

**AN APPRAISAL OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN
LAW IN REGULATING THE SUFFERING OF CIVILIANS
AND COMBATANTS DURING ARMED CONFLICTS.**

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Abstract

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a critical legal framework designed to mitigate the suffering caused by armed conflicts, protecting civilians, combatants and regulating the conduct of hostilities, by ensuring humane treatment of all individuals involved in warfare. Rooted in the principles of humanity, IHL has evolved through various treaties, notably the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, reflecting advancements in humanitarian standards and the international community's response to the changing nature of warfare. This paper explores the significance of IHL, focusing on its role in safeguarding civilians, enforcing humane treatment of combatants, regulating warfare, and ensuring accountability for violations. The paper also highlights the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms, to enhanced protection of vulnerable groups, and greater international cooperation to ensure compliance with IHL. The findings emphasize that while IHL remains indispensable in reducing the impacts of armed conflicts, ongoing challenges such as violations in conflict zones necessitate more robust global efforts to uphold these vital humanitarian principles. The paper concluded by providing

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useful recommendations towards protecting civilians and combatants during armed conflicts.

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1.0 Introduction

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a body of law designed to mitigate the suffering caused by armed conflict. It establishes legal norms and standards aimed at protecting civilians, limiting the means and methods of warfare, and ensuring humane treatment for those involved in or affected by conflicts. Rooted in humanitarian principles, IHL seeks to balance military necessity with humanitarian concerns, thereby providing a framework for conducting war with respect for human dignity¹. The paper look at the origins of international humanitarian law which can be traced back to the early forms of war regulations and treaties. One of the foundational moments was the 1864 Geneva (Switzerland) Convention, inspired by the work of a Swiss businessman and social activist - Henry Dunant, who witnessed the horrors of the Battle of Solferino, Italy ². The Battle of Solferino was fought on 24th June, 1859. It was a crucial event that contributed in reshaping modern humanitarian laws.

However, as time goes on, IHL has evolved through various treaties and conventions, including the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005. These legal instruments collectively form the core of modern IHL, reflecting advancements in humanitarian standards and the international community's response to

¹ICRC. (2021). International Humanitarian Law: A brief introduction. International Committee of the Red Cross. Retrieved from <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/international-humanitarian-law-brief-introduction>

² International Review of the Red Cross Detention-Humanitarian Law Debate Vol.87(2005)

the changing nature of warfare³. Humanitarian laws, particularly International Humanitarian Law (IHL) ⁴, are vital in:

1. Alleviating the adverse effects of armed conflicts on both civilians and combatants. Commonly referred to as the laws of war, these regulations are tailored to protect individuals who are not engaged in hostilities, restrict the methods and means of warfare, and ensure the respect of fundamental human rights even during conflicts.
2. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are set of rules and principles designed to safeguard individuals who are not or are no longer participating in hostilities during armed conflicts. Primarily codified through the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, IHL aims to minimize the suffering and devastation caused by warfare, striving to uphold human dignity amidst the chaos of conflict.
3. The principles enshrined in IHL reflect a collective commitment by the international community to mitigate the horrors of war, emphasizing the protection of the most vulnerable populations. This paper intends to provide an appraisal of relevant areas of international law that provide the needed protection of civilians and wounded soldiers during Armed Conflicts.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Armed conflicts continue to inflict severe suffering on civilians and combatants, despite the existence of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which aims to mitigate such impacts. While IHL provides a robust legal framework for protecting non-combatants, regulating warfare methods, and ensuring humane treatment of those involved in conflicts. Despite the availability of international legal framework on IHL, still numerous violations still occur, leading to significant humanitarian crises. The persistent challenges in enforcing IHL, protecting vulnerable populations, and holding violators accountable

³ Schindler, D., & Toman, J. (1988). *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions, and Other Documents*. MartinusNijhoff Publishers.

⁴ Dixon, M., *Textbook on International Law* (2007) Oxford University Press, New York

underscore the critical need for enhanced mechanisms to ensure compliance and strengthen the law's effectiveness. This study addresses the ongoing issues related to the application and enforcement of IHL relating to civilians and combatants by examining the gaps in current practices and proposing solutions to reinforce the legal protections afforded by IHL in contemporary conflict settings.

3.0 Conflict

The word conflict is rooted from the Latin phrase word “configere”. The prefix “con” means “together/against”, and the suffix “fi-gere” means “to strike”. Etymologically, it means “together/against to strike”. Hence, conflict is a struggle or contention between individuals or groups. It is an incompatibility or contradiction between ideas or interests. According to the (IHL), a conflict is an armed confrontation between two or more parties, either international (between states) or non-international (within a state), resulting in human suffering, damage, or destruction. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is essential for mitigating the impacts of conflicts on both civilians and combatants. As provided in article 4 of the AP II of 1977 while the IHL makes it clear by way of an extension to other persons that should be treated as civilians in line with Article 4 A (4) GC II. Furthermore, article 27 of GC IV is instructive in providing civilians population protection and it provides as follows; “Protected persons are entitled in all circumstances, to respect for their persons, their honor, their family rights, their religious conviction and practice, and their manner and customs. They shall at all-times be humanly treated and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insult and public curiosity.” While article 8 of the additional protocol I provide protection in both military and civilians. But for the proposed of proper understanding let us consider the difference between the two main types of armed conflicts recognized under IHL⁵:

1. International Armed Conflicts (IACs):

- Between two or more states.
- Involving regular armed forces.
- /Crossing international borders.

⁵Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. "The Core of International Humanitarian Law." [ICRC](<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/geneva-conventions-1949-additional-protocols>), Accessed August 2024.

IHL treaties, such as the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and that of Additional Protocol I of 1977, provide a comprehensive legal framework governing the conduct of hostilities and protecting those who are not participating in combat, such as civilians, the wounded, and prisoners of war⁶. The Additional Protocol I (1977) relates it more to the protection of survivors of International Armed Conflicts.⁷

2. Non-International Armed Conflict (NIACs):

- Within a state.
- Between government forces and non-state armed groups (NSAGs).
- Not crossing international borders.

3. Criteria for Conflict:

To determine if a conflict exists, IHL considers:

1. Intensity:
 - Level of violence.
 - Organized armed groups.
 - Government involvement.
2. Duration:
 - Protracted violence.
 - Long-term occupation.
3. Parties involved:
 - States.
 - Non-state armed groups (NSAGs).
 - International organizations.

The rules governing NIACs are found primarily in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and that of the Additional Protocol II.⁸ For a situation to be classified as a NIACs, the conflict must reach a certain level of intensity (not just sporadic violence or riots), and the parties involved must be organized, such as a recognizable chain of command or control over

⁶Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. Common Article 2.

⁷Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.

⁸Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. Common Article 3

territory. More so, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions applies to armed conflicts not of an international character occurring within the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties. It provides minimum standards of humane treatment and prohibits violence to life and person, taking of hostages, and degrading treatment. Additionally Protocol II (1977) Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts it was developed to supplement Common Article 3 by providing more detailed protection for victims of NIACs (Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts-Protocol II, 8 June 1977)⁹

4.0 Key IHL Treaties:

1. a. First Geneva Convention (1864; revised 1949):

- Protects wounded and sick soldiers on land during war.
- Guarantees humane treatment for the wounded and medical personnel.
- Establishes the Red Cross as a symbol of protection for medical services.

b. Second Geneva Convention (1949):

- Expands the protections of the First Convention to wounded, sick, and shipwrecked military personnel at sea.
- Requires that all parties to conflict take measures to search for and rescue the shipwrecked and wounded.

c. Third Geneva Convention (1949):

- Focuses on the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs).
- Outlines rights for POWs, including humane treatment, adequate food and water, medical care, and communication with families.

⁹Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977

- Prohibits torture, humiliation, and coercion.

d. Fourth Geneva Convention (1949):

- Protects civilians in and around war zones.
- Outlines rules for the treatment of civilians under occupation, ensuring their rights are respected and protected.
- Prohibits deportation, hostage-taking, torture, and discrimination.

2. Additional Protocols:

a. Protocol I (1977):

- Expands protections to international armed conflicts, including wars of national liberation.
- It introduces new protections for victims of conflicts and covers aspects like targeting, civilian protection, and the use of certain weapons.

b. Protocol II (1977):

- Focuses on non-international armed conflicts (civil wars), providing protections to those not directly involved in hostilities, such as civilians, medical personnel, and those who have laid down their arms.

b. Protocol III (2005):

- Introduces an additional emblem—the Red Crystal—alongside the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to offer a neutral symbol that can be used in conflict situations where the other symbols might not be accepted.

5.0 Importance of International Humanitarian Laws:

1. Protection of Civilians: Article 50 of the GC of 1949 provide civilian protection which serve as one of the central tenets of IHL in the protection of civilians and civilian objects from the ravages of armed conflict. The Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols delineate clear obligations for warring parties to avoid targeting

civilians and to take measures to minimize civilian harm¹⁰. This legal protection is vital in ensuring that non-combatants are spared from the direct impacts of warfare. The conventions explicitly prohibit attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, recognizing that civilians are often the most vulnerable during conflicts. By establishing these protections, IHL aims to reduce the suffering of those who are not involved in hostilities, thereby promoting a more humane approach to warfare.

For instance, this was demonstrated in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has frequently brought up issues surrounding the protection of civilians under IHL. The Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, have been invoked to demand the protection of civilian populations in Gaza during military operations. International organizations, such as the United Nations, have repeatedly called on all parties to respect their obligations under IHL to protect civilians and avoid targeting non-military objectives¹¹. Furthermore, regarding the Afghanistan conflict, IHL principles have been applied to protect civilians from hostilities. Reports by organizations like the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) have documented civilian casualties and called for compliance with IHL to prevent indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas¹².

2. Humane Treatment of Combatants: Article 43 of the GC I, also provide protection to combatants during armed conflict, while other areas of IHL also addresses the treatment of combatants, such as those who are wounded, shipwrecked, or captured. The conventions mandate that such individuals be treated humanely, without hostile discrimination, and to be provided with necessary medical care¹³. This principle underscores the commitment to humane treatment even amidst conflicts. It recognizes that combatants, once incapacitated or

¹⁰ICRC. "The Role of International Humanitarian Law in Post-Conflict Recovery." [ICRC](<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ihl-post-conflict-recovery>), Accessed August 2024.

¹¹United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2021). Occupied Palestinian Territory: Humanitarian Impact of the Escalation in the Gaza Strip. Retrieved from OCHA Website

¹²United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). (2020). *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report*. Retrieved from UNAMA Website

¹³Henckaerts, J. M., & Doswald-Beck, L. (2005). *Customary International Humanitarian Law: Volume I: Rules*. International Committee of the Red Cross.

captured, should not be subjected to torture, inhumane treatment, or degrading conditions. This humane treatment is crucial for maintaining a sense of dignity and respect for all individuals, regardless of their status in the conflict. For instance, the mistreatment of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison during the Iraq War led to international outrage. The Third Geneva Convention, which requires humane treatment of prisoners of war, was cited extensively in condemning the abuses and calling for reforms in the treatment of detainees.¹⁴ More so, during the conflict in Afghanistan, there has been concerns regarding the Taliban's treatment of captured soldiers and non-combatants. The ICRC has worked to promote adherence to IHL, advocating for the humane treatment of all detainees and raising awareness about the obligations of armed groups under international law¹⁵.

3. Regulation of Warfare: The regulation of the means and methods of warfare is another critical aspect of IHL. It prohibits the use of weapons and tactics that cause excessive injury or have indiscriminate effects, thereby aiming to limit the overall destructiveness of armed conflict. This regulation helps to preserve some degree of humanity and control in warfare¹⁶. For instance, IHL restricts the use of certain types of weapons, such as chemical and biological agents, which can cause widespread suffering and long-term environmental damage. By imposing these limitations, IHL seeks to ensure that military operations are conducted in a manner that minimizes harm to civilians and the environment. Furthermore, the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions – CCM (123 states have signed or ratified the CCM) bans the use, production, and transfer of cluster bombs (it releases multiple explosive sub-munitions over a wide area) due to their indiscriminate impact on civilian populations. Countries affected include:

- Laos: Heavily contaminated from the Vietnam War (from 1964 to 1973).
- Lebanon: Israel-Hezbollah, 2006 conflict.
- Syria: Ongoing conflict.

¹⁴International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2004). Report on the Treatment of Fifteen "High Value" Detainees in CIA Custody. Retrieved from ICRC Website.

¹⁵International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2021). *Afghanistan: Detainee Visit Overview*. Retrieved from ICRC Website

¹⁶Schindler, D., &Toman, J. (1988). *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions, and Other Documents*. MartinusNijhoff Publishers.

- Ukraine: Ongoing conflict.

However, the treaty has influenced global norms and significantly reduced the use of such weapons in conflicts¹⁷. Indeed, the use of chemical weapons by various parties in Syria has been condemned globally, and efforts led by the OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) were instrumental in overseeing the destruction of declared stockpiles, in line with the Chemical Weapons Convention¹⁸.

4. Accountability and Enforcement: Humanitarian laws establish mechanisms for accountability, including the prosecution of war crimes and other serious violations. International tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), play a crucial role in enforcing IHL and providing justice for victims of war crimes. This accountability serves both as a deterrent to potential violators and a means of redress for affected individuals¹⁹. The existence of legal frameworks for prosecution reinforces the notion that violations of IHL will not go unpunished, thereby promoting adherence to these laws. Furthermore, accountability mechanisms help to uphold the rule of law in conflict situations, ensuring that those responsible for atrocities are held accountable for their actions. **For instance:** The aftermath of the Rwandan Civil war saw the ICC established to prosecute those responsible for genocide and other serious violations of IHL during the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. The tribunal set significant legal precedents in international law and accountability for war crimes²⁰. Additionally, Bosco Ntaganda - a Congolese military leader, was convicted (on 8th July, 2019) and was found guilty of 18 counts by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, and recruiting child soldiers. Ntaganda's crimes were committed in Ituri, Democratic

¹⁷Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). (2008). *Treaty Text*. Retrieved from [CCM Website](#).

¹⁸Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). (2013). Syria and the OPCW. Retrieved from OPCW Website

¹⁹ Cassese, A. (2008). **International Criminal Law** (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Dunant, H. (1862). *A Memory of Solferino*. Geneva Red Cross

²⁰United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). (2020). Rwanda: Genocide and Aftermath. Retrieved from IRMCT Website.

Republic of Congo, between 2002 and 2003, as the former military chief of staff of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). On November 7, 2019, Ntaganda was sentenced to 30 years in prison, the longest sentence ever handed down by the ICC. The ICC also ordered him to pay \$30 million in compensation to the survivors. Ntaganda's appeal was rejected by the ICC Appeals Chamber on March 30, 2021, confirming his conviction and sentence. Therefore, his conviction was a significant milestone in the pursuit of social justice by the IHL for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, murder and child soldiers' recruitment. This case demonstrates the enforcement of IHL by holding individuals accountable for grave breaches²¹.

5. Protection of Vulnerable Groups: IHL places a strong emphasis on the protection of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and the elderly. Specific provisions, like the prohibition of using children as soldiers and the protection of women from sexual violence, address the unique vulnerabilities of these groups during conflicts. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols provide additional protections to children, ensuring their safety and well-being even in war zones. **For instance:** During the Sierra Leone Civil War, thousands of children were recruited as soldiers. Following the conflict, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) was established, and IHL principles were invoked to hold perpetrators accountable and protect the rights of children, emphasizing the prohibition of child recruitment under IHL²². In the DRC, the widespread use of sexual violence in conflict has been addressed through both national and international legal frameworks guided by IHL principles. Various initiatives have focused on the protection of women and girls and the prosecution of sexual violence as a war crime²³.

6. Facilitation of Humanitarian Assistance: Humanitarian laws also play a pivotal role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid during conflicts. They grant safe passage to humanitarian workers and ensure

²¹International Criminal Court (ICC). (2019). The Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda: Judgment. Retrieved from ICC Website

²²Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). (2004). Trial of Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon, and Augustine Gbao (RUF Case). Retrieved from SCSL Website.

²³Human Rights Watch. (2009). Soldiers Who Rape, Commanders Who Condone: Sexual Violence and Military Reform in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch Website.

that aid can reach those in need, even amid hostilities. This is essential for alleviating the suffering of affected populations, as it ensures that food, medical care, and other necessary services are provided despite the challenges posed by ongoing conflicts. For example: The ICRC is often allowed access to conflict zones under IHL provisions, enabling it to deliver vital aid. Moreover, during the South Sudanese Civil War, humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC and UN agencies have been instrumental in negotiating access to conflict zones to provide aid since 2013. The principles of IHL facilitated the establishment of humanitarian corridors and negotiated truces for aid delivery²⁴. Again, the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has led to severe humanitarian needs. IHL has been invoked to allow humanitarian organizations access to deliver food, medical supplies, and other essential services to affected civilians²⁵.

6.0 Findings

The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) has been fundamentally established to alleviate the suffering of civilians and those hors de combat (out of the fight) during armed conflicts. This body of law aims to balance military necessity against the principles of humanity by protecting those not participating in hostilities and limiting the methods and means of warfare. The analysis of the importance of IHL highlights several key findings in this paper:

1. Protecting Civilians and Combatants: IHL plays a crucial role in shielding civilians from the direct impacts of warfare by prohibiting attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. It also mandates humane treatment of incapacitated or captured combatants, ensuring their dignity and rights are preserved during conflicts. **An example** is during the Siege of Sarajevo (1992-1996) of the Bosnian War, the city of Sarajevo was under siege for nearly four years. The IHL provisions, particularly those under the Fourth Geneva Convention, were used to emphasize the protection of civilians trapped in the city. Despite the grave violations, the principles of IHL helped bring international

²⁴United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2018). South Sudan: Humanitarian Access Overview. Retrieved from OCHA Relief Web.

²⁵United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2021). Ethiopia: Humanitarian Access in Tigray. Retrieved from OCHA Website.

attention to the plight of civilians and pressured conflicting parties to provide access for humanitarian aid²⁶. Another instance is in response to the ongoing conflict in Syria, IHL has been invoked to establish "safe zones" where civilians are supposed to be protected from hostilities. While these zones have not always been perfectly implemented, the creation and advocacy for them are based on IHL principles that prohibit targeting civilians and require special protection for them during conflicts²⁷.

2. Regulation of Warfare: The law imposes restrictions on the means and methods of warfare, particularly banning weapons and tactics that cause excessive harm or have indiscriminate effects. This regulation aims to limit the destructiveness of armed conflict, thereby preserving some level of humanity in warfare. We find an instance of this in the Ban on Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Civil War. The use of chemical weapons by various parties in the Syrian Civil War led to international condemnation and intervention. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), an IHL instrument, strictly prohibits the use of such weapons. This led to the dismantling of Syria's declared chemical weapons stockpile under international supervision, highlighting the restriction on using certain weapons to prevent unnecessary suffering²⁸. Furthermore; we see also that after years of civil war, Mozambique was heavily contaminated with landmines. The country's commitment to the Ottawa Treaty (Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention) resulted in extensive mine clearance efforts, completed in 2015. The treaty, underpinned by IHL, prohibited the use of landmines, prevented further harm, and contributed to civilian safety and the country's recovery²⁹.

3. Protection of Vulnerable Groups: IHL emphasizes the protection of women, children, and other vulnerable groups during armed conflicts. However, the effective implementation of these protections

²⁶. (1994). *Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35: The Fall of Srebrenica (A/54/549)*. Retrieved from [UN Digital Library](#)

²⁷United Nations. (2017). *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/34/64)*. Retrieved from UN Human Rights Council.

²⁸Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). (2013). *Syria and the OPCW*. Retrieved from OPCW Website.

²⁹Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor. (2015). *Mozambique Mine Ban Policy*. Retrieved from Landmine Monitor.

is frequently hindered by the realities on the ground, including ongoing violence, lack of resources, and insufficient international oversight. After the Rwandan Genocide, IHL provided a framework for holding perpetrators accountable while supporting recovery efforts. International and domestic courts helped bring justice, while humanitarian organizations and international cooperation focused on rebuilding communities and promoting reconciliation based on IHL's protective principles³⁰. Furthermore, following years of civil war, Liberia's recovery efforts were significantly shaped by IHL principles, which guided disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs for former combatants. This helped restore order, promote reconciliation, and lay the foundation for lasting peace in the region³¹.

4. Humanitarian Assistance and Access: IHL provisions facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in conflict zones, ensuring that essential services reach those in need. Nevertheless, access to affected populations is often obstructed by warring parties, leading to severe humanitarian crises. The instance in the ongoing conflict in Palestine, Lebanon and Yemen has led to severe humanitarian crises. IHL has been used to negotiate and establish humanitarian corridors to allow the safe passage of aid and medical assistance into besieged areas, such as during the Hodeidah ceasefire agreement in 2018. The ceasefire agreement between Hezbollah and Israel in November 2024 and the recent one between Hamas and Israel of December 2024 has brought an end to hostilities. This is to ensure that humanitarian organizations can deliver critical supplies and services to those in need³². Also, throughout the conflict in Afghanistan, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been able to access conflict zones to provide medical assistance, support detainees, and reunite families, based on IHL principles. The ICRC's mandate under IHL allows it to operate in these contexts, negotiate access, and deliver aid impartially³³.

³⁰United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). (2020). Rwanda: Genocide and Aftermath. Retrieved from IRMCT Website.

³¹United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2017). *Liberia: DDRR Program Overview and Results*. Retrieved from UNDP Website.

³²United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2018). *Yemen: Humanitarian Update*. Retrieved from OCHA ReliefWeb.

³³International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2021). *Afghanistan: ICRC Operations Overview*. Retrieved from ICRC Website.

5. Need for Strengthened Awareness and Education: There is a critical need to integrate IHL into educational curricula and provide comprehensive training for military personnel and armed groups. Public awareness campaigns are also essential to empower civilians in conflict zones to understand and demand their rights under IHL.

6. Recommendations

The paper recommends that by enhancing accountability mechanisms, improving the protection of vulnerable groups, facilitating humanitarian access, and promoting international cooperation to ensure the global enforcement of IHL. Additionally, post-conflict recovery efforts should integrate IHL principles to support long-term peace and stability. In light of the importance of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in mitigating the suffering of civilians and regulating hostilities during armed conflicts, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the application and enforcement of these laws:

1. Strengthen Awareness and Education on IHL: Educational institutions, especially in conflict-prone regions, should incorporate IHL into their curricula to raise awareness among students about the principles and importance of these laws. **Training for Military and Armed Groups:** Governments and international organizations should ensure that military personnel and members of armed groups receive comprehensive training on IHL. This training should emphasize the importance of distinguishing between combatants and civilians, the prohibition of inhumane weapons, and the humane treatment of prisoners of war. More so, there is a need to launch public awareness campaigns. This is to educate civilians and communities in conflict zones about their rights under IHL. This knowledge can empower them to demand protection and respect for humanitarian laws during conflicts.

2. Improve the Protection of Vulnerable Groups: Strengthen gender-sensitive approaches within IHL frameworks to address the specific needs of women and girls during armed conflicts. This includes enhancing protections against sexual violence and ensuring the provision of necessary medical and psychological support for survivors. Reinforce international efforts to protect children from being recruited as soldiers and ensure their access to education and healthcare

during and after conflicts. International bodies should work closely with local governments and NGOs to create safe spaces and support networks for children affected by war.

3. Facilitate Humanitarian Access: Strengthen Cooperation with Humanitarian Organizations: Governments and warring parties should cooperate fully with humanitarian organizations to ensure the delivery of aid to affected populations. This includes granting safe passage, respecting the neutrality of aid workers, and avoiding any actions that would hinder humanitarian operations. Implement Humanitarian Corridors: In conflict zones, the establishment of humanitarian corridors should be prioritized to allow the safe movement of civilians and the delivery of essential supplies. These corridors should be respected by all parties to the conflict, and violations should be met with international condemnation and accountability.

4. Promote International Cooperation and Dialogue: Strengthen Global Partnerships: Encourage international cooperation to ensure the global enforcement of IHL. Countries, international organizations, and NGOs should collaborate to share best practices, resources, and information to promote compliance with humanitarian laws worldwide. Encourage Dialogue Among Warring Parties: Promote dialogue among warring parties to ensure that they understand and commit to respecting IHL. Mediators and peace negotiators should incorporate IHL principles into peace agreements and ceasefire arrangements to protect civilians and promote lasting peace.

These recommendations aim to strengthen the application and enforcement of International Humanitarian Law, ensuring that its principles are respected and that the suffering of civilians in armed conflicts is minimized.

5. Promote Awareness: Parties should be made to adhere to method of warfare especially by not using banned weapons that causes excessive harm to civilians and combatants.

6.0 Conclusion

International Humanitarian Law is indispensable in mitigating the impacts of armed conflicts on both civilians and combatants. By providing legal protections, regulating the conduct of warfare, and

establishing accountability mechanisms, IHL upholds humanitarian principles and strives to reduce the suffering associated with war. Its evolution from historical precedents to modern standards reflects a growing commitment to human dignity and the rule of law in times of conflict. Thus, the ongoing challenge as it is perennial, nonetheless ought to ensure compliance with these laws, as violations continue to occur in various conflict zones across the globe. But the double standard in its application is still guided by international conspiracy.