



ICRC

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Introduction

In 2025, the ICRC documented over 130 armed conflicts worldwide – a figure that has more than doubled in the last 15 years.¹ Many of these conflicts have persisted for decades, trapping generations in cycles of violence and trauma. As these conflicts spread, we witness not only an alarming increase in suffering and humanitarian needs but also a concerning retreat by some States from their humanitarian responsibilities and disarmament commitments.

¹ ICRC, [Annual Report of 2025](#), p.2.

In parallel, as detailed in the United Nations Secretary-General's 2025 report,² military spending has grown to extraordinary levels. Many States appear to be re-orienting their policies and capabilities towards preparing for major conflict in ways not seen for decades. Yet the conclusion of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held almost half a century ago in 1978, remains valid: more weapons mean less security.³

Every day, ICRC staff throughout the world witness the unbearable human cost of armed conflict. Heavy explosive weapons in populated areas cause devastating civilian casualties and the destruction of essential infrastructure. Anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, weapons thought to have been relegated to the past, continue to inflict appalling suffering long after their use. Poorly regulated and irresponsible arms transfers fuel vicious cycles of violence, while emerging and new technologies of warfare introduce new risks of harm to civilians. Above all, nuclear weapons continue to pose an existential danger to humanity as a whole. These are all serious humanitarian concerns that the First Committee has the responsibility to address, with urgency and determination.

IHL prohibits or restricts the use of certain weapons to protect civilians and civilian objects from indiscriminate effects and spare combatants from injuries that serve no military purpose. Beyond specific prohibitions and restrictions in disarmament treaties and customary law, all weapons must be used in compliance with IHL, including the principles and rules on distinction, proportionality and precautions. Humanitarian disarmament, and IHL more broadly, save lives during armed conflict. We must continue to value, uphold and strengthen the common humanity they embody. However, despite many instances of respect for international humanitarian law (IHL), the level of harm inflicted on civilians and other protected persons in today's armed conflicts demonstrates that compliance clearly falls short of what is required. All too often, violations of IHL are misrepresented as compliant behavior and the most fundamental principles of IHL are simply disregarded. As the President of the ICRC stated at the UN Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict held earlier this year, "wars fought without rules transform wars between combatants into wars against civilians. We can no longer pretend that what we are witnessing across war zones is in accordance with the law".⁴ The international community must reiterate its steadfast commitment to upholding IHL, in letter and in spirit. Ultimately, "the responsibility to protect civilians lies with those who hold the political power."⁵

In response to these dire circumstances, in 2024, Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan and South Africa, together with the ICRC, launched a global initiative to galvanize political commitment to IHL. After two years of consultations across seven thematic workstreams,⁶ the initiative has developed guidance to facilitate the implementation of existing obligations in a

² United Nations Secretary-General, [The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future](#), Report, 2025.

³ United Nations General Assembly, [Resolution adopted on the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Tenth Special Session S-10/2](#), 30 June 1978, para. 12.

⁴ ICRC, [ICRC President: "We can no longer pretend that what we are witnessing across war zones is in accordance with the law"](#), Statement, 20 May 2026.

⁵ ICRC, [ICRC President: The responsibility to protect civilians lies with those who hold political power](#), Statement, 21 September 2026; ICRC, [Joint statement on the Global Initiative to galvanize political commitment to international humanitarian law](#), Statement, 23 September 2026.

⁶ The seven workstreams cover prevention good practices, national IHL committees, IHL and peace, protection of civilian infrastructure, protection of hospitals, upholding IHL in the use of ICTs, and naval warfare.

manner consistent with the protective purpose of IHL and hence respond to the challenges posed by contemporary warfare.⁷ With 119 states having joined the initiative at the time of writing,⁸ the Global IHL Initiative will culminate in the High-Level Conference on Humanity in War, to be held in Jordan on 7 December 2026, bringing together Heads of State and Government from States that have joined the initiative to reaffirm their commitment to making IHL a political priority. We urge all States to join the initiative.

Against this backdrop, the work of the First Committee is perhaps more important than ever. Disarmament and non-proliferation are indispensable tools to prevent war and strengthen international peace and security. They are also critical means to mitigate the impact of armed conflict when it occurs, contributing to the achievement of the protective purpose of IHL. In times of increased conflict and tension, the treaties and arrangements overseen by the Committee must be reinforced, developed and expanded – not ignored, neglected or abandoned. Now is the time for States to redouble their efforts to fully and faithfully implement existing disarmament treaties, to bring them closer to universality, and to develop new legally binding and other instruments and mechanisms to address the risks posed by new technologies of warfare. It is only through reenergized commitment to humanitarian disarmament and IHL that we may limit human suffering and sow the seeds of peace.

Conventional weapons

Conventional weapons are responsible for the large majority of civilian harm in today's armed conflicts, whether on civilians directly or on the objects on which they depend for their survival and well-being. It is essential that States take urgent action to ensure their use and transfer comply with the law. Addressing the pressing need to limit the unacceptable and intolerable suffering witnessed over the past decades, the outcome of the Global IHL Initiative workstream on protecting civilian infrastructure, co-chaired by Algeria, Costa Rica, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and the ICRC,⁹ provides practical guidance which, when implemented, will help spare present and future generations from the damage and destruction of civilian infrastructure that has become a hallmark of contemporary armed conflicts.

Explosive weapons in populated areas

Protection of civilians must start where they are most at risk: when war is waged in cities and other populated areas. The use of heavy explosive weapons in cities continues to cause unacceptable civilian harm – death, injury, lifelong disability and severe psychological trauma – on a shockingly large and ever-increasing scale throughout the world.¹⁰ The plight of civilians is exacerbated when basic services on which they rely for their survival – such as water, electricity, health care or waste management – are disrupted.¹¹ Those who manage to leave have to endure the dangers and hardships of displacement, often for years. Many others are unable to get away because escape

⁷ ICRC, [Global IHL Initiative: Outcome documents compilation](#), September 2026.

⁸ For more information on the Global Initiative and for the full list of states joined, see <https://www.upholdhumanityinwar.org/#who-is-involved>.

⁹ Global IHL Initiative, Outcome Documents Compilation, above note 7, pp. 45-54.

¹⁰ ICRC, [ICRC president: We are witnessing a global and collective failure to protect civilians in armed conflicts](#), Statement, 22 April 2024.

¹¹ ICRC and Norwegian Red Cross, [Keeping the lights on and the taps running: protecting and facilitating safer access for essential service providers in armed conflict](#), 2024.

routes are blocked, bombed or contaminated by unexploded ordnance that will continue to maim and kill for decades to come.

Despite overwhelming evidence of the destruction it causes, parties to armed conflicts continue to routinely bomb and shell towns and cities, setting development back decades. This practice defeats the purpose of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and many of the Actions of the Pact for the Future;¹² it takes us further away from a sustainable peace. States must urgently take decisive measures to prevent urban warfare and to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure when urban warfare takes place.

In the last years, States have enshrined the need for action in two landmark documents: the 2022 ‘Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas’,¹³ now endorsed by 91 States, and the Pact for the Future.¹⁴ Both include commitments to strengthen the protection of civilians and to restrict or refrain from, as appropriate, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas when their use may be expected to cause harm to civilians or civilian objects.

While the ICRC welcomes these commitments, States must urgently and faithfully implement them for civilians to finally see changes on the ground. This should include avoiding the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects,¹⁵ as the ICRC and the entire International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have been calling on all States and parties to armed conflict to do for over a decade.¹⁶ Heavy explosive weapons should not be used in populated areas unless sufficient mitigation measures are taken to limit their wide area effects and the consequent risk of civilian harm. This is necessary to avoid preventable death and destruction and to comply with the IHL rules governing the conduct of hostilities. Indeed, it is very difficult to use heavy explosive weapons in populated areas in compliance with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. The Political Declaration embodies States’ collective recognition that the status quo is no longer acceptable and that urgent change, including restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, is required.¹⁷ At the second international conference on the Political Declaration, held in Costa Rica in November 2025, States reaffirmed their commitment to the Declaration and shared progress made towards its implementation at the national level.

The ICRC calls on all States that have not yet done so to endorse the Political Declaration and to use the First Committee as a forum to share experiences and accelerate implementation efforts.

Cluster munitions, anti-personnel mines, and incendiary weapons

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) are leading IHL treaties that ban unacceptable weapons and have prevented innumerable

¹² See, e.g. Actions 13-27 in United Nations, [Summit of the Future Outcome Documents: Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations](#), September 2024.

¹³ [Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas](#) (EWIPA Political Declaration), 2022.

¹⁴ Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations, above note 12.

¹⁵ ICRC, [Explosive weapons with wide area effects: a deadly choice in populated areas](#), January 2022.

¹⁶ See, Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, [War in Cities: Resolution 6](#), CD/22/R6, June 2022.

¹⁷ ICRC, [ICRC president: Use of explosive weapons in populated areas requires a collective response](#), Statement, 20 November 2025.

deaths and the life-long mutilation of countless civilians. They further enshrine the commitment to supporting victims and clearing affected areas and establish a framework to do so. Widely ratified, they are prominent disarmament successes.¹⁸ Notably, in the late 1980s, the ICRC described anti-personnel mines as a “worldwide epidemic,” with an estimated 24,000 people, mostly civilians, killed or injured each year.¹⁹ The adoption of the APMBC in 1997 marked a turning point. Over 55 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed, vast areas of land cleared, and the production and transfer of these weapons drastically reduced. These efforts led to the number of casualties dropping by over 75 percent from its peak in the late 1990s, making the APMBC one of the most successful humanitarian disarmament treaties to date.²⁰ In the case of the CCM, since the coming into force of the convention, States Parties have destroyed nearly 1.5 million cluster munitions and 179 million submunitions. Each submunition destroyed is a childhood saved from debilitating injury and a family spared decades of anxiety.

Despite the existence of a clear and robust legal framework prohibiting them, we are very concerned that the production, transfer and use of cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines in armed conflicts are on the rise, threatening the gains of decades-long decontamination and development efforts. The universalization and effective implementation of the CCM and the APMBC are more important than ever. Indeed, while some States have very regrettably withdrawn from the conventions,²¹ and discussions about withdrawals or reduced commitment to humanitarian disarmament treaties more broadly continue to surface, the membership of these key instruments continues to expand, albeit at a slower pace: since 2020 four States have joined the CCM and three States have joined the APMBC. These new ratifications represent an unequivocal demonstration of the value the international community continues to ascribe to the objective of a world free of cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines.

It is important to recall why these weapons were outlawed in the first place. Because of their indiscriminate effects on civilians and the threat they pose long after conflicts end, prohibitions against their use, transfer, production and stockpiling have rightly been cemented by the international community. All the reasons that led to the adoption of the CCM and APMBC remain just as valid today. The appalling human cost exacted by the use of these weapons is not diminished by a changing security environment.²² The ICRC calls on States Parties and the international community to further strengthen the stigma against any use of cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines²³ and to reaffirm their commitment to the CCM and the APMBC and the norms they embody. Respect for IHL must be a political priority, especially in times of increasing polarization, insecurity and armed conflicts.²⁴

¹⁸ See ICRC, [ICRC President: Civilians will pay the price if global commitment to ban landmines allowed to fracture](#), Statement, 16 June 2025.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The full list of States Parties to IHL-related treaties is accessible on the ICRC’s webpage at: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/treaties-and-states-parties>

²² ICRC, [In times of insecurity and conflict, states must work together to uphold and strengthen international humanitarian law](#), 18 July 2024.

²³ ICRC, [International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Armed Conflicts: Building a Culture of Compliance for IHL to Protect Humanity in Today's and Future Conflicts](#), 2024 (2024 Challenges Report), pp. 52 – 54.

²⁴ ICRC, [ICRC Vice-President: Maintaining and strengthening IHL is a collective responsibility of all states](#), Statement, 16 September 2025.

The 3rd Review Conference of the CCM was an important step in this respect. The Conference strongly condemned any use of cluster munitions by any actor, under any circumstances. States deeply regretted the case of a State Party withdrawing from the Convention, the first ever withdrawal from of a humanitarian disarmament treaty prohibiting an entire category of weapons. Nevertheless, States committed to redouble their efforts to prevent similar developments in the future, and to actively engage with signatory States and States not party to encourage them to ratify, accept, approve or accede, with the goal of achieving universal adherence to the Convention.

Another milestone was the affirmation by the 22nd Meeting of States Parties to the APMBC that the Convention does not allow the suspension of its operation and consequently its obligations. The upcoming 23rd Meeting of States Parties to the APMBC later this year presents an important opportunity for States to renew and strengthen commitment to the humanitarian principles that lie at the heart of these conventions. One such reaffirmation of commitment has been Lebanon's recent accession to the APMBC, highlighting the relevance of humanitarian disarmament instruments for countries in armed conflict.

At Meetings of States Parties and Review Conferences, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has urged States Parties to do far more to promote universalization and adherence to the CCM and the APMBC and defend their core humanitarian norms in times of tension. This is equally required for the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its Protocols, and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The ICRC, together with the wider Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, calls on all States that have not yet done so to join all these instruments to achieve universal adherence.²⁵

The ICRC has repeatedly expressed serious concern about the humanitarian consequences of the use of incendiary weapons, and of weapons with incidental incendiary effects, such as white phosphorus munitions. We encourage High Contracting Parties of the CCW to have a dedicated discussion on the implementation of Protocol III at the upcoming Review Conference, including sharing of information on national policies and operational practices in connection with these weapons, with a view to minimizing their indiscriminate effects on civilians and preventing unnecessary suffering for combatants. In addition, we call on States to consider future work to further examine the military, technical, legal and humanitarian aspects of incendiary weapons and weapons with incidental incendiary effects.

Responsible arms transfers

Since 2020, twelve States have joined the ATT, reflecting the widespread recognition that the humanitarian consequences of arms transfers matter and strengthening the prospect of a truly global standard for responsible arms transfers. Yet the widespread availability of arms and ammunition, often the result of irresponsible or poorly controlled transfers, continues to come with a bloody price. The increase in military spending and weapons proliferation further exacerbates the risk of diversion or illicit arms trade.²⁶ Irresponsible arms transfers take lives, prolong conflicts, drive displacement and adversely affect the achievement of development goals. The ICRC is deeply concerned about the gap that seems to exist between the commitments

²⁵ Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, [Resolutions](#), 23-25 November 2009.

²⁶ UN Secretary-General, [The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future](#), above note 2, section 4.4.6, pp. 45-46.

made by States to respect and ensure respect for IHL and to faithfully implement instruments such as the ATT, and the arms transfer practices of too many of them. Of particular concern are exemptions from IHL risk assessments given to certain transfers or recipients; export licenses valid for many years without a requirement for periodic review; and certain measures, aimed at facilitating export of arms produced jointly by several States, that limit contributing States' ability to challenge the export of the final product on humanitarian grounds.²⁷

The law is straightforward: States must refrain from transferring arms where there is a risk that they would be used to commit or facilitate IHL violations. In addition, States have a positive obligation to take timely, robust and practical measures that can realistically offset risks of violations.²⁸ Those who supply the means by which wars are fought assume a special responsibility. They must do everything reasonably in their power to ensure respect for IHL by the recipients of the weapons they provide. Faithful implementation of the ATT and Article 1 common to the 1949 Geneva Conventions can go a long way in preventing serious violations of IHL.

Weapons of mass destruction

Weapons of mass destruction were among the first to be unequivocally prohibited by the international community. This is because they are generally blatantly at odds with two key rules of IHL: the prohibition of inherently indiscriminate weapons and the prohibition of weapons that are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering. The human suffering caused by nuclear, biological, chemical, and in some cases radiological weapons is intolerable and their humanitarian consequences are unacceptable. The ICRC and the wider International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have long recognized the inherent difficulties of responding to the effects of any use of such weapons, and the inadequacy of existing assistance and response capacities in such an event.²⁹

Nuclear disarmament

The risk of nuclear weapons being used remains at its highest in decades. It is fueled by strident nuclear rhetoric and threats of use, international armed conflicts involving nuclear-weapon States and that exacerbate geopolitical tensions, accelerated modernization, and potentially dangerous technological developments, including automation and Artificial Intelligence. Meanwhile, nuclear doctrines are being revised to strengthen the role of nuclear weapons and to lower the threshold for their use.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 reduced the two cities to ash in seconds, and killed tens of thousands instantly. Over eighty years later, Japanese Red Cross Society hospitals are still treating thousands of survivors for long-term health effects. Today, if a similar weapon, which was much smaller than many currently held in nuclear arsenals, were used in or near a populated area, no State or international organization could mount a

²⁷ ICRC, 2024 Challenges Report, above note 23, p. 82.

²⁸ See Arms Trade Treaty, 2 April 2013, arts 1,6-7; ICRC, [Arms transfers to parties to armed conflict: what the law says](#), 3 June 2024.

²⁹ Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, [Weapons and International Humanitarian Law: Resolution 6](#), CD/24/R3, October 2024.

humanitarian response capable of adequately addressing the catastrophic humanitarian consequences.³⁰

IHL fully applies to the use of nuclear weapons,³¹ be it strategic or tactical, for offensive or defensive purposes. In the view of the ICRC, and of the wider Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, it is extremely doubtful that the use of nuclear weapons could ever comply with the principles and rules of IHL. In addition, any threat to use nuclear weapons is abhorrent to the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience.³²

States must persist with, and insist on, progress on nuclear disarmament, through universalization and full implementation of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), as well as the regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties. The ICRC, together with the wider Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement,³³ calls on all States to join and faithfully implement these instruments. This must be done not in spite of the current international security situation, but because of it. The persistent nuclear rhetoric and threats of use, accelerated modernization, and strengthened roles for nuclear weapons in national security doctrines must be replaced with renewed efforts to move ahead both with the implementation of long-standing nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, including the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons, and – pending their total elimination – with parallel actions to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons being used. The latter must include efforts to reduce nuclear arsenals and increase transparency, lower the operational readiness levels of nuclear weapons, reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines, and commit to no-first-use, as well as measures to condemn and suppress nuclear threats. Efforts must also continue to be made to increase awareness and understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons for directly affected populations, for the population of other States, and for humanity as a whole. This understanding must be put back at the forefront of any debate and decision related to nuclear weapons.

In this respect, the ICRC welcomes the adoption of UNGA Resolution 79/238 on nuclear war effects and scientific research,³⁴ and the subsequent appointment of the Independent Scientific Panel on the Effects of Nuclear War.³⁵ The ICRC looks forward to continuing to collaborate with the Panel and assisting it with its mandated task of examining the physical effects and societal consequences of a nuclear war on a local, regional and planetary scale.

In an era of heightened geopolitical tensions globally, the importance of multilateral collaboration has never been greater. The 2010 NPT Action Plan commitments remain a solid basis for all States to advance their treaty obligations, including those on nuclear disarmament.³⁶ The failure of the 11th Review Conference of the NPT to adopt a consensus outcome document – the third consecutive such failure – only emphasizes the need for States to persist with even

³⁰ IFRC and ICRC, [The humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons are beyond the capacity of any humanitarian organization to address effectively](#), Joint Statement, 5 March 2025.

³¹ International Court of Justice, [Nuclear Weapons Advisory Opinion](#), 8 July 1996, paras. 85-87.

³² ICRC, 2024 Challenges Report, above note 23, p. 12.

³³ Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, [Weapons and International Humanitarian Law: Resolution 6](#), CD/24/R3, October 2024.

³⁴ UNGA, [Nuclear war effects and scientific research](#), UN Doc A/RES/79/238, 31 December 2024.

³⁵ Ibid, para. 2.

³⁶ For the 64-point Action Plan, see 2010 Review Conference of the NPT, [Final Document](#), NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I).

greater determination in their nuclear disarmament efforts. States possessing nuclear weapons bear a particular responsibility to pursue concrete, transparent, and irreversible steps towards the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, while their allies should diminish reliance on nuclear deterrence in their security doctrines and thereby contribute to creating the necessary conditions for sustained progress towards nuclear disarmament.

The TPNW, by prohibiting nuclear weapons, makes a crucial effective contribution towards nuclear disarmament. As of 1 October 2026, 75 States are party to the TPNW, and 26 others have signed it, meaning more than half of the international community of States have expressed their commitment to be bound by the Treaty. Signing and ratifying the TPNW is a concrete and practical step towards the only solution for safeguarding humanity from the threat of nuclear weapons: the complete elimination of these weapons. In December, States Parties will convene for the First Review Conference of the TPNW. Against the bleak and concerning backdrop surrounding nuclear weapons debates, the conference offers a pivotal opportunity to demonstrate the treaty's critical importance and contribution to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

States should sustain and deepen their efforts to ensure both the success of the TPNW Review Conference and the implementation of NPT undertakings and commitments, including by supporting the nuclear disarmament resolutions to be considered by this Committee.

Biological and chemical weapons

The prohibitions on chemical and biological weapons stand as clear evidence that disarmament can deliver lasting and effective outcomes, preventing immense human suffering and contributing to a safer international community. The 100th anniversary of the 1925 Geneva Protocol last year presented an opportunity to both remember the time it took to achieve a full prohibition of these weapons and how much human suffering could have been avoided if it had been achieved earlier; and to underscore the eventual success of these prohibitions.

The humanitarian principles and norms underpinning the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention remain robust, and today the use, development, production or transfer of such weapons is universally regarded as morally, legally, and militarily unacceptable. Incidents involving the use of chemical weapons, as well as other chemicals whose use as a method of warfare is prohibited under treaty and customary law, in past years have been met with unequivocal condemnation by the international community, confirming that humanitarian norms must and can be fiercely defended. Similar resolve is urgently required when addressing other categories of indiscriminate or inhumane weapons,³⁷ including in particular nuclear weapons, the last remaining and most horrific weapon of mass destruction.

Emerging and new technologies

The ICRC has observed a steady increase in the use of emerging and new technologies of warfare in current conflicts. Such technologies create new dangers for civilian populations and new forms of harm that compound the devastation caused by more traditional weapons. The ICRC remains convinced that the international community must act now to address the unacceptable

³⁷ See, ICRC Customary IHL Study, [Rule 71](#).

humanitarian, ethical and legal risks posed by the unconstrained development and use of new technologies in warfare.

These concerns are particularly acute in relation to the growing military use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the increasing autonomy of weapon systems. States have increasingly recognized the humanitarian and broader implications of military AI at the UN level, including through the Pact for the Future,³⁸ UNGA Resolution 79/239 and the UN Secretary-General's subsequent report on AI in the military domain,³⁹ UNGA Resolution 80/58 and the informal exchanges in Geneva in June 2026 that were mandated by this resolution.⁴⁰ These issues have also received growing attention in the UN Security Council, including at the September 2025 open debate on AI and international peace and security, at which the ICRC highlighted the humanitarian and legal risks associated with military applications of AI,⁴¹ and again during UNGA High-Level Week in September 2026, where concerns about AI systems and the importance of human control featured prominently.⁴²

The ICRC welcomes the strong support expressed by States for ensuring that AI in the military domain is only used in compliance with the existing legal framework.⁴³ IHL provides essential principles and rules that regulate the use of means and methods of warfare, including emerging military applications of AI, to protect those affected by armed conflict.

The ICRC has consistently underscored that, in all considerations related to the development and use of AI in military applications, States and parties to armed conflicts must preserve human judgement and control in decisions that pose risks to the life and dignity of people affected by armed conflict.⁴⁴ This is essential for ensuring respect for applicable laws, including IHL, and upholding ethical standards.

Autonomous weapon systems (AWS)

The need to preserve human judgement and control, and to take urgent action in this respect, is particularly acute in the field of autonomous weapons,⁴⁵ given the rapid pace of their development and increasing use on the battlefield. States must act now to prohibit unpredictable autonomous weapons – an issue of particular concern where AWS incorporate AI in ways that make their functioning opaque and their effects difficult to predict and limit – and autonomous

³⁸ Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations, above note 12, Action 27.

³⁹ See, UNGA, [Artificial intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security](#), UN Doc. A/RES/79/239, 31 December 2024; UN Secretary-General, [Artificial intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security](#), Report, UN Doc. A/80/78, 5 June 2025.

⁴⁰ UNGA, [Artificial intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security](#), UN Doc. A/Res/80/58, 5 December 2025.

⁴¹ ICRC, [UN Security Council: We cannot let AI be deployed on the battlefield without oversight and regulation](#), Statement, UN Security Council Open Debate on "Artificial Intelligence and International Peace and Security", 26 September 2025.

⁴² United Nations Office for Partnerships, [AI and Human Development](#), Goals Lounge, 23 September 2026; United Nations Security Council, [Ongoing Efforts to Create Powerful AI a 'Race Where Everyone Loses', UN Expert Tells Security Council, as Members, Tech Leaders Debate Governance Issues](#), Meetings Coverage, SC/16462, 23 September 2026.

⁴³ See UNGA Resolutions 79/239 and 80/58, above notes 39 and 40.

⁴⁴ ICRC, "UN Security Council: We cannot let AI be deployed on the battlefield without oversight and regulation", above note 41.

⁴⁵ ICRC, [Renewed call from UN Secretary-General and ICRC President to adopt rules on autonomous weapon systems](#), 25 August 2026.

weapons designed or used to apply force against persons, and to impose strict international legal restrictions on the development and use of all other autonomous weapons.

The publication of the Secretary-General's report on lethal autonomous weapon systems,⁴⁶ and the high number of submissions to this report, indicates the importance of this issue to the international community. This importance is further reflected in the adoption by consensus in September 2026 of the report of the CCW Group of Governmental Experts (GGE LAWS), containing a set of elements of an instrument to address emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon systems⁴⁷. While the ICRC has some concerns about elements that were not included, the GGE LAWS report, together with the material developed by the Group over the last three years, constitutes a strong and sufficient basis to launch negotiations on a legally binding instrument. In this respect, the ICRC welcomes the fact that 47 States and the African Group confirmed their willingness to move to negotiations on an instrument on autonomous weapons, bringing the overall total of States that have explicitly voiced this goal to over 70 States.

Against this backdrop, the ICRC President and the UN Secretary-General have emphasized that time is running out for the international community to take preventive action on autonomous weapons. In their renewed joint appeal this year, they reiterated the urgency of negotiating and adopting a legally binding instrument to regulate autonomous weapons and called on States to take the decision, at the November CCW Review Conference, to launch negotiations of a new Protocol to the CCW. States must move decisively to ensure that the future of warfare is governed by humans, not machines.

AI-enabled decision-support systems (AI-DSS)

AI-enabled decision-support systems (AI-DSS) are already a prominent military application of AI. Provided they are appropriately designed and used, AI-DSS may help to avoid or reduce civilian harm. However, AI-DSS also create additional risks for civilians and other protected persons in armed conflict, because of the difficulties inherent in predicting and understanding how and why AI systems produce a given output; the lack of quality data in conflict zones; and human cognitive tendencies such as “automation bias” or over-trust.

AI-DSS must be designed and used only to support, never hinder or replace, human decision-making. Furthermore, AI-DSS must be used only within legal, policy and doctrinal frameworks that respect IHL. Otherwise, these tools will serve only to replicate unlawful or harmful outcomes at a faster rate and on a larger scale, thus exacerbating IHL violations and civilian harm.

To support efforts by States and other actors to ensure that military uses of AI-DSS remain consistent with IHL and humanitarian principles, the ICRC has formulated a non-exhaustive set of preliminary recommendations relating to the development and use of AI-DSS in armed conflict. These recommendations reflect the ICRC's *human-centred approach* to the development and use of AI in armed conflict. They focus on 1) ensuring human control and judgement; 2) system design requirements; 3) testing, evaluation, verification and validation; 4) legal reviews; 5) operational constraints on use; 6) user training; 7) after-action reviews; and 8) accountability,

⁴⁶ UN Secretary-General, [Lethal autonomous weapon systems](#), Report, UN Doc. A/79/88, 1 July 2024.

⁴⁷ CCW, Report of the 2024-2025-2026 sessions of the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, [CCW/GGE.1/2026/3](#), 14 September 2026.

among others.⁴⁸ Since then, the ICRC has conducted a series of consultations with States, independent technology experts, technology companies and industry representatives. These exchanges have provided constructive and broadly positive feedback, helping to identify areas where the recommendations can be further refined.

Moreover, the ICRC welcomes the constructive spirit of the informal exchanges held in Geneva from 15 to 17 June 2026, which brought together a broad range of stakeholders to discuss the risks, opportunities and governance of AI in the military domain. The ICRC particularly welcomes the wide recognition among participants of the risks posed by these technologies and of the continued need for human judgement and control over decisions that affect the life and dignity of people in armed conflict – a position the ICRC has consistently advocated. The ICRC encourages States to build on this momentum and to pursue structured discussions on AI in the military domain that can advance normative developments, whether in the General Assembly or other relevant fora, drawing on relevant resources, including the ICRC’s preliminary recommendations, the Secretary-General’s report and the 2026 informal exchanges.

Existing and emerging normative proposals on the military application of AI should build upon established international legal frameworks and mechanisms, including IHL. Where necessary, these frameworks can be reinforced through the development of additional legal instruments (as discussed above on AWS), operational guidance or policy measures to address specific risks or challenges posed by emerging technologies.

ICT activities during armed conflict

As our world digitalizes, the vulnerability of civilian populations to ICT activities is growing. Today, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have immense benefits in the social, economic, development, and humanitarian spheres. ICTs help save and improve lives, including in situations of armed conflict. However, State and non-State actors use ICT activities to disable civilian infrastructure and systems, or disrupt the provision of essential services, medical facilities, and humanitarian activities.

States need to develop shared understandings of how IHL applies to and restricts such operations. Over the past year, significant progress has been made. In October 2024, States parties to the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopted a resolution on ‘Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict’.⁴⁹ Between 2024 and 2026, the ICT Workstream of the Global IHL Initiative has provided a dedicated space for in-depth exchanges involving more than 100 states and other stakeholders on how IHL applies to ICT activities during armed conflict and how its protections can be effectively upheld in practice. The outcome document provides guidance to facilitate the implementation of IHL obligations in relation to ICT activities in a manner consistent with the protective purpose of IHL.⁵⁰ The ICRC also welcomes

⁴⁸ For the full set of preliminary recommendations, see ICRC, [Submission to the United Nations Secretary-General on artificial intelligence in the military domain](#), 17 April 2025.

⁴⁹ 34th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, [Protecting civilians and other protected persons and objects against the potential human cost of ICT activities during armed conflict, Resolution 2](#), 34IC/24/R2, October 2024.

⁵⁰ Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law, [Upholding international humanitarian law in the use of information and communication technologies during armed conflicts: Outcome Document](#), 2026.

the intergovernmental work in the Global Mechanism on ICTs, which we hope will build on the progress achieved thus far.⁵¹

Five issues need States' urgent attention with regard to cyber and information operations:

First, State armed forces are integrating AI in their military ICT operations, as do civilian hackers. For the ICRC, this raises at least two concerns. On one hand, AI tools are today capable of performing complex tasks spanning across the cyber kill chain, from reconnaissance and vulnerability discovery to exploitation and creation of effects, thereby increasing speed, scale and potential for harm that ICT operations cause to civilian populations. On the other hand, the ICRC regularly sees reports of AI agents performing actions beyond those intended by their users: conducting ICT operations they were not asked to conduct, or operating outside the control of human users.⁵² In situations of armed conflict, the ICRC is concerned that the use of AI in ICT operations, especially AI agents, will heighten the risks of indiscriminate attacks, incidental civilian harm, and damage to civilian infrastructure. One message must be clear: the fact that additional technologies are integrated into ICT operations does not change the applicable rules. Nonetheless, the ICRC calls on States to consider whether existing international law provides sufficient safeguards against the harm that increasingly autonomous ICT capabilities can cause, or whether additional limits are needed.

Second, ICT operations in today's armed conflicts often aim to disrupt services such as electricity and water, disable computer networks and damage or delete data without causing physical damage. To protect civilian populations against the effects of such operations, interpretations of IHL that focus only on the protection of civilian objects against physical damage are inadequate. Such interpretations of IHL undermine the protective function of IHL in the ICT environment.⁵³ In the ICRC's view, if infrastructure that enable the delivery of essential services to civilian populations are damaged, or data destroyed, under IHL it does not matter whether such damage or destruction is caused through ICTs or through kinetic means – the same IHL rules apply. If the kinds of harm resulting from the use of ICT during armed conflict remain unaddressed, additional rules will have to be developed to strengthen the existing legal framework.

Third, ongoing armed conflicts confirm a trend the ICRC has observed in recent years: the use of ICTs draws civilians – individuals, hacker groups and tech companies – closer to hostilities. It is the responsibility of States to ensure that these actors respect IHL when operating in armed conflict, and to make them aware of the risks they take when participating in armed conflict.

Fourth, ICT activities enable an unprecedented scale, speed, and reach of harmful information. States must take all feasible measures to prevent the use of ICT to spread information that violates IHL, including spreading information that incites or encourages IHL violations; the recruitment and use of children in hostilities; exposing images and videos of persons deprived of liberty; and information campaigns aimed at undermining the work of medical services and humanitarian operations. Particularly concerning is the increasingly inflammatory rhetoric by political and military leaders of several States, that normalizes or calls for violence against

⁵¹ See UNGA, [Final report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025](#), UN Doc. A/AC.292/2025/L.1, 1 July 2025.

⁵² See, for instance, Thematic Brief of the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI: [AI Agents, Misalignment and the Risk of Losing Human Control: Evidence from the OpenAI-Hugging Face Incident](#), 2026.

⁵³ ICRC, 2024 Challenges Report, above note 23, pp. 57-59.

protected persons and objects; where such rhetoric encourages attacks against civilians, other protected persons or civilian objects, it violates IHL. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that State and non-State actors that spread information online respect IHL.

Finally, with the growing use of digital technologies in armed conflicts, it is important to develop digital tools to ensure that long-standing protections remain fit-for-purpose.⁵⁴ The Digital Emblem project – spearheaded by the ICRC – shows how existing agreements can be meaningfully adapted to new domains, and how new technologies can be harnessed to limit harm and suffering. Building on the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Crystal distinctive emblems enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the project explores ways to digitally signal protected medical and humanitarian infrastructure, assets and data in the ICT environment. Over the past years, the ICRC, with the support of States, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, technical experts and organizations, and others, has advanced the legal and technical tracks of the project and launched Phase 2 this year – focused on design, testing, and standardization of a DNS-based solution, or in other words, a solution leveraging the same global system that connects domain names to information on the internet.⁵⁵ The launch took place at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), where high-level representatives of States, international organizations, and the technology sector expressed support for the Project and multidisciplinary panels discussed the digital emblem’s development and implementation.⁵⁶

Military space operations

The expanding role of space systems in military operations during armed conflicts increases the likelihood of their being targeted, putting at risk the functioning of essential civilian services on earth that rely on such systems.

Military space operations do not take place in a legal vacuum, but are constrained by existing international law, in particular, the Charter of the United Nations, space law treaties, the law of neutrality and IHL.⁵⁷ IHL contains rules that prohibit the development and use of certain weapons, means and methods of warfare, and thereby reduces the potential human cost of military operations in outer space while contributing to the prevention of an arms race.⁵⁸

The 2024 Pact for the Future strives to “advance further measures and appropriate international negotiations to prevent an arms race in outer space in all its aspects”.⁵⁹ Given the indispensable role of space systems in the provision of essential civilian services, humanitarian considerations should be a cornerstone of any multilateral discussion or normative development regarding space security. The recent acknowledgement in multilateral fora, including the Open-ended Working Group on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space in all its aspects, of the risks posed to

⁵⁴ See ICRC, 2024 Challenges Report, above note 23, p. 74; D’Cunha, S., [Conceive, standardize, integrate: the past, present, and future of adopting distinctive emblems and signs under IHL](#), Humanitarian Law and Policy blog, 12 September 2024.

⁵⁵ See ICRC, [Modern Warfare; Timeless Emblems: The Digital Emblem Project](#), 03 September 2025.

⁵⁶ See ICRC, [Global Launch of the Digital Emblem Project, Phase II: From IHL Protection to Operational Practice](#), 9 July 2026.

⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion on existing limits under international law, including IHL, on military operations in or in relation to outer space during armed conflicts, see ICRC, [Constraints under international law on military operations in outer space during armed conflicts](#), 5 May 2022.

⁵⁸ See ICRC, [IHL contributes to the prevention of an arms race in outer space](#), Statement, 6 March 2024.

⁵⁹ Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations, above note 12, Action 27.

these systems marks significant progress.⁶⁰ Building on this momentum, the ICRC will continue contributing our expertise to the Open-ended Working Group to further strengthen the protection of essential civilian services.⁶¹

Conclusion

Humanitarian disarmament treaties and commitments remain some of the international community's greatest successes, demonstrating that multilateralism can significantly reduce the suffering caused by armed conflicts. These instruments are both a vital component of IHL and an important means of giving effect to it. Humanitarian disarmament faces particular challenges today against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions and an ongoing arms race and therefore demands heightened and concerted action by all States. Even so, it continues to serve as a highly effective tool available to the international community to save lives, reduce the inhumanity of war, prevent arms races, and create the conditions for sustainable peace. In a decade defined by war, compliance with IHL, including humanitarian disarmament, offers a pathway to peace.⁶² It is the legal and moral responsibility of States to uphold their international obligations and place disarmament at the forefront of their political priorities.

The First Committee has a critical responsibility to ensure that disarmament treaties and commitments are preserved, strengthened, and expanded. The ICRC remains committed to supporting States in their efforts to ensure that humanitarian disarmament and the protection of civilians not only remain at the center of the work of the Committee, but are promoted and strengthened through political resolve and concrete action.

⁶⁰ See, e.g., [Documents and Statements](#) from the Open-Ended Working Group on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (2025).

⁶¹ ICRC, [Protecting Essential Civilian Services on Earth from Disruption by Military Space Operations](#), Report, June 2024; ICRC, [Preliminary recommendations on possible norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours relating to threats by States to space systems](#), Working Paper, 2 February 2023.

⁶² See ICRC, [ICRC president: IHL only as strong as leaders' will to uphold it](#), Statement, 18 August 2025.