for cadets of the "Alexandru cel Bun" Military Academy of the Armed Forces.

All these sessions covered the mandate and activities of the ICRC, the principles of IHL, lawful methods and means of warfare, the protection of persons in armed conflict, the status of the Red Cross emblem, and the protection of cultural property. These activities contribute to ongoing efforts to promote the dissemination and implementation of IHL within the armed forces as part of the 2026 Cooperation Plan signed on 16 January between the ICRC Mission in Moldova and the General Staff of the MNA.



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.

