



PRIVATE BUSINESSES AND ARMED CONFLICT

AN INTRODUCTION TO RELEVANT RULES
OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

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INTRODUCTION: WHY DO BUSINESSES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW?

This brochure explains why, when and how international humanitarian law (IHL) is relevant to private businesses. It is primarily intended for businesspeople, particularly corporate legal counsel and others in corporate compliance or human rights due diligence roles. However, it also aims to answer questions that humanitarian practitioners, legal experts, government officials and others frequently ask about business and IHL. Accordingly, additional technical information on several issues is provided in breakout boxes.

Businesses need to be aware of and prepared to seek advice about IHL whenever there is a possibility their operations, supply chains, partnerships or investments may affect or be affected by a situation of armed conflict.

A business may expand its operations or relationships in ways that bring it into contact with an armed conflict, or an armed conflict may break out in a place where a business is already involved. Either way, such situations can present new and unfamiliar risks.

What a business does or does not do in such circumstances can have important consequences for affected civilian populations, as well as its own personnel and assets. Beyond the harm to victims, being involved in IHL violations can negatively impact a business' reputation, operations and financial situation.

Businesses are increasingly aware of their human rights responsibilities. Many have adopted policies that align with initiatives like the United Nations Global Compact and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (see the breakout box below).

In situations of armed conflict, international human rights law remains relevant, but IHL takes on an essential role as it is a separate set of specialized rules that aim to limit suffering during situations of armed conflict.

IHL directly binds all individuals whose activities are sufficiently connected to an armed conflict. This can include the personnel of private business entities, depending on what they do. This means that under international law, IHL can directly apply to the operations of a private business.

Business activities that physically take place in a country where an armed conflict is occurring may be more likely to become subject to IHL. However, other kinds of relationships can also make IHL relevant to a private business, even when its personnel and assets are not physically located where the conflict is taking place.

If violations of IHL occur, private businesses and their personnel can be subject to civil liability or criminal liability under international or national laws. States have obligations under IHL to ensure that private individuals and businesses under their authority respect IHL, including through enacting and enforcing national legislation.

Humanitarian, reputational and operational considerations should also prompt a business to recognize its responsibility to ensure respect for IHL by its personnel and to promote respect for IHL by others with whom it has relationships. These could include government authorities or non-state armed groups, other private business entities that are its customers or in its supply chain, as well as any entities in which it invests or to which it provides financial services.

IHL also protects the personnel and assets of businesses. IHL restricts the circumstances in which parties to a conflict can seize, damage or destroy private property. Personnel and assets may not be directly attacked as long as they retain their civilian character. Even attacks targeting a valid military target are prohibited if the incidental damage to civilians and civilian objects, including the personnel and assets of businesses, would be expected to be disproportionate. However, the decisions a business takes on the activities of its personnel and the use of its assets can also result in its personnel and assets losing protection, thus being exposed to higher risks.

For all these reasons, businesses need to be familiar with the rules of IHL that are relevant to their operations or that may become relevant to them. This brochure aims to improve this awareness and understanding, and to highlight further resources to help private business actors adopt appropriate policies and practices.

IHL and business and human rights initiatives

Many global initiatives and other guidance on business and human rights call on companies to respect IHL. Businesses may already be committed to respecting IHL by adopting human rights policies and commitments based on them, including, for example, by conducting risk management and training. For example:

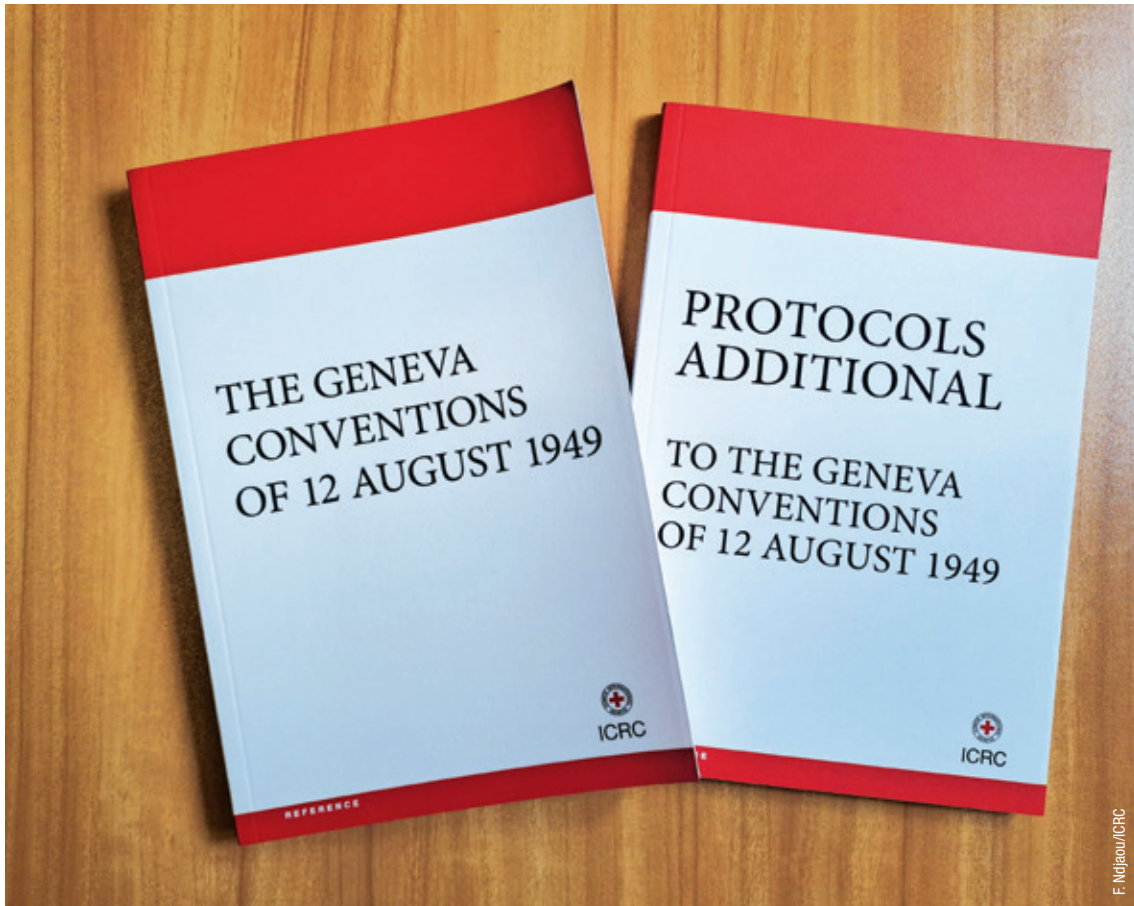
- The 2011 [**United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**](#) recognize the heightened risk of gross human rights abuses in conflict-affected areas and call on businesses to conduct heightened human rights due diligence and “respect the standards of international humanitarian law” when operating in such situations.
- Through the [**United Nations Global Compact**](#), more than 20,000 business entities have committed to “support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights” and to “make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses”. The UN Global Compact, founded in 2000, has acknowledged the importance of respecting these principles, even in conflict-affected areas, including through respect for IHL.
- The 2000 [**Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights**](#) provide guidance to companies, particularly those that extract, harvest, or develop natural resources or energy, on conducting a comprehensive human rights risk assessment of any relationship with public or private security providers. The Principles call on companies to respect IHL. They include the expectation that private and public security forces hired by a member company be mindful of and trained in the rules of IHL.
- The [**Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct**](#), introduced in 1976 and last updated in 2023, affirm that in situations of armed conflict, enterprises “should respect the standards of international humanitarian law” and conduct “enhanced due diligence in relation to adverse impacts”, including IHL violations.
- In 2022 the [**United Nations Development Programme**](#) and [**United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights**](#) published a [**Guide on Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for Business in Conflict-Affected Contexts**](#). It explains and underscores the need for businesses to respect IHL, including by integrating IHL into their due diligence processes.
- Standards on business reporting and disclosure, including to shareholders, can and should incorporate references to IHL in situations of conflict. The [**Global Reporting Initiative’s 2024 sustainability reporting standard for responsible mining \(GRI 14: Mining Sector 2024\)**](#), for example, explains the relevance of IHL and requires businesses to “describe [their] approach to ensuring adherence to international humanitarian law when operating in conflict-affected and high-risk areas.”

Participation by a private business in these initiatives is voluntary. However, IHL can directly impose legally binding obligations on people acting on behalf of the business and sometimes on the business entity itself, whether or not it has joined such initiatives. These direct international obligations apply in addition to, or in the absence of, any relevant obligations of the personnel or company under national law.

1. WHAT IS IHL?

To help understand the relevance of IHL for private businesses, the following sections explain its origins and foundations, and how to determine which rules apply and when.

1.1 WHERE DOES IHL COME FROM?



Since ancient times, most social, religious and cultural systems have sought to protect individuals from the worst consequences of war. In the late 19th century, states agreed on the first modern IHL treaties, which are formal written agreements between countries that regulate warfare and protect victims of armed conflicts. The most significant general IHL treaties today are the four [Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977](#). The fact that all countries have ratified the Geneva Conventions and the vast majority are parties to the Protocols attests to the accepted nature of these laws. Other [specialized treaties](#) address specific topics in more detail, such as prohibiting or regulating certain kinds of weapons, protecting children or cultural property, or punishing war crimes.

In addition, a range of unwritten rules of IHL called “[customary international humanitarian law](#)” apply in all armed conflicts. Some of these rules pre-date the modern treaties. These customary rules are so widely accepted that they are considered to apply universally.

1.2 FOUNDATIONS OF IHL



Thailand/Cambodia, 1989: Soldiers prepare for a wounded man to be transported to an ICRC hospital.

IHL is shaped by two foundational principles: humanity and military necessity. The **principle of military necessity** permits only the degree and kind of force required to achieve the complete or partial submission of the enemy with the minimum expenditure of life and resources. It does not permit measures that would otherwise be prohibited under IHL. The **principle of humanity** imposes limits on the means and methods of warfare, and requires that those who have fallen into enemy hands be treated humanely at all times. It seeks to limit suffering, injury and destruction during armed conflict; its purpose is to protect life and health, and to ensure respect for the person.

IHL applies to all belligerent parties, **regardless of the reasons for the conflict or the justness of the causes** for which they are fighting. International law treats the question of the lawfulness of resorting to war, or to the use of armed force in general, as strictly separate from the question of the lawfulness of the conduct of the parties within the armed conflict once it is taking place. The rules that everyone must follow in combat thus remain clear to soldiers on all sides, no matter how deeply they may disagree on which side is right and which side is wrong, or who is the aggressor and who is the victim. IHL seeks to minimize suffering in armed conflicts, notably by protecting and assisting all victims of armed conflict to the greatest extent possible.

Key rules of IHL include the following:

Distinction: The parties to a conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants. Neither the civilian population as a whole nor individual civilians may be attacked. Attacks may only be directed against combatants and military objectives.

Proportionality: IHL prohibits disproportionate attacks, i.e. that may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians or destruction of civilian objects that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

Precaution: In the conduct of military operations, constant care must be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians and civilian objects. All feasible precautions must be taken to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.

Restrictions on methods or means of warfare: Parties to a conflict do not have an unrestricted right to choose methods or means of warfare. Using weapons or methods of warfare that are indiscriminate is forbidden, as is using those that are likely to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.

The wounded and the sick: The wounded and the sick must be searched for, collected and cared for as soon as circumstances permit, without adverse distinction. Medical personnel and medical facilities, transport and equipment must also be respected and protected. That means they must not be attacked or unduly interfered with in the performance of their functions. They must also be spared from harm and supported in their work. The red cross, red crescent or red crystal on a white background is the distinctive sign indicating that these people and objects benefit from specific protection under IHL. The First Geneva Convention explicitly prohibits use of this emblem by private individuals, societies, firms and companies, except as specifically authorized by IHL.

Detainees and civilians: Captured combatants and civilians who find themselves under the authority of an adverse party are entitled to respect for their lives, their dignity, their health, and their political and religious beliefs, and other convictions. They must be protected against all acts of violence or reprisal. They are entitled to exchange news with their families and receive food and other forms of assistance. Their basic judicial guarantees must be respected in any criminal proceedings against them.

Non-discrimination: Parties to an armed conflict must apply IHL without negative discrimination based on race, colour, sex, language, religion or beliefs, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status, or any other similar criteria.

Numerous other rules elaborate on and extend the key rules summarized above. Other sections of this brochure highlight rules that are particularly relevant for private business actors.

1.3 WHEN DOES IHL APPLY?

1.3.1 IHL APPLIES IN ARMED CONFLICT

IHL only applies in situations of armed conflict, but it applies to every situation of armed conflict.

An armed conflict can be international or non-international. This distinction can be important when determining which specific rules apply.

An **international armed conflict** occurs when one or more states resort to the use of armed force against another state. This includes when a state occupies some or all of another state's territory, even if the occupation does not meet with any armed resistance.

In a **non-international armed conflict**, often referred to as "civil war", hostilities take place between the armed forces of a state and one or more non-state armed groups, or between such groups. Fighting must reach a certain level of intensity and the groups involved must be sufficiently organized for a situation to constitute a non-international armed conflict. Riots or isolated and sporadic acts of violence do not, in themselves, constitute a non-international armed conflict.

Both types of conflict can occur simultaneously in the same place. This could happen, for instance, if a state is fighting another state and one or more non-state armed groups at the same time. The specific rules applicable to a particular event or situation would then depend on which conflict is the most relevant to that event or situation.

If the facts meet the criteria for an armed conflict, IHL applies whether or not the parties have issued a formal declaration of war.



Central African Republic, 2013.

Private businesses do not normally need to determine on their own whether a situation is an armed conflict. If in doubt, a business should seek expert advice. The ICRC does not always make its classification of situations public. However, guidance can be taken from publicly available sources from other organizations, such as the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict [database](#) published by the Geneva Academy of Humanitarian Law and Human Rights.

1.3.2 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF IHL

In principle, IHL applies to the whole territory of a state that is a party to an armed conflict.

IHL also applies to attacks and other actions taken by a state in the territory of another state that is party to the conflict. It applies to the entirety of occupied territory, i.e. territory that a state effectively controls outside of its own borders as part of the conflict.

Some IHL provisions also have implications for states that are not a party to the conflict. One example is the obligation to give free passage to humanitarian assistance.

As for its application to individuals, IHL applies to acts that are sufficiently connected to the armed conflict, as explained in the following section.

If a business operates in a state involved in an armed conflict, IHL may still be relevant even if its activities do not take place in the cities or regions directly impacted by fighting. Indeed, IHL may also be relevant to a business whose personnel and assets are located outside of the states where fighting is taking place if it has certain relationships with parties to the conflict, including by providing goods or services in connection with the conflict. Furthermore, IHL also applies to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in situations of armed conflict. Even if a business only provides remote ICT services to a party to an armed conflict and these online activities are its only connection to the conflict, IHL may still be relevant.

1.3.3 IHL APPLIES TO ACTS CONNECTED TO THE ARMED CONFLICT

In addition to creating obligations for states and non-state armed groups, IHL can also create direct obligations for individuals. Under international law, individuals can be held criminally responsible for war crimes when they commit serious violations of IHL.

IHL applies to the acts of individuals when those acts are sufficiently connected to an armed conflict. The necessary degree of connection is determined by a legal concept referred to as the “**nexus**” between the acts and the conflict.

IHL clearly applies to acts of individual members of the armed forces of states or non-state armed groups. However, it is not limited to these categories of people. Personnel of a private business, including directors and other members of management, can also be subject to relevant rules of IHL if their activities have the necessary “nexus” with the conflict. Because IHL applies to individuals who act on behalf of a business, IHL also applies to the *activities* of the business if those activities are sufficiently connected to an armed conflict.

In a sense, a corporate entity can only “act” through the people who make and carry out decisions on its behalf. However, the corporate entity itself can also be subject to legal obligations to comply with the relevant rules of IHL. These obligations can arise directly under international law, for example, if a corporate entity qualifies as a non-state armed group party to a conflict, as might be the case for a private military and security company in certain circumstances, for instance. In general, however, national laws provide the clearest source of direct legal liability for corporate entities for violations of IHL. These laws may impose specific legal obligations on the corporate entity or more generally provide for corporate employers to be liable for the wrongful acts of their employees. (See subsection 1.4 on war crimes and section 3 on risks of criminal and civil liability).

“When does a ‘nexus’ exist? The legal details”

Decisions of international tribunals adjudicating war crimes help to illustrate the degree of connection required between a particular act and an armed conflict to qualify as a “nexus”. To constitute a war crime, an act must violate an underlying rule of IHL. War crime tribunals determine whether a nexus existed between the acts of the accused and an armed conflict. If a tribunal concludes that an act had the necessary nexus in relation to a war crime, this automatically means that the corresponding rule of IHL applied to the act.

In the context of war crimes, this **nexus** has been described in various ways: that the conduct took place “in the context of” and “was associated with” an armed conflict; that the conduct was “shaped by or dependent upon the environment – the armed conflict – in which it is committed”; that the acts were “closely connected” to hostilities occurring elsewhere; or that “the existence of an armed conflict must have, at a minimum, played a substantial part in the perpetrator’s ability to commit the crime, the decision to commit it, the purpose of the commission, or the manner in which the crime was committed.”

International tribunals have put forward factors to be taken into account, including, for instance: (i) the status of the perpetrator and victim, and whether they had a role in the fighting; (ii) whether the act could be said to serve the ultimate goal of a military campaign; and (iii) whether the crime is committed as part of, or in the context of, the perpetrator’s official duties. This list of factors is not exhaustive: not all of them necessarily need to be fulfilled in a given case and other factors could also be relevant. In private business enterprises, individual personnel do not usually have a role in the fighting. However, certain business activities, particularly the supply of certain goods or services to a party to an armed conflict, could certainly be viewed as serving the ultimate goal of a military campaign. Private business personnel may not have “official duties” in the same sense as state officials or officials of non-state armed groups, but the fact that a private business is acting under a contract with such officials may be pertinent when determining if a nexus exists.

As discussed in the following section on war crimes, the direct perpetrator of a war crime whose act has a nexus to the conflict may not be the only one who is criminally responsible. Others who are **complicit** in the crime (i.e. aid or abet it) can also be held criminally responsible even if they are far from the crime in time or distance. This suggests that the act of aiding and abetting a war crime constitutes a sufficient connection for the rules of IHL to be relevant to the complicit person or entity. Complicity may be particularly relevant for private businesses, given that violations of IHL can occur up or down business supply chains. Additionally, international criminal law recognizes that a civilian “superior” can be held criminally responsible for war crimes committed by a “subordinate” if the superior fails to exercise proper control; in the context of a private business, it is possible that “civilian superior responsibility” could arise between an employer and employee in certain circumstances.

Since the range of circumstances that can constitute a sufficient link continues to develop through the decisions of tribunals and courts in individual cases, businesses should bear in mind that the notion of a sufficient link may change over time.

1.4 WAR CRIMES AND VIOLATIONS OF IHL



Nuremberg, Germany, 1947: Trial of I.G. Farben corporate directors, Military Tribunal VI.

War crimes are serious violations of IHL committed during international or non-international armed conflicts. They include grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and serious violations of other laws and customs of war.

Examples of war crimes include:

- wilful killing (murder) of a protected person (e.g. wounded or sick combatant, prisoner of war, civilian);
- torture or inhuman treatment of a protected person;
- wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to a protected person;
- committing sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery or enforced prostitution;
- attacking the civilian population;

- unlawful deportation or transfer;
- using prohibited weapons or methods of warfare;
- unlawfully recruiting children into armed forces or armed groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities;
- making improper use of the red cross or red crescent emblem, or other protective signs;
- perfidiously (deceitfully) wounding or killing, for example by pretending to surrender or pretending to be protected medical personnel;
- pillage of public or private property.

War crimes can be **investigated and prosecuted** by national authorities and, depending on the circumstances, by international bodies such as the International Criminal Court. States have obligations under international law to investigate war crimes and, if appropriate, prosecute the suspects.

Under IHL and international criminal law, criminal responsibility is not only applicable to the person who actually carries out the criminal act, but also others who assist in, facilitate, aid or abet, or plan or instigate the commission of a war crime. These secondary modes of criminal responsibility are sometimes referred to as “**complicity**”. Aiding and abetting, in particular, is potentially relevant to private businesses. The specific requirements for liability for aiding and abetting vary among different national and international legal frameworks. In general, however, liability can arise if a person both: (1) provides practical, material, moral or psychological assistance to the person who commits a war crime, which has a substantial effect on the commission of crime; and (2) does so with the knowledge that his or her acts or omissions assist the commission of such crimes. Assistance does not necessarily need to take place at the time or location where the crime is ultimately committed.

The obligation of states to ensure that people within their jurisdiction respect IHL and that those responsible for grave breaches are brought to justice is not limited to members of armed forces. These obligations extend to private persons, including the management (including company directors) and personnel of private businesses. If a state’s legal system recognizes and provides for the criminal liability of corporate entities, war crime provisions should apply to both corporate entities and individuals.

1.5 IHL AND INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

IHL is not the same as international human rights law. These two distinct bodies of law complement one another and share fundamental aims such as the protection of life, health and human dignity. The essence of some of their rules is similar. However, there are important differences:

- IHL is a specialist body of law that applies during armed conflict, including military occupation, whereas human rights law applies at all times. The outbreak of armed conflict triggers IHL, introducing additional rules and protections that all concerned parties need to be aware of.
- International human rights law is traditionally regarded as directly binding for states only. IHL on the other hand clearly also applies to certain non-state actors, such as non-state armed groups and individuals whose activities are sufficiently connected to an armed conflict. Thus, IHL can directly apply to the activities of a private business (see discussion in section 1.3.3 above) in a way that international human rights law might not.

The relationship between international human rights law and IHL can sometimes be complex. It is clear that states and other actors must, at minimum, always respect IHL in situations of armed conflict. However, depending on the circumstances, international human rights law may impose additional obligations, particularly in relation to issues that IHL does not address.

In addition to international human rights law, other rules of international treaty and customary law, including, for instance, rules of international environmental law, the law of the sea, international criminal law and international labour law, may continue to apply alongside IHL during armed conflicts.

2. WHICH IHL RULES ARE MOST RELEVANT FOR BUSINESSES?

2.1 USE OF FORCE BY SECURITY PROVIDERS



Afghanistan, 2007: Private security guards.

IHL rules on the use of force can become pertinent for a private business in relation to the security arrangements it makes for its operations in a situation of armed conflict. Such arrangements can take different forms, including:

- contracting of [public security services](#) from the government;
- contracting of [private security companies](#), whether local or international;
- in-house security personnel;
- protection by non-state armed groups.

Some key IHL rules on the use of force were explained earlier, such as distinguishing between civilians and combatants, protecting civilians against direct attack, prohibiting disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks, limiting the methods and means of warfare, and protecting medical personnel and facilities.

Whether in peacetime or in armed conflict, private security providers, whether contracted or in-house, have limited authority under national law to use force in self-defence. Public security providers, such as police forces, are subject to national and international legal standards on the use of force and firearms in law enforcement, including when providing routine protection to private business operations. In situations of armed conflict, acts by security forces – including private security providers – that are sufficiently connected to the armed conflict must also comply with IHL.

Furthermore, security forces of any kind, even if initially contracted exclusively for self-defence, could be drawn into direct participation in hostilities. In such circumstances, they may expose themselves, and company assets and personnel to a greater risk of being affected by an attack by opposing forces (for further discussion, see “IHL protections for private businesses”) or of violating IHL. Such risks are heightened if security providers are not properly trained in IHL. This is why it is important for private businesses operating in situations of armed conflict to **vet** security providers to ensure their personnel have received IHL training and if not, to arrange for such training.

2.2 HUMANE TREATMENT OF CIVILIANS, INCLUDING PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

Apart from the use of force, other IHL rules protecting civilians, especially detainees and prisoners of war, can become relevant to private businesses. For example:

- If security forces acting on behalf of a company detain civilians in the context of an armed conflict, IHL rules on the **treatment and conditions of detention** of people deprived of liberty become relevant.
- Companies contracted to **provide goods or services** in relation to people deprived of liberty in connection with an armed conflict need to evaluate whether their activities are consistent with IHL rules on treatment and conditions in detention, including for example:
 - the availability and suitability of shelter, bedding, sanitary installations, food, clothing and medical attention,
 - contact with the outside world,
 - special measures for children,
 - opportunities for physical and intellectual activity, and
 - protection against torture and other abuse.
- Even private businesses that are not involved in detention should be aware of IHL protections that might be pertinent to their field of business. For instance, IHL protects civilians and prisoners of war against exposure to **public curiosity**. News media and social media companies need to take this into account, e.g. when publishing images.

IHL also requires that treatment and protection be accorded without adverse distinction (i.e. without **discrimination**) on grounds including race, colour, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status, or any other similar criteria. The specific protection, health and assistance needs of women, children, persons with disabilities and other such groups must be respected. Private businesses contracted to provide goods or services in connection with an armed conflict need to ensure that their operations and activities respect these requirements. This includes understanding how diverse groups of women, men, girls and boys may be affected differently by the provision of goods and services, and taking steps to avoid or reduce harm to all.



2.3 PROTECTION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROPERTY



A. Mohamed/CRC

Somalia, 2023.

Private businesses need to consider whether their dealings related to **public or private property** in states or territories affected by armed conflict are consistent with IHL. Relevant activities include:

- taking ownership of or leasing public or private property,
- obtaining licenses or carrying out operations to extract or develop natural resources from public or private property,
- destroying, demolishing or otherwise modifying public or private property, and
- impacting the natural environment insofar as it constitutes public or private property.

Pillage is prohibited by IHL and is a war crime. Pillage is when a person appropriates or obtains public or private property without the owner's implied or express consent, in violation of IHL. IHL restricts the scope for parties to the conflict to destroy, seize or confiscate property. Pillage does not need to involve the use of force or violence. The definition of property in this context extends to publicly- or privately-owned natural resources, for example oil, minerals or metals. Pillage is discussed further below under "protection of civilian business assets".

Specific IHL rules that apply in **occupied territory** further limit the authority of the occupying state to destroy, exploit, or modify public or private property. IHL also imposes obligations on an occupying power to preserve and manage public property during occupation. Private businesses need to ensure that their ownership, use or modification of property is consistent with IHL when dealing with public or private property in an occupied territory, especially when acting under a contract with or with the permission of an occupying power.

2.4 AVOIDING FORCED DISPLACEMENT



Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2022: civilians on the move to avoid fighting.

Parties to an international armed conflict are prohibited from [deporting or forcibly transferring](#) the civilian population of an occupied territory, in whole or in part, except where required for the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons. A similar rule applies in non-international armed conflicts, in relation to ordering the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, for reasons related to the conflict. (Evacuations for other reasons, such as in response to natural disasters unrelated to the conflict, are not within the scope of this prohibition.)

The displacement may only last for as long as the conditions justifying it continue to exist. As soon as those reasons no longer exist, displaced persons have a right to voluntary return in safety to their homes or places of habitual residence. Certain conditions aimed at ensuring the well-being of displaced persons must also be complied with: all possible measures must be taken to provide the civilians concerned with satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and so that members of the same family are not separated. The property rights of displaced persons must also be respected.

Business operations in conflict zones can affect a civilian population's residential or agricultural land, for instance, to obtain access to resources or set up transport routes. Sometimes government armed forces or security services, non-state armed groups, private military or security companies hired by a company, or a company's own in-house security division will force civilians to leave in order to make way for business operations.

If this forced displacement is carried out by a party to the conflict for reasons related to the armed conflict but is not for the safety of the displaced civilians or imperative military reasons, it clearly violates IHL and can amount to a war crime. Depending on the circumstances, similar actions by the personnel of a private military or security company, or an in-house security team can also violate IHL and potentially constitute a war crime. A private business involved in such situations needs to assess whether the actions of security forces and its involvement are consistent with IHL.

Iraq, 2020: Palm trees damaged during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s have not grown back.



2.5 PROTECTION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Armed conflict often damages the natural environment, gravely affecting civilian populations that rely on it for food, water and livelihoods. IHL contains [rules that limit such negative impacts](#).

The natural environment is civilian in character, meaning it is protected by IHL rules regarding civilian objects. Under general IHL rules on distinction, proportionality and precautions:

- no part of the natural environment may be attacked, unless that specific part has become a military objective.
- an attack against an otherwise lawful target is prohibited if it would result in disproportionate damage to the natural environment.
- in the conduct of military operations, all feasible precautions must be taken to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental damage to the environment. Scientific uncertainty about the effects on the environment of certain military operations does not absolve a party to the conflict from taking such precautions.

The natural environment also benefits from special protection under IHL: the use of means or methods of warfare that are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment is prohibited.

Another rule of IHL prohibits attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”, including when such objects are part of the natural environment. This includes, for instance, pollution of water sources with chemicals or other agents, rendering them useless, or the destruction of crops with defoliants.

Even if an act would not necessarily be prohibited under the preceding rules, destroying any part of the natural environment by any means is prohibited unless required by imperative military necessity.

These rules could become relevant to private businesses in different ways. For example, businesses supplying goods or providing services to parties to armed conflicts, or operating under authorizations put in place by an occupying power, need to assess whether any resulting damage to the natural environment would violate IHL.

Even when a private business is not providing goods or services directly to a party to an armed conflict, it should exercise due diligence with respect to protecting the environment, including in relation to human health. Businesses should adopt measures to ensure that natural resources are obtained in an environmentally sustainable manner. The United Nations International Law Commission concluded that states should adopt measures to ensure that business enterprises can be [held liable for harm caused by them to the environment](#) in situations of armed conflict. This should include harm caused by a subsidiary acting under the de facto control of the parent company. Adequate and effective procedures and remedies should be available, in particular for victims of such harm.

2.6 WORKING CONDITIONS



Mozambique, 2021: Detainees working in the fields.

IHL prohibits uncompensated or abusive [forced labour](#) in both international and non-international armed conflicts. In international armed conflicts, [specific treaty rules](#) restrict the kinds of work that can be assigned to certain categories of people, such as prisoners of war, protected civilians and civilian internees. Treaties also set out requirements for working conditions, duration of labour, working pay, occupational accidents and medical supervision, including limits based on sex and age. Treaty rules also place limits on the [recruitment of children](#) by armed forces and armed groups, and their use in hostilities.

Businesses who employ workers in situations of armed conflict, or who receive goods or services provided by government actors or others operating in situations of armed conflict, need to assess whether the treatment of workers is consistent with the relevant rules of IHL.

2.7 FOOD, WATER AND OTHER ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES



Mali, 2021: Water tower installed by the ICRC to support villagers affected by combined effects of conflict and climate change.

IHL includes a range of rules that seek to protect civilian populations from [starvation](#) because they are deprived of food, water or other things that are essential to survival.

The use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. Special protection is given to “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”. These include food, agricultural areas for food production, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works. Depending on the circumstances, things like shelter or clothing may also be included.

Each party to an armed conflict bears the primary obligation to meet the basic needs of the population under its control. It is important to recall that a population is comprised of diverse women, men, girls and boys with different basic needs that may be affected differently by armed conflict.

Impartial humanitarian organizations have the right to offer their services to carry out humanitarian activities, in particular when the needs of a population affected by an armed conflict are not fulfilled. Such activities are undertaken in situations of armed conflict with the consent of the parties to the conflict. If a party is unable or unwilling to fulfil its obligation to meet basic needs, it cannot validly withhold its consent if an impartial humanitarian organization offers relevant services. Once impartial humanitarian activities have been accepted, the parties to the conflict (and third states) must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need. This obligation applies to humanitarian assistance that is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, and is subject to the concerned party’s right of control.

The intentional use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions, constitutes a war crime.

Private businesses that are involved in the production, distribution or supply of food, water, medical supplies or other items essential to the survival of a civilian population in a situation of armed conflict need to ensure that their activities are consistent with the relevant rules of IHL. In particular, private businesses that are requested or ordered by a party to an armed conflict to suspend or alter their production, distribution or supply of such items to a civilian population, or to consider doing so for other reasons related to the conflict, need to assess whether these changes would be consistent with IHL.

2.8 OCCUPIED TERRITORY

Specific rules address situations of military occupation, where a state exercises effective control over the territory of another. Occupation most often occurs as the result of fighting, but IHL also applies to a hostile occupation that meets with no armed resistance. IHL applies throughout an occupied territory, whether or not active hostilities are taking place in it. Some rules of IHL continue to apply in an occupied territory, even after military operations related to the conflict have generally ended.

Key rules include the following:

- An occupying power does not acquire sovereignty over the territory it occupies. It is not entitled to change the status or intrinsic characteristics of the occupied territory.
- The occupying power must administer the occupied territory for the benefit of the local population.
 - The authority of an occupying power is temporary and is accompanied by the obligation to respect (unless absolutely prevented from doing so) the laws in force in the occupied territory, as well as to maintain as normal a life as possible in it.
 - An occupying power must not exercise its authority to further its own economic interests or other interests, or use the inhabitants, resources or other assets of the territory it occupies for the benefit of its own territory or population.
- While an occupying power may impose certain security measures as a matter of military necessity, they must be consistent with its other obligations under IHL. An occupying power must, for instance:
 - treat all people in the territory humanely;
 - ensure adequate access to food, water and other essential items, as well as medical services;
 - respect private property;
 - properly manage public property;
 - ensure the operation of educational institutions; and
 - allow impartial humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC to deliver humanitarian relief and carry out other activities.
- IHL prohibits individual or mass forcible transfers or deportations of protected civilians from occupied territory. An occupying power is also prohibited from deporting or transferring parts of its own civilian population into a territory it occupies.

Private businesses that provide goods or services to an occupying power, or carry out other activities related to occupied territory, need to assess whether their activities and the use of the goods or services they supply are consistent with the relevant rules of IHL.

2.9 MANUFACTURE AND TRADE OF WEAPONS



The vast majority of countries are party to one or more IHL treaties that prohibit developing, producing and transferring certain kinds of [weapons](#). These include, for example, anti-personnel landmines, biological or chemical weapons, and nuclear weapons. Some treaties also require state parties to impose penal sanctions to prevent and suppress the manufacture of or trade in these weapons.

Other treaties seek to control international trade in weapons that are not prohibited. The [Arms Trade Treaty](#), for instance, regulates international transfers of conventional arms, ammunition, and parts and components, with a view to reducing human suffering and promoting responsible action and transparency in the international arms trade:

- The Arms Trade Treaty prohibits transfers when there is an overriding risk that they would contribute to IHL violations or serious violations of international human rights law. This includes serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.
- The Treaty requires each state party to take appropriate measures to enforce national laws and regulations that implement its provisions. Even states that are not parties to the Arms Trade Treaty are often still subject to national regulatory systems to control arms exports, which usually include administrative or criminal penalties for companies and individuals.

A business that develops, produces or transfers weapons that are prohibited by IHL faces the risk of civil or criminal liability. A business that transfers weapons that are controlled but not prohibited, in violation of national laws regulating such transfers (whether adopted pursuant to the Arms Trade Treaty or otherwise), also faces the risk of civil or criminal liability.

Outside of these treaties, transferring weapons to a party to a conflict while knowing or being reckless to the likelihood that the weapons will be used to perpetrate specific violations of IHL could be considered a form of complicity in war crimes under national or international criminal laws (see section 1.4 on War Crimes).

Furthermore, businesses should consider the wider IHL implications of developing and supplying technologies. This not only applies to weapons-related technology, but also civilian products and services, or other military technologies that may ultimately be used by parties to a conflict in ways that violate IHL. Such technologies could include, for example, surveillance and telecommunications equipment or cyber-security software.

IHL rules and the humanitarian impact should be taken into account in decision-making, not only by the manufacturers and suppliers of weapons and weapons-related services, but also investors in such businesses, as well as those that provide financial services to them.

3. RISKS OF CIVIL AND CRIMINAL LIABILITY

Failure by a private business to respect IHL is not only an issue of social responsibility and reputational or operational risk. It can also expose its personnel, including its management, and the corporate entity, to civil and criminal liability.

3.1 CRIMINAL LIABILITY

As explained earlier, the personnel of a private business, including directors and other members of management, can incur individual criminal responsibility if they commit [war crimes](#) or are complicit in war crimes committed by others.

In principle, personnel could be investigated and prosecuted for war crimes directly under international law by an international criminal tribunal. However, the vast majority of war crime investigations and prosecutions happen in national courts and rely on national laws.

Indeed, international treaties require states to ensure that war crimes, including [grave breaches](#) of the Geneva Conventions, for instance, are enacted as criminal offences in their national laws. States must investigate and, where warranted, prosecute individuals who commit such crimes or extradite them to another state willing to do so.

Furthermore, to ensure these rules are effectively enforced, war crimes are subject to universal jurisdiction. This means that any state, and not only the state where the crime took place or the state of nationality of the perpetrator or victim, can potentially assume jurisdiction over the case.

In some countries, national laws also allow for the criminal prosecution of corporate entities, including for war crimes. In others, the concept of corporate criminal responsibility may not exist in national law and companies may only be prosecuted for regulatory offences. In either case, potential penalties for corporate entities range from monetary fines to intrusive surveillance or supervision of corporate activities, to suspension or cancellation of business licenses or registrations.

3.2 CIVIL LIABILITY

Businesses and employees also face potential civil liability under the national laws of their home state or other states where they have operations, or otherwise cause or contribute to damage as a result of IHL violations.

Claims for financial compensation can often be brought directly by individual victims and usually carry a lower standard of proof than criminal proceedings. Claims can usually be brought against the responsible individuals, the corporate entity or both.

Some national systems provide more generally for business entities to be presumed liable for wrongdoing by individual employees, which may include harm caused by IHL violations. Depending on the circumstances, liability can extend to companies that invest in or provide financial services to a government, non-state armed group or other company that is involved in violations.

The ability to bring claims in a company's home jurisdiction for damage caused abroad varies depending on national laws and, in some cases, international agreements.

4. IHL PROTECTIONS FOR PRIVATE BUSINESSES

4.1 PROTECTIONS FOR BUSINESS PERSONNEL

The personnel of businesses operating in conflict zones may face serious threats to their physical safety as a result of a surrounding armed conflict.

In situations of armed conflict, employees of private businesses are considered to be civilians under the principle of distinction, unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities.

Company personnel therefore benefit from IHL protections for civilians. For instance:

- IHL prohibits attacks directed at civilians, as well as attacks that fail to distinguish between civilians and combatants.
- An attacker must also consider the anticipated *incidental* loss of life and injury to civilians when assessing whether an attack on a legitimate military objective is proportionate.
- All feasible precautions must be taken to avoid, and in any event to minimize, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.
- Each party to the conflict must, to the extent feasible, remove civilians and civilian objects under its control from the vicinity of military objectives.

Civilians who take a direct part in hostilities lose their protection from attack while they are carrying out these activities. Business personnel operating in situations of armed conflict should be aware that they will lose their protection if they directly participate in hostilities (see breakout box).

Employees are also entitled to be treated humanely. This includes protection against violence to their life, health, physical or mental well-being, as well as specific guarantees and standards of treatment if they are charged with a criminal offence or deprived of their liberty.

IHL also addresses the right of foreign nationals to leave the territory of parties in conflict, including occupied territory, which could be of acute importance to expatriate employees of a transnational business.

“What is direct participation in hostilities?”

An individual participates directly in hostilities when they carry out acts that aim to support one party to the conflict by directly causing harm to another party, either by directly inflicting death, injury or destruction, or by directly harming the enemy’s military operations or capacity. Examples of causing military harm include capturing, wounding or killing military personnel; damaging military objects; or restricting or disturbing military deployment, logistics and communication, for example through sabotage, erecting roadblocks or interrupting the power supply of radar stations. Interfering electronically with military computer networks (computer network attacks) and transmitting tactical targeting intelligence for a specific attack are also possible examples.

On the other hand, “indirect” activities such as producing and shipping weapons, constructing roads and other infrastructure, and financial, administrative and political support, do not constitute “direct participation in hostilities”. For example, a civilian truck driver delivering ammunition to a shooting position at the front line would almost certainly be regarded as directly participating in hostilities. However, transporting ammunition from a factory to a port far from a conflict zone would generally be too incidental to the use of that ammunition in specific military operations to be considered as “directly” causing harm.

A person is not directly participating in hostilities if they are totally unaware of the role they are playing in the conduct of hostilities, e.g. a driver who doesn't know that a remote-controlled bomb is hidden in their vehicle. The use of necessary and proportionate force by civilians in self-defence or defence of others also cannot be regarded as direct participation in hostilities. This would include security providers defending themselves or those under their protection against an unlawful attack or looting, rape or murder by marauding soldiers.

It is important to understand that IHL distinguishes between an attack that is *directed against* civilians, and an attack that would be expected to *incidentally* kill or injure civilians, but is targeted at a legitimate military objective that happens to be in proximity to them. For example, a civilian working in an ammunition factory would not be considered as directly participating in hostilities and cannot be the target of an attack. However, the ammunition factory itself remains a military objective, and so potentially subject to attack, even if it may result in injuries or death to civilians. The fact that civilian workers could be killed or injured must still be taken into account when determining whether an attack on the factory would be proportionate and all feasible precautions must be taken to spare civilian workers from harm.

4.2 PROTECTION OF BUSINESS ASSETS

The facilities and assets of a private business, including its factories, offices, vehicles, land, equipment and goods are generally viewed as civilian objects. Civilian objects are protected from direct attacks and benefit from the prohibition of pillage and other restrictions on the appropriation or seizure of private property under IHL.

4.2.1 DAMAGE TO PROPERTY

Under IHL, attacks may only be directed at military objectives. Military objectives are objects that by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action, and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage. Any object that is not a military objective is a civilian object.

A civilian object can become a military objective depending on how it is used, or its location and purpose. For instance, if a party to the armed conflict uses buildings owned by a private company as a headquarters to command and control military operations, the buildings will likely qualify as a military objective under IHL and can be subject to attack.

IHL does not prohibit *indirect* damage to civilian objects, including assets of a private business, if it arises from legitimate attacks against military objectives. However, under IHL, the principle of proportionality states that military objectives may not be attacked when the expected consequences for civilians and civilian objects, including the personnel and assets of a private company, is excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

Certain kinds of objects receive special protection under IHL. Some of these can be owned by a private business. One example is [hospitals and other medical facilities](#). Another is “[objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population](#)”, such as food, agricultural areas for food production, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works. A third example is “works or installations containing [dangerous forces](#), namely dams, dykes and nuclear electrical generating stations”. Depending on the circumstances, IHL may prohibit attacks on these objects even if they become military objectives. The incidental damage to vital water, sanitation, and health services, and food production and distribution, must also be taken into account and minimized when parties are planning attacks and other military operations that may destroy or disable other kinds of critical infrastructure such as electrical generation and transmission networks.

Businesses should consider these factors when making decisions about where their premises and operations are to be situated within conflict zones, as well as decisions on where to relocate if the conflict evolves.

4.2.2 CONFISCATION OR SEIZURE OF COMPANY ASSETS

In times of armed conflict, businesses also risk having company assets confiscated or seized.

IHL includes rules requiring respect for private property. An occupying power may not confiscate or destroy private property in occupied territory for reasons related to the conflict unless expressly authorized under applicable IHL rules. The property and investments of private businesses are covered by this protection, as is any privately-owned housing for their personnel. Under limited circumstances, however, IHL permits an occupying power to seize or requisition private property, including property of a private business. This can only be done on condition that compensation is paid and, if the property still exists at the end of the conflict, that it is returned at that time.

More generally, unlawfully seizing private property from the population of an adversary can constitute pillage. As was discussed earlier (section 2.3), IHL prohibits pillage. The prohibition of pillage covers the appropriation or seizure of private property without the owner's consent. It applies to acts connected to the armed conflict. It only applies to appropriation or seizure that is in violation of IHL. IHL allows for the seizure of private property in certain circumstances. First, IHL allows certain property of an enemy to be captured as "war booty" if it can be used for military operations. While this mainly applies to public property, it also allows weapons, ammunition, non-protective military equipment and military papers belonging to private individuals to be seized on the battlefield. Second, as noted above, an occupying power can seize or requisition private property in certain circumstances. Third, IHL allows certain enemy property to be seized when imperatively demanded by the necessities of war, in other words, when there is a reasonable connection between seizing the property and overcoming the enemy forces.

IHL generally does not address a state's actions in its own territory in relation to seizing or confiscating private property of its own nationals, including property held by private businesses. These questions are addressed by other relevant national or international laws.

5. HOW CAN BUSINESSES IMPROVE RESPECT FOR IHL?

What can and should businesses do to improve respect for IHL, whether for corporate social responsibility, legal compliance, to avoid disrupting operations or to guard against reputational risk?

For many businesses, engaging with the laws and principles of IHL starts with a simple self-assessment:

- Is the business operating in, or doing business with, a country that is experiencing armed conflict or at risk of doing so?

If the answer is yes, the business has a responsibility and potentially, as has been described in this brochure, specific legal obligations to ensure that its management and other personnel understand and respect the relevant rules and principles of IHL – not only the protections these laws afford, but also the duties and obligations they entail.

However, even if the answer is no and the company is not operating in or doing business with a country that is experiencing armed conflict, it is prudent to plan ahead and decide how the company will manage these risks if they emerge. This is particularly the case for businesses that are exposed to fragile or high-risk areas.

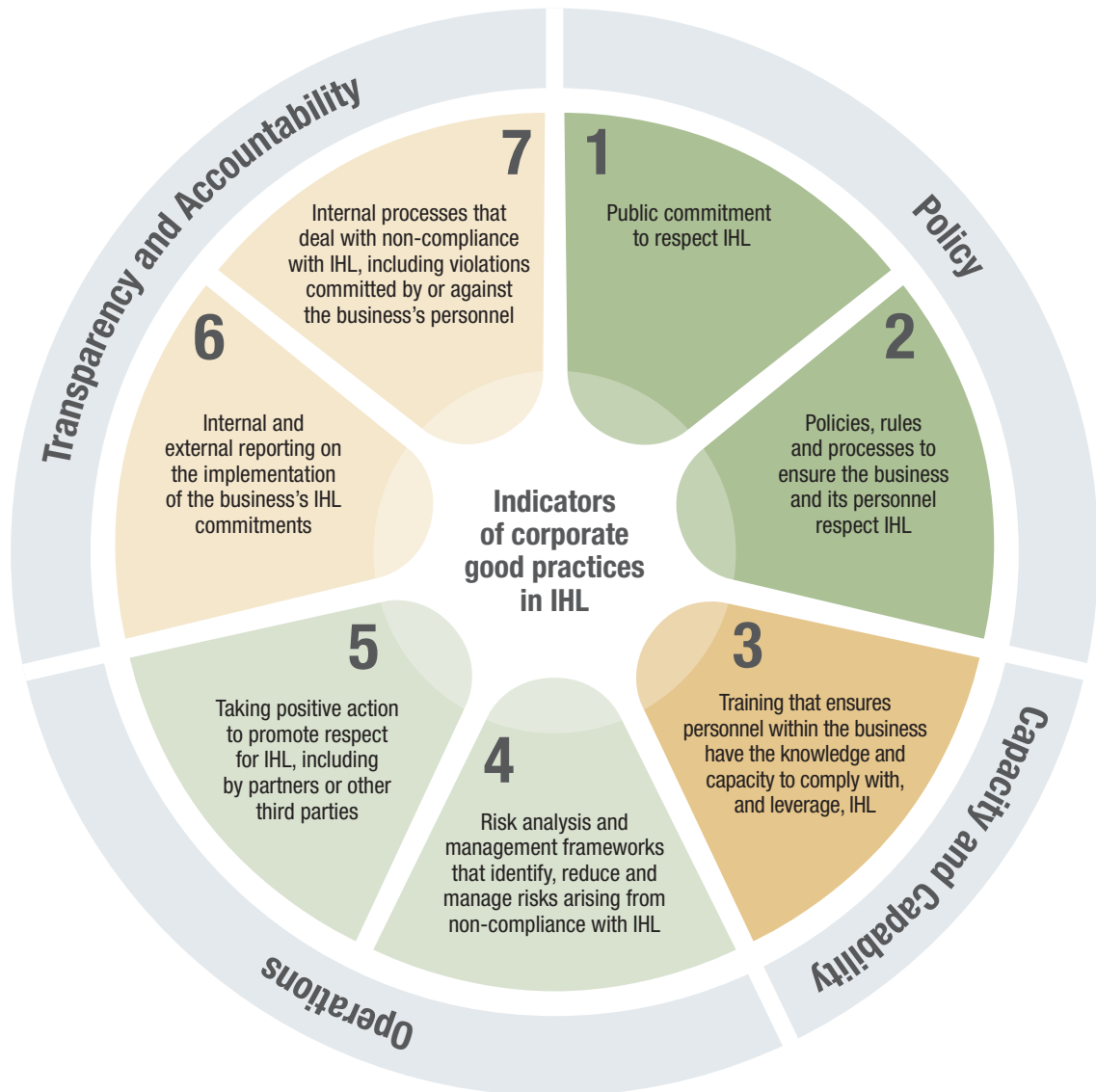
Similarly, businesses can demonstrate their social responsibility and guard against potential reputational issues, including shareholder confidence, media scrutiny and public criticism, by implementing good practices in respecting human rights and humanitarian law in any conflict-affected or high-risk area.

Many businesses already have frameworks in place to meet their human rights responsibilities, for example, through human rights policies, due diligence processes and risk management frameworks, personnel training, board/director education programmes or sustainability reporting. However, for the reasons explained in this brochure, in situations of armed conflict, existing measures need to be *enhanced* by integrating IHL rules and principles.

As a starting point, examples of good practices include the following:

1. A **public commitment** by the business to respect IHL, in addition to human rights.
2. Adopting effective corporate **policies, rules and processes** to ensure the company and its personnel comply with and promote compliance with IHL.
3. **Training** that ensures company personnel have the knowledge and capacity:
 - a. to comply with, and make use of and promote compliance with IHL, or to identify when a situation calls for them to seek competent advice in this regard.
 - b. to be aware of the protections that company personnel and assets are entitled to under IHL, as well as the circumstances in which such protection is lost.

Such training may be offered by local National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (see the list of Additional Resources below for examples).
4. **Risk analysis and management** frameworks that identify, reduce and manage risks arising from situations of armed conflict, including occupation and non-compliance with IHL, for example, by mapping conflict-affected contexts that are relevant to its operations or by identifying corporate activities that may impact or be impacted by the effects of the conflict on civilian populations, people deprived of liberty, and the sick and wounded.
5. Taking positive corporate action to **promote respect** for IHL, including by partners, suppliers, sub-contractors or other third parties.
6. Internal and external **reporting** on implementation, including, for instance, by providing information about IHL compliance in the business' regular sustainability or shareholder reporting.
7. Internal processes that **deal with non-compliance** with IHL, including violations committed by or against corporate personnel.



Specific measures can integrate several of these good practices at the same time. Companies should, for instance, require that security providers contracted by the company be trained in IHL and vetted to ensure that they and their personnel do not have a record of violations or other relevant misconduct. This measure reflects an effective use of internal policies, rules and processes, and involves training, managing risk and taking action to promote respect for IHL by others.

This introductory brochure has mainly focused on explaining the general scope and content of IHL, and its relevance to private business actors. However, applicable national laws must also be considered when assessing the specific legal obligations of a private business entity and its personnel, including company directors and other members of management. While national laws cannot validly remove IHL obligations that apply directly to a person or entity, national laws can extend or operationalize IHL obligations beyond what is directly or specifically provided for in international law.

The following section lists further resources and practical tools and guidance for business actors. Some of these, such as the materials produced by Australian Red Cross, incorporate an analysis of relevant national laws. In all cases, businesses should consult legal experts and other experts for more specific advice.

6. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

LEGAL RESOURCES

ICRC, IHL Treaty databases: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties>

ICRC, Customary IHL database: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl>

ICRC, National Practice database: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/national-practice>

ICRC, *Business, violence and conflict*. International Review of the Red Cross, November 2012 issue: <https://international-review.icrc.org/reviews/irrc-no-887-business-violence-and-conflict>

Montreux Document on pertinent international legal obligations and good practices for states related to operations of private military and security companies during armed conflict (2008): <https://www.montreuxdocument.org/>

PRACTICAL TOOLS AND GUIDANCE FOR BUSINESS ACTORS

DCAF/ICRC, Security and Human Rights Knowledge Hub: <https://www.securityhumanrightshub.org/>

DCAF/ICRC, Toolkit on Addressing Security and Human Rights Challenges in Complex Environments (updated 2021): <https://www.securityhumanrightshub.org/toolkit/>

Australian Red Cross/ICRC, *Armed conflict, international humanitarian law and responsible business conduct: A compendium of resources for businesses* (2023): <https://www.securityhumanrightshub.org/resources/armed-conflict-ihl-responsible-business-conduct.html>

Australian Red Cross/RMIT University, *Seven Indicators of Corporate Best Practice in International Humanitarian Law* (2021): <https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-assets/documents/ihl--no-ihl/7-indicators-of-corp-best-prac-final-2021.pdf>

Australian Red Cross/RMIT University, *War, Law and Business: a module on international humanitarian law for future business leaders* (2021): <https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/html-sites/ihl/war-law-and-business/arc-warlawbusiness.html>

Australian Red Cross/RMIT University, *International Humanitarian Law for Business* (online course, free enrollment available): <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/international-humanitarian-law-for-business>

French Red Cross, *Entreprises et Droit international humanitaire – Outils d’analyse* (French-language resources), forthcoming, December 2024.

DCAF/ICRC/RMIT, *Security, Conflict, and Sustainability: Strengthening the GRI Sustainability Standards for Corporate Reporting on Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas* (2024): <https://www.securityhumanrightshub.org/resources/security-conflict-sustainability-gri-standards.html>

UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, *Guide on Heightened Human Rights Due Diligence for Business in Conflict-Affected Contexts* (2022): <https://www.undp.org/publications/heightened-human-rights-due-diligence-business-conflict-affected-contexts-guide>

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles. As the reference on international humanitarian law, it helps develop this body of law and works for its implementation.

People know they can rely on the ICRC to carry out a range of life-saving activities in conflict zones, including: supplying food, safe drinking water, sanitation and shelter; providing health care; and helping to reduce the danger of landmines and unexploded ordnance. It also reunites family members separated by conflict, and visits people who are detained to ensure they are treated properly. The organization works closely with communities to understand and meet their needs, using its experience and expertise to respond quickly and effectively, without taking sides.

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