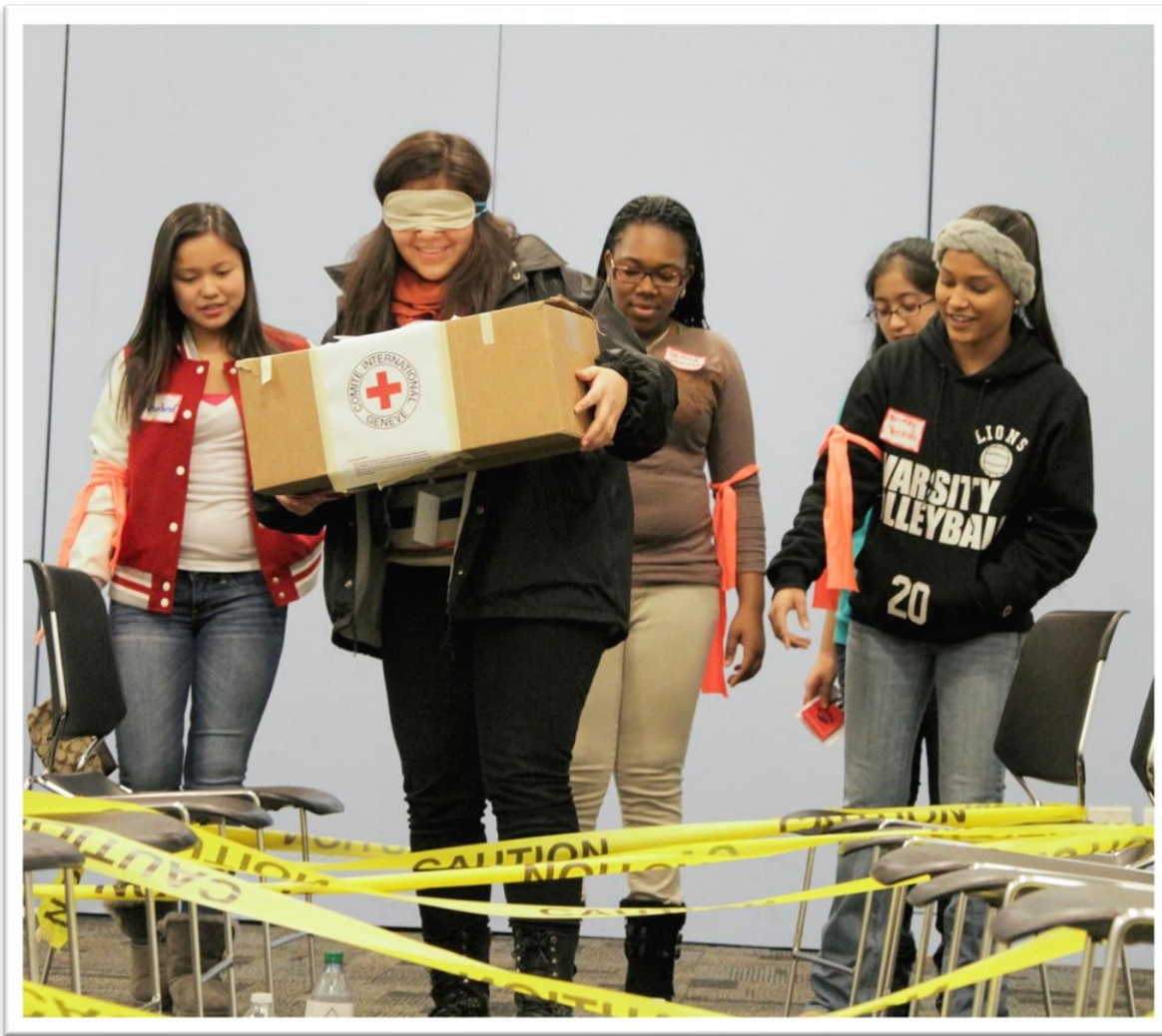




International Humanitarian Law

Youth Action Campaign

2026-2027

Healthcare and Armed Conflict

Handbook for Youth Advocates



**American
Red Cross**

Int'l Humanitarian Law
Youth Action Campaign



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Module 1: An Overview of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement?

Thank you for joining the American Red Cross International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Youth Action Campaign (YAC)!

The IHL Youth Action Campaign is an American Red Cross program that encourages youth and young adults to learn about the rules of armed conflict and empowers them to engage with IHL through peer-to-peer campaigns. Later, we will discuss the Youth Action Campaign and how to build your own campaign. For now, let us talk about the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and International Humanitarian Law.



The Story of Henry Dunant

On June 24, 1859, the Austrian and the French armies clashed at Solferino, a town in northern Italy. After only 16 hours, 36,000 men lay dead or wounded. On the evening after the battle, Henry Dunant, a young Swiss citizen, arrived in Solferino.

As Dunant wandered among wounded soldiers, he realized how little attention anyone was paying to them. He gathered a group of locals and organized them into teams to take food and water to the wounded. He organized a field hospital in a church, collected linen for bandages, brought food and medical supplies from neighboring towns, and directed volunteers to fetch water in buckets. He further recruited tourists, a journalist, a count, and a chocolate manufacturer, who soon were dressing wounds, carrying water and writing farewell letters to families of the dying men. All the helpers, Dunant observed, had forgotten the nationality of the men they tended.

Horrified by the condition of the soldiers and inspired by the actions of the volunteers, Dunant realized the importance of creating a neutral organization to tend to the wounded and sick during war. A few years later, Dunant helped to start the International Committee of the Red Cross and inspired the formation of The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. He said:



“Would it not be possible in time of peace and quiet to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?”



Clara Barton and the American Red Cross



In 1859, while Dunant witnessed the scene of the Battle of Solferino, another humanitarian across the Atlantic in the United States was also confronting the suffering caused by war. Clara Barton was working as a recording clerk in the U.S. Patent Office in Washington, D.C. when the first units of federal troops began appearing in the city in 1861. The Civil War had just begun and, as the troops poured in, Clara Barton realized that she could not remain on the sidelines while wounded soldiers and military medical personnel were in desperate need of assistance.

She started by taking supplies to the young men of the Sixth Massachusetts Infantry who had been attacked in Baltimore, Maryland, by southern sympathizers. Barton provided clothing and assorted foods and supplies to the sick and wounded soldiers as well as personal support to the men in hopes of keeping their spirits up. She read to them, wrote letters for them, listened to their personal problems, and prayed with them. Knowing she was needed most on the battlefield, she traveled to Virginia and became known as the “Angel of the Battlefield” as she risked her life to treat the sick and wounded.

In 1869, Clara Barton traveled to Europe where she was introduced to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, Barton was again called to action. Though not yet allied to the Red Cross, Clara Barton served with International Red Cross volunteers and even fashioned a cross with a red ribbon to protect herself with the newly recognized emblem.

Inspired by her experiences with the Red Cross in Europe, Barton traveled back to the United States of America and formed the American Red Cross. Clara Barton served as the president for thirteen years, working to alleviate human suffering in face of emergencies.

The Mission of the American Red Cross

It often comes as a surprise that the American Red Cross was founded to address the humanitarian challenges faced in war. Clara Barton, our founder, was inspired to establish the American Red Cross in response to the clear needs she witnessed during the American Civil War. As a national society of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the American Red Cross has a mandate to educate the public about International Humanitarian Law or IHL. As participants of the IHL Youth Action Campaign, you become our partner in promoting IHL and helping us to carry out this mandate.

The mission of the American Red Cross is to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors.

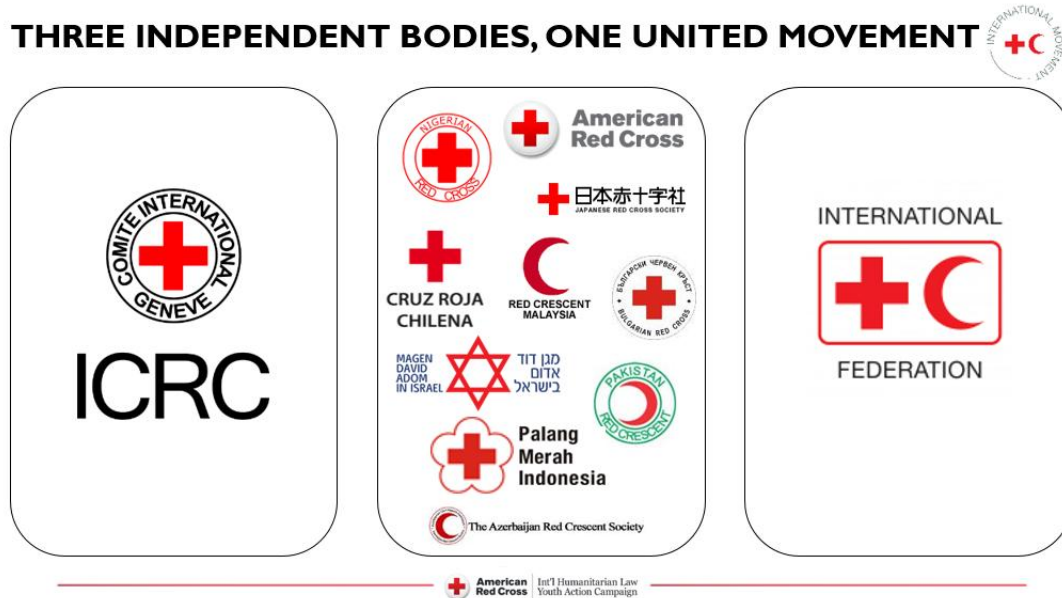


The Structure of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement

Henry Dunant's commitment to humanitarian values inspired the creation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

The Movement consists of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), over 190 national societies (including the American Red Cross), and the International Federation of the Red Cross. Though these organizations are separate, they remain equal partners in the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

THREE INDEPENDENT BODIES, ONE UNITED MOVEMENT

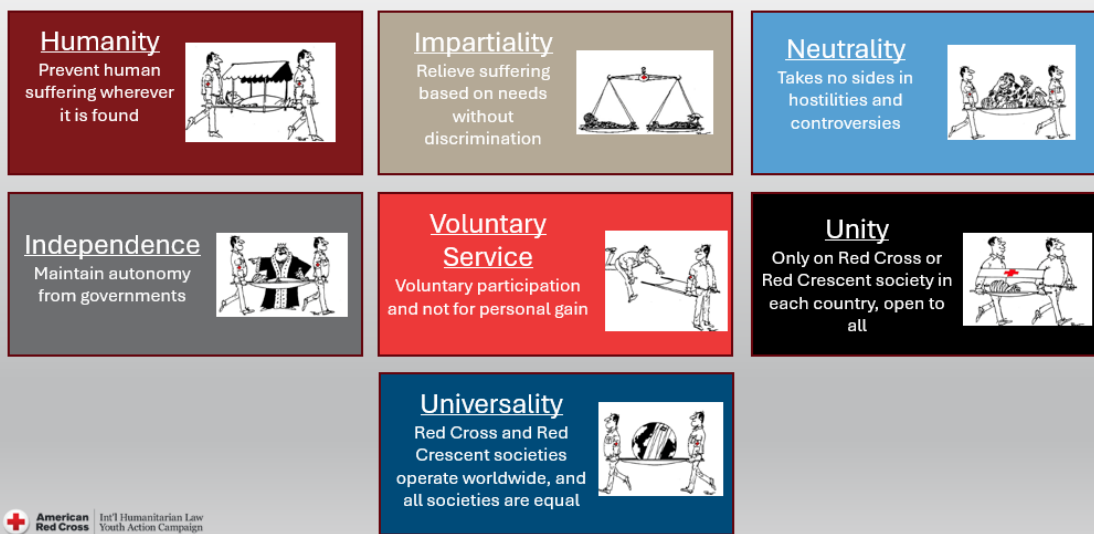


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The Seven Fundamental Principles of the Movement

The Seven Fundamental Principles of the Movement are the values that guide the Movement's missions to alleviate human suffering. As volunteers of the American Red Cross, it is important that we use these principles while implementing the campaigns. We can also practice these principles in our own lives.

7 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES



4



Protection of the Emblems

To standardize a symbol for medical personnel and facilities, the Red Cross was the first distinctive emblem authorized in the original Geneva Conventions. It has no religious meaning but is the inverse of the Swiss flag which is a white cross on a red background. The standardization of this symbol did not last long, as some nations started to use other emblems. To stop this practice, the Movement has three globally recognized emblems—the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and the Red Crystal—a neutral emblem that is not linked to any one country or region. They are symbols of assistance in times of conflict and disaster and are some of the most widely recognized brand symbols globally.

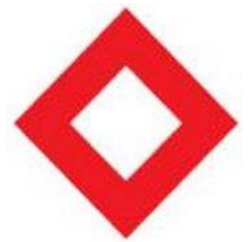


When you see the Red Cross or other affiliated symbols on a battlefield, they carry a special significance. These symbols represent immunity—they cannot be attacked, and those using them, like medics aiding an injured soldier, must be granted safe passage.



There are two uses for the emblems: The first is what we call 'Protective use.' It signals legal protection under International Humanitarian Law, ensuring that people, equipment, or locations marked with the emblem are safeguarded during armed conflict.

The second use of the emblem is to show who or what is connected to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, like people, vehicles, or buildings, ensuring special protections. This is called 'Indicative use' and represents the marking of Red Cross buildings and people. In your work as an IHL Youth Action Campaign ambassador, you are engaging in this indicative use when you wear a shirt, hat, or pins with the Red Cross. As such, you are now part of our network of Red Cross volunteers responsible for protecting the emblem and ensuring it is used to protect our principles.



Module 2: The Fundamentals of International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

As long as there have been armed conflicts, there have been rules governing them. As armed conflicts have evolved, so have these rules. **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** is a set of rules that seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict.

IHL acknowledges the reality of armed conflict. During armed conflicts, actions that would never be allowed in peacetime, like killing someone, suddenly become lawful. IHL attempts to protect lives and preserve humanity when it seems like all other rules have broken down. It protects people who are not or are no longer participating in hostilities, like civilians or the sick and the wounded, and restricts the means and methods of warfare to limit certain weapons and strategies from causing unnecessary suffering.



IHL is made up of **international treaty law** and **customary international law**. International treaty law includes formal international agreements like the Geneva Conventions. Customary international law is developed when a significant number of nations consistently do a certain practice to the point that it is eventually recognized as an obligation on all nations, despite the fact that it is not written in a formal treaty. It is similar to the way that many people in the United States tend to walk on the right side of the sidewalk. People do this not because it is written law, but simply because it is a social norm that helps decrease confusion when two people are walking towards each other. When enough nations adhere to the same practice and that practice inspires a sense of obligation to comply with the practice, the practice becomes accepted as customary international law.

IHL has been at the heart of the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement since its inception. The Movement has a mandate to educate the public about IHL which it continues to do in many ways including through the IHL Youth Action Campaign!

The Geneva Conventions

A year after the International Committee of the Red Cross was founded in Switzerland, the first treaty that championed its ideas was signed by twelve governments in the first Geneva Convention in 1864.

The Geneva Convention of 1864 contained ten brief articles that protect medical personnel and wounded combatants during armed conflicts. After this convention, additional treaties in The Hague and Geneva were developed to offer further protections applicable in armed conflicts.

The next major development in IHL occurred after the atrocities of World War II. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 aimed to prevent the atrocities of World War II from ever occurring again by providing the first universally accepted codification of laws that govern armed conflicts. Every nation in the world has signed the 1949 Geneva Conventions and has adopted them as law. These treaties became the cornerstone of modern International Humanitarian Law. The Additional Protocols of 1977 are two additional documents that were added to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and further developed the laws that govern armed conflict. However, unlike the 1949 Geneva Conventions, they have not been as widely accepted. Some countries, including the United States, have not ratified them.

These are only a few of the international agreements that make up IHL. Other treaties and customary international law contribute to a robust body of law that protects the victims of armed conflict.

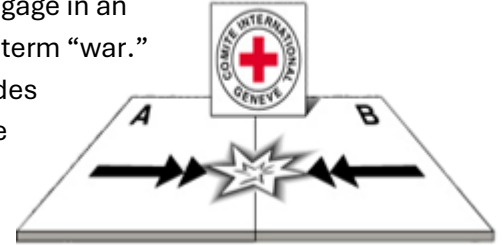




Types of Armed Conflict

In IHL, armed conflicts can be categorized into different classifications. The type of classification for a conflict is important as it determines what rules of IHL apply, or if IHL applies at all.

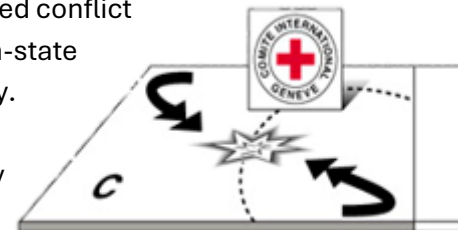
An **International Armed Conflict (IAC)** is when two or more nations engage in an armed conflict. IACs are what most people think of when they hear the term “war.” IHL that applies in International Armed Conflicts is very robust; it includes all four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I. In total there are over 600 articles that apply to International Armed Conflicts.



There are a few other situations that are considered International Armed Conflicts even though it may not be two countries fighting each other.

1. The first situation is when one country occupies another, even if there is no resistance to the occupation. While there may not be a fight occurring in occupied country B, the rules from Geneva Convention IV and Additional Protocol I still apply.
2. The second situation is during national liberation wars. In Article 1 of Additional Protocol I, the definition of IACs includes conflicts where people are fighting against colonial domination and racist regimes. This applies even though the fighting is all taking place inside one country. (This is one of the articles in AP I that the U.S. objects to as it does not define the conflict based on geography, but rather motive to fight.)

Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs) occur when there is an armed conflict between a country and a non-State armed group or between multiple non-state armed groups and the fighting is contained within the borders of a country. Examples of non-state armed groups would be militias or terrorist groups that are fighting the state. During Non-International Armed Conflicts, only Common Article 3 and Additional Protocol II apply. It is called a common article because it is found in--or common to -- all four of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. In total, there are just 29 articles that apply to NIACs.



In internal tensions or disturbances that occur within a country that do not rise to the level of armed conflict, IHL does not apply. In these situations, domestic criminal law applies and law enforcement within the country handles the issue.

The Tadic definition of an armed conflict:

“An armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between states or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a state.”



Four Core Principles of IHL

Although IHL is quite expansive, there are four principles that form the foundation upon which IHL is built. Sometimes there are clearly right and wrong military actions, but often decisions become difficult in the fog of war. These four principles are at the heart of IHL and guide the decisions parties to a conflict make.

Principle of Military Necessity



Combatants can engage in military acts necessary to defeat the enemy, provided their actions are not otherwise unlawful under IHL. If achieving a legitimate military objective is not the purpose of their actions or if their actions violate other provisions of IHL, then their actions do not adhere to the Principle of Military Necessity.

Put another way, combatants cannot just attack anyone or anything for no reason. Their actions must have a purpose, and the outcome must create a military advantage. They must make the case that the outcome will lead to a military advantage and that the actions are legal under IHL. For example, if during an armed conflict the enemy is just a few miles away, then destroying a bridge to keep the enemy from crossing would probably be in alignment with the Principle of Military Necessity. On the other hand, there is likely no military advantage to destroying a bridge when the enemy is a thousand miles away and is in no danger of crossing it anytime soon, or even at all. That act would be in violation of the Principle of Military Necessity.

The reason that the Principle of Military Necessity is discussed first is because if a military action does not adhere to this principle, there is absolutely no reason to move forward with a military action. There must be an anticipated military advantage to be gained by the action, otherwise the military action is unlawful.

Principle of Distinction

The Principle of Distinction states that all parties to a conflict must distinguish between civilians and combatants and between military objectives and civilian objects.

In armed conflict, there are three categories of people to help distinguish who should be attacked and who should be protected:



- **Combatants** are members of a state's armed forces. They can legally engage in fighting and can be lawful targets. If captured, they must be treated as Prisoners of War and cannot be criminally charged for these lawful military actions. Combatants are required to distinguish themselves from civilians, for example by wearing uniforms.
- **Non-combatants** are members of armed forces who are medical personnel and chaplains. They may not engage in fighting and cannot be intentionally targeted. If



captured, they must be returned to their side unless they stay to attend to the Prisoners of War from their own countries.

- **Civilians** include everyone else. In fact, everyone must be assumed to be a civilian, unless there is evidence otherwise. Civilians cannot be directly targeted by parties to a conflict. If civilians participate in an armed conflict, such as participating in a rebel group, they lose their protections as civilians for such time as they directly participate in hostilities.

IHL also divides objects into categories:

- **Military Objectives** are objects which 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.”
- **Civilian Objects** are all objects unless they are distinctly military objectives.

When parties to a conflict conduct an attack, they must distinguish between civilians and combatants and civilian objects and military objectives. Only combatants and military objectives may be deliberately attacked. Using indiscriminate weapons or strategies that cannot distinguish between the status of people or objects is strictly prohibited under IHL.

The Principle of Proportionality



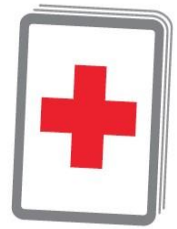
Combatants must not engage in an attack where the anticipated loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, or damage to civilian objects is excessive in relation to the direct and concrete military advantage that is anticipated by conducting the attack. Even though civilians cannot be targeted purposefully, IHL recognizes that civilians and civilian objects may be inadvertently harmed. This is often referred to as **collateral damage**. Parties to a conflict are obligated to take measures to minimize collateral damage.

The Principle of Proportionality requires parties to a conflict to consider if the collateral damage expected to be caused by a military attack is excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. Proportionality is one of the hardest principles to understand and apply because it is a judgement call. There is no recognized metric of the worth of a military advantage in relation to the loss of civilian lives and property.



The Principle of Limiting Unnecessary Suffering

The Principle of Limiting Unnecessary Suffering prohibits means and methods of warfare that would cause unnecessary suffering to combatants or civilians. Means of warfare include tools or weapons used to carry out military attacks. Methods of warfare are the strategies and tactics used when carrying out an attack. This principle recognizes that in armed conflicts a certain amount of suffering will necessarily take place. The idea behind this principle is that the means and methods of warfare should not be designed to cause more suffering than necessary to accomplish military goals.



For example, to shoot a combatant with a normal bullet will cause suffering and maybe even death. While unfortunate, this is permissible under IHL. However, to shoot a combatant with a bullet that is designed to break apart into tiny fragments that are impossible for medical personnel to remove just so that the person will suffer in pain for years, is impermissible. If the only reason to use this type of bullet is to make people suffer more than if they were shot with a regular bullet, then it violates the Principle of Limiting Unnecessary Suffering.

Parties to a conflict should uphold the Principle of Limiting Unnecessary Suffering by conducting reviews of their methods and means of warfare.

Feasible Precautions

The four principles of IHL are implemented by taking feasible precautions to avoid violating IHL during military operations. To be feasible, precautions must be practicable considering the circumstances ruling at the time.

Precautions when conducting an attack may require that the attacker consider:

1. Cancelling an attack when it is clear the attack will result in a violation of IHL.
2. Choice of military objectives to attack—the objective that results in the least danger to civilians should be chosen.
3. Timing of the attack.
4. Types of weapons used to carry out the attack.

Precautions against the effects of an attack may require that the attacker consider:

1. Removing the civilian population and civilian objects from the vicinity of military objectives.
2. Avoiding placing military objectives near or within densely populated areas.
3. Conducting certain attacks at night to reduce casualties.
4. Publishing a warning of an impending attack via social media or SMS to residents of the target zone.



What Happens When IHL Is Violated?

States must incorporate the Geneva Conventions into domestic law, so violations of IHL can be handled domestically. In the U.S., most of these cases are handled internally through military courts.

Only grave breaches of IHL are considered war crimes, and the Geneva Conventions require that states prosecute war crimes. If states are unwilling or unable to hold a trial for a war crime, and have ratified the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court could try the case. The United States has signed but not ratified the Rome Statute, so Americans that commit war crimes are not tried by the International Criminal Court.

Key IHL Accountability Terms

These key terms are important when understanding how accountability takes place under IHL.

- **War Crimes** are serious or grave violations of IHL, committed against persons or objects in connection to an armed conflict.
- **Crimes Against Humanity** are certain inhumane acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population
- **Genocide** are acts committed with the intent to physically destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. This would be considered a crime against humanity.



International Criminal Law and IHL

International Criminal Law (ICL) is a field of last resort that focuses on rendering individual criminal responsibility. IHL is enforced through courts' use of ICL. Domestic and international courts both prosecute war crimes but in different ways.

Domestic courts are the most common venue for prosecution of war crimes. The country where a war crime was committed can prosecute the individuals responsible. Countries can also prosecute their own citizens for war crimes committed abroad in certain circumstances. A country's national laws would be applied in prosecution.



International criminal courts are used as a last resort and only used if domestic or military courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute. Courts apply international criminal law in the prosecution of war crimes. Jurisdictions for international courts are set forth in the court's governing statute which establishes a court's power and what laws they need to apply. The most well-known international court is The International Criminal Court (ICC).



Module 3: Annual Theme: Healthcare and Armed Conflict

Whether you are a civilian, an ally, or an enemy — if you are sick or wounded, you are a human being first. That's not a slogan. It's the law.

Introduction

In armed conflicts around the world, healthcare is under attack. During and after war, medical needs soar, while systems collapse. This year, the IHL Youth Action Campaign will raise awareness about the harm caused to the healthcare sector during armed conflicts and promote the laws of war that protect healthcare.

Healthcare facilities, providers, and those receiving treatment are deliberately targeted and caught in the crossfire. Providing safe access to healthcare and appropriate protections for healthcare systems and workers is an essential humanitarian concern.



The Impact of Armed Conflict on Health and Healthcare

Armed conflict causes irreparable harm to the healthcare sector. Not only are hospitals often targeted and destroyed, but medical personnel may be injured or killed, and patients may be unable to access treatment or without appropriate supplies/medicine.

Medical Personnel



Medical personnel face not only threats and intimidation, but also injury and death.

Medical personnel are often targeted, contributing to high rates of displacement and making it difficult for them to reach patients and provide essential care.

Healthcare Facilities



Both stationary and mobile healthcare facilities (mobile clinics, vehicles for transport and treatment, etc.) can be damaged, destroyed, or targeted during armed conflict. Attacks on these facilities can disrupt the delivery of essential medical services and limit access to care.

Patients



Patients may face inadequate or delayed care due to shortages of healthcare workers, medicines, and medical equipment. Unsafe and unsanitary conditions can also increase their risk of preventable diseases and illness.



Society



The effects of armed conflict extend beyond physical destruction, individual patients, and healthcare workers. Armed conflict can disrupt chronic disease management, increase maternal mortality and other health risks, and create long-term health consequences for communities. The loss and displacement of healthcare workers and other members of the workforce can further weaken communities and prolong the effects of conflict.

Key Statistics¹

- 3,623 overarching incidents against healthcare were recorded in 2024—15% more than 2023 and 62% more than 2022.
- 1,348 attacks on medical facilities, specifically, were reported in 2025, resulting in 1,981 deaths.
- Killings from attacks on healthcare increased from 249 in 2020 to 1,981 in 2025; injuries increased from 322 to 1,168.
- Between 2021 and 2025, 1,241 locally hired aid workers were killed, 1,006 injured, and 604 kidnapped, representing 98% of aid workers killed worldwide.
- Violence and threats against aid workers increased 70% in 2023 and 50% in 2024 compared against 2020 and 2020.

Defining Healthcare in Armed Conflict

The World Health Organization defines an attack on healthcare as any act of physical violence, verbal violence, obstruction, or threat of violence that interferes with the availability, access, or delivery of health services during an emergency.

So, it's not just a missile hitting a hospital.

If an army deliberately sets up a checkpoint to block an ambulance carrying life-saving vaccines, that is legally an attack on healthcare. The definition is intentionally wide because the harm — people not getting care when they need it — is the same regardless of the method.

History of Healthcare and Armed Conflict

Before Modern IHL

The grim reality of war without modern protection and healthcare was a state of suffering. There were no neutral zones, no protected vehicles, no guarantee that anyone would come for you when you went down. If you were wounded, your survival didn't depend on medicine — it depended on whether someone felt like picking you up. And most of the time? They didn't. You were left behind.

¹ Médecins Sans Frontières, “Attacks on Medical Care in Armed Conflict Reach Record Levels,” January 22, 2026.



Henry Dunant

After witnessing the Battle of Solferino in 1859 — where tens of thousands of soldiers were left dying on the field with no care — Dunant had a radical idea. He argued that saving lives requires a neutral, organized system, not random acts of charity. He proved that the moment a soldier is wounded, they are human beings first. Not an enemy.

Clara Barton

During the U.S. Civil War, Barton went to the front lines and nursed soldiers under fire, earning the name 'Angel of the Battlefield.' Her experience on the ground made one thing crystal clear: the United States needed a permanent, organized relief society capable of handling mass human suffering.

1864 Geneva Conventions

In 1864, twelve nations took Dunant's humanitarian vision and turned it into binding international law. For the first time, hospitals were legally declared neutral territory, and the Red Cross emblem became a protected symbol — not just a good idea, but a legal shield.

The First Geneva Convention of 1864 established the foundational obligation of states to protect the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field — a commitment now codified in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and ratified by 196 nations.

American Red Cross

In 1881, Clara Barton officially founded the American Red Cross, bringing these global protections home. Crucially, she also expanded the mission beyond wartime to include disaster relief — protecting human dignity in both conflict and peace.

Legal Frameworks

International Human Rights Law

Think of Human Rights Law as the permanent baseline. It operates at all times — in peace, in crisis, and in war. It doesn't switch off when a conflict starts.

Under instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, every person holds a fundamental right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being — including medical care, food, housing, and necessary social services, without distinction of race, religion, or political belief.

That creates a legal obligation for governments. In peacetime, a state has a duty to its people to provide access to these things. And critically, that duty doesn't simply disappear the moment war breaks out.





International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

IHL is the specialized set of rules that kick in during armed conflict. Think of it as the law of war. It's a combination of formal treaties — binding legal contracts between nations — and customary law, which are global standards so widely accepted that they bind even nations that haven't signed specific treaties.

IHL has exactly one mission: to limit suffering and draw a line that no army is legally permitted to cross. It regulates in precise detail what States, armies, and armed groups can and cannot do.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949, along with their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, form the backbone of International Humanitarian Law. They have been ratified by 196 states — making them among the most universally adopted legal instruments in history.

Three out of the four Geneva Conventions are specifically focused on protecting the sick, the wounded, and the people caring for them. This isn't incidental — healthcare protection is central to the entire architecture of the law of war.

Who is Protected?

At the core of IHL lies who and what is protected. Related to healthcare, there are three key groups, or 'protected statuses': The Wounded and Sick; Medical Personnel; and Medical Units.

The Wounded and Sick

Under the Geneva Conventions, 'the wounded and sick' means any individual needing medical assistance due to trauma, disease, or physical or mental disorder.

Critically, IHL does not discriminate it protects both civilian victims and wounded military combatants, regardless of which side they're fighting for. It also explicitly extends to expectant mothers and newborn children. This is a fundamental principle: medical need is the only criterion that matters. Not nationality. Not allegiance.

Important Distinction: *Combatants cannot receive protected medical care while they are still fighting. The moment they stop fighting, the rules change completely. The obligation to provide them care is then absolute.*

Under IHL, a wounded combatant must completely refrain from any acts of hostility to receive protected status. A soldier who is wounded but still firing a weapon or throwing a grenade remains a lawful military target. The legal shield only activates when that person has put down their weapon and become a patient.



Medical Personnel

Medical personnel are the people doing the saving, including both military and civilian medical personnel. This includes those involved in the search for, collection, transportation, diagnosis, or treatment of the wounded, sick, and shipwrecked, as well as those working to prevent disease or administer and operate medical units and medical transport.

Under Article 15 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, civilian medical personnel — including doctors, nurses, medics, and hospital administrators, both civilian and military — must be respected and protected at all times. They must be granted access to any location where their services are essential.

Important Distinction: Medical personnel must be exclusively engaged in medical purposes. Their only role in the conflict zone must be search and rescue, diagnosis, treatment, or disease prevention. The moment they step outside that role, their protected status is at risk.

Medical Units

Medical units consist of the physical facilities and spaces where care happens. The protection travels with the function, not with the building, meaning even mobile clinics and vehicles designated for treatment and transport are protected.

IHL states that medical units may, in no circumstances, be attacked. Beyond preventing bombings, the Conventions also prohibit 'requisition': an occupying army cannot seize a civilian hospital, steal its equipment, or compel its doctors to exclusively treat its own soldiers while the local civilian population still depends on those resources.

Important Distinction: Healthcare facilities may lose their protection only in limited circumstances, such as when they are used to commit acts harmful to the enemy. The act must aid a military force and create a direct threat. Importantly, the threat must be actual (not speculative); ongoing or imminent; and clearly military in nature. Examples may include, but are not limited to, storing offensive weapons, shielding military operations, or using the facility as a military base.

Impartiality and Neutrality

Within these 'protected statuses' and protections as a whole, lie two fundamental principles. The first is impartiality: we don't look at race, religion, nationality, or political party. We look only at who



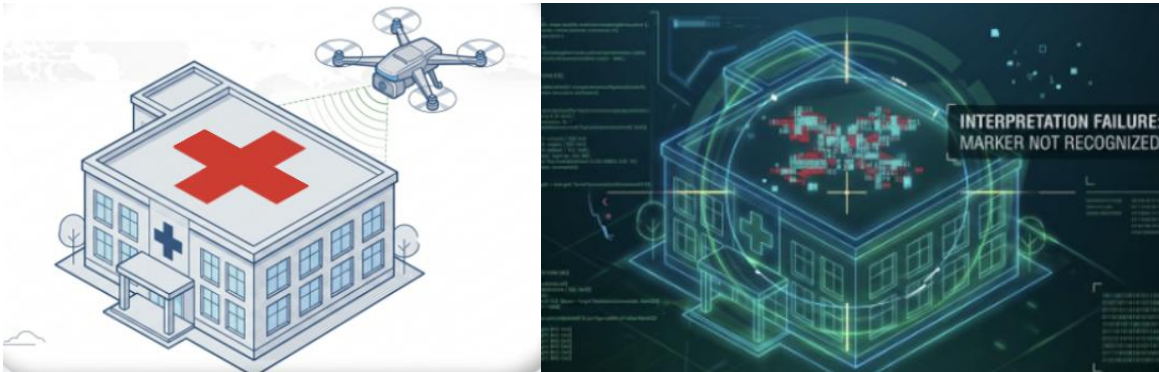
needs help most urgently. The second is neutrality: we don't take sides in the fighting, because that's the only way all parties will trust us enough to let us through the lines.

Whether you are a civilian, an ally, or an enemy — if you are sick or wounded, **you are a human being first**. That's not a slogan. **It's the law**.

Emerging Challenges

Cyber Warfare

Modern law has not kept pace with rapidly evolving technology, creating new challenges for the protection of medical units and protected emblems. For example, a human pilot flying over a conflict zone can look down, recognize a Red Cross emblem painted on a rooftop, and choose not to attack. An AI-driven autonomous system, or malware designed to disrupt critical infrastructure, cannot 'see' a physical flag. If a hospital power grid is taken out by a cyberattack, or its patient management system is encrypted by ransomware, people die just as surely as if the building had been bombed.



Note: The ICRC is developing a digital emblem to help address this gap and make protected medical services more recognizable in the digital environment. The emblem would use digital signals to identify protected medical services in cyberspace, transforming visibility from a beacon into a shield.

Disability

Conflict compounds vulnerability, placing people with disabilities at particular risk. People with disabilities may have reduced ability to flee, limited access to medical care, and disrupted support networks — including broken assistive devices, interrupted treatment, and destroyed community systems.

The legal response to this reality rests on three principles: care provided without adverse distinction, the parallel human rights obligation of equality and non-discrimination, and medical treatment based on clinical need with appropriate attention to individual circumstances.



The Future of Combat

Weapon Review

Under Article 36 of Additional Protocol I, states are legally required to review any new weapon, means, or method of warfare to determine whether its use would violate international law—including whether it causes unnecessary suffering or has indiscriminate effects.

The ICRC recommends that medical personnel be included in these review processes. The logic is simple: a military strategist evaluates a weapon for its effectiveness. A doctor sees something different—the specific, catastrophic ways weapons can destroy a human body. Medical personnel who have treated blast injuries, burn wounds, and fragmentation trauma bring knowledge to weapon review tables that no general can. They provide the human reality check on what international law can and cannot tolerate.

Module 4: Building Your Campaign

The IHL Youth Action Campaign (YAC) informs youth and young adults (ages 13-24) about the rules of armed conflict and empowers them to raise awareness in their community about International Humanitarian Law (IHL) through grassroots, youth-led campaigns.

IHL YAC Volunteer Roles

The IHL YAC Ambassador Trainee

Every participant begins their journey as an **IHL YAC Ambassador Trainee**. In this role, volunteers:

- Register for the campaign through Volunteer Connection.
- Complete the required training curriculum in EDGE.
- Build foundational knowledge of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the American Red Cross, and the annual campaign theme.
- Prepare to transition into the full Ambassador role.

IHL Youth Action Campaign Ambassador

After successfully completing all required training modules, volunteers become **IHL Youth Action Campaign Ambassadors**. As an Ambassador, you are responsible for:

- Planning and implementing an IHL Youth Action Campaign.
- Raising awareness about IHL and the annual theme.
- Conducting activities in each required campaign category.
- Reporting campaign activities and participant engagement.
- Logging volunteer hours.
- Completing an end-of-year Campaign Summary Report.
- Serving as a peer educator and advocate within your community.

IHL YAC Mentors

Every Ambassador is paired with an **IHL YAC Mentor**, an experienced youth or adult volunteer who provides guidance and support throughout the campaign year. Mentors help Ambassadors by:

- Answering questions.
- Reviewing campaign plans and ideas.
- Providing feedback on activities.
- Reviewing social media content and outreach materials.
- Connecting Ambassadors with resources.
- Helping solve challenges that may arise during campaign planning or implementation.

While Mentors provide support and guidance, Ambassadors remain responsible for completing their own campaign requirements and reporting obligations.

Collaborating with Others:

Although each Ambassador is responsible for completing their own campaign requirements, collaboration is encouraged. Ambassadors may work together on activities, events, and outreach efforts when appropriate. Working with others can help expand your campaign's reach, share responsibilities, and create more engaging experiences for participants.

For more information, consult the **Group Work Guidance** resource available in the Ambassador GroupShare.

Timeline

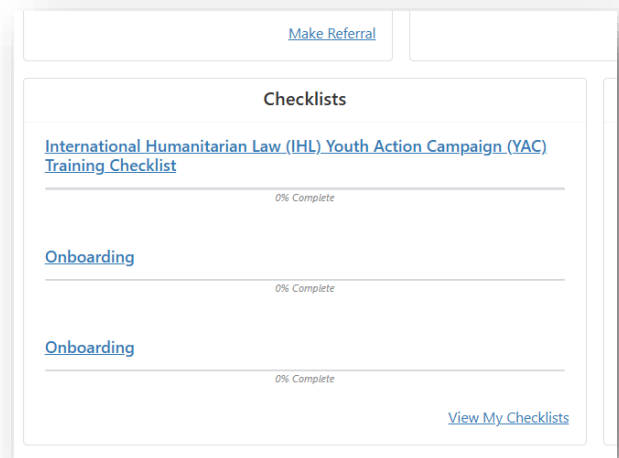


The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Youth Action Campaign is a year-long volunteer opportunity that begins with training and culminates in the opportunity to apply for the annual IHL Youth Summit. While every Ambassador's experience is unique, successful campaigns generally follow the same pathway. This section provides an overview of each step and highlights best practices for building a meaningful and impactful campaign.

Step 1: Register in Volunteer Connection

The first step is to register for the IHL YAC Ambassador Position through Volunteer Connection. Your application will be referred to the Volunteer screening team who will assign you the **IHL YAC Ambassador TRAINEE position**. Within 24hours, you will receive an email informing you that you have been assigned the **IHL YAC Training Checklist**, which can be found at the bottom of your Volunteer Connection Homepage.

Please keep in mind, every academic year that you participate in the program, you'll need to re-register yourself and complete the trainings, regardless of if you previously completed them in an earlier Campaign. This ensures that everyone receives the same, up-to-date information and that you start your campaign with refreshed knowledge.



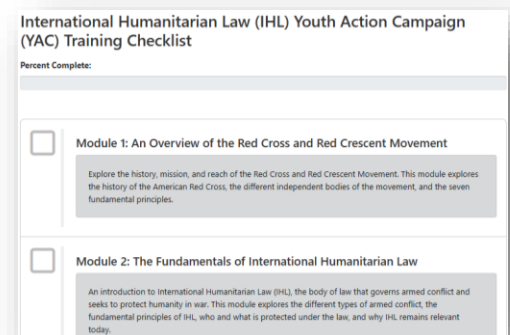
Step 2: Complete Training Modules

The next step is to complete the required training modules on the EDGE online learning platform.

To access the trainings, you can either go through your **Training Checklist** at the bottom of your Volunteer Connection Homepage or by selecting "EDGE" under your picture on the homepage. Once in EDGE, you can use the search bar to find the **IHL YAC Curriculum**. The curriculum will have a stack of books as the icon. **Please note: your training checklist will take 24hours to update following the completion of each training.**

The four training modules are:

1. **Module 1:** What is the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement?
2. **Module 2:** International Humanitarian Law Basics
3. **Module 3:** Healthcare and Armed Conflict (this year's theme!)
4. **Module 4:** Building Your IHL Youth Action Campaign



These trainings must be completed by **January 1st** to participate as a full IHL YAC Ambassador and earn a spot at the annual IHL Youth Summit in Washington, D.C.



Step 3: Connect With Your Mentor and Explore Campaign Resources

Once your training is complete, you will officially become an IHL Youth Action Campaign Ambassador. Your Volunteer Connection profile will be updated within 24hrs, you will gain access to the Ambassador GroupShare, and you will be paired with a YAC Mentor within a week.

Your mentor serves as your primary support person throughout the campaign. They can:

- Review outreach and social media materials.
- Connect you with additional resources.
- Answer questions.
- Provide feedback.
- Help troubleshoot challenges.

Explore Your Resource Hub: IHL YAC Ambassador GroupShare

The IHL YAC Ambassador GroupShare Files contains valuable resources, including:

- Campaign planning tools
- Activity guides
- Annual theme materials
- Social Media Guidance
- Tracking forms
- Campaign Summary information

Step 4: Build Your Campaign

This is where your campaign begins to take shape! The strongest campaigns start with a clear plan rather than jumping directly into events. Before scheduling activities, consider:

Identify Your Audience

- Who am I trying to reach?
- What does this audience already know about IHL?
- What format would be most engaging for them?

Possible audiences include:

- High school students
- College students
- Youth organizations
- Community groups
- Educators
- Friends and family members



Define Your Campaign Goals

Successful campaigns have specific goals. Examples include:

- Educating students about the annual theme
- Introducing IHL concepts to a new audience
- Increasing participation in humanitarian education
- Promoting awareness within a school or community

Remember that the overall purpose of every campaign is to raise awareness about IHL and the annual theme through community focused education.



Develop a Campaign Plan

The ***Building Your Campaign Outline*** resource available in GroupShare can help organize your ideas into a realistic action plan. Your campaign plan should outline:

- Target audience
- Activity ideas
- Event dates
- Required resources
- Promotion strategy
- Timeline for completion

Step 5: Conduct Your Campaign

Successful IHL YAC Campaigns are required to complete at least one activity in each of the following categories:

1. In-Person Event
2. Live Virtual Event
3. Promotional Material
4. Informational Material

Although only one from each category is required, the more, the better!

Category 1: In Person Activities

Your campaign should include at least one in-person event that incorporates the annual theme of Healthcare and Armed Conflict. **Examples:**

- Interacting Tabling
- Scavenger Hunt
- Movie Screening + Discussion
- Panel Discussion
- Conducting School Survey
- Game Series (Kahoot, Bingo, Puzzles, etc.)
- IHL Simulation Activities (Activity Guides are available to help guide you through this!)

Category 2: Live Virtual Activities

Live virtual activities are online gatherings where people can be educated about IHL through live activities where discussion can occur. Examples:

- Online Webinar/Presentation
- Virtual Guest Speaker
- Interactive Games or Activities

Or feel free to adapt any of the in-person activity examples to online formats!



Category 3: Promotional Material

To broaden the reach of your campaign events, use promotional materials like flyers, brochures, and social media platforms.

We encourage you to use our pre-approved branded materials through our **Brand Central** platform available on the **OneSource**. **Examples:**

- Putting up flyers on a bulletin board
- Messaging in your school newsletter
- Post reminders about events on social media

Category 4: Informational Materials

You can use existing flyers and pamphlets from the GroupShare or create informational materials through Brand Central using approved informational resources. Examples:

- Handing out physical flyers about IHL principles
- Posting creative videos talking about why IHL matters



Step 6: Track Your Progress

ALL campaign events, outreach, and engagement must be reported using the **Activity and Participant Log** found in the GroupShare. **Remember: if an activity is not tracked it does not count in your Campaign Summary report!**

Tracking your progress helps you and the Red Cross measure your community impact, capture participant engagement, document campaign accomplishments, and support end-of-year campaign summaries, recognition, and Summit Applications. Throughout your campaign, collect:

- Attendance numbers
- Activity descriptions
- Promotional materials
- Participant feedback
- Event photographs

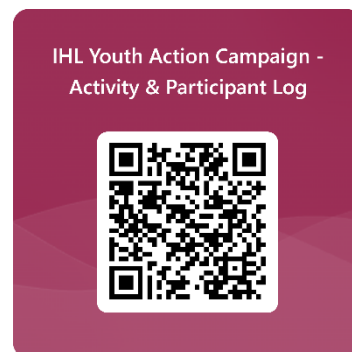
Photos are encouraged, but signed photo releases must be collected from anyone photographed.

What To Track:

- In-Person and Live Virtual Events: # of Active Participants
- Promotional and Informational Material: # of Posts

Step 7: Campaign Summary Projects and Youth Summit Application

Your final step is completing the Campaign Summary Report, due each year by May 1. The report allows you to share the story of your campaign, highlight your accomplishments, and reflect on your impact throughout the year.





The Campaign Summary Report also serves as the application for the annual IHL Youth Summit. To be considered for Summit selection, IHL YAC Ambassadors must:

- Maintain an active Volunteer Connection profile.
- Complete all required trainings.
- Complete at least one activity in each of the four campaign categories.
- Submit a Campaign Summary Report.

Additional factors that may be considered include:

- Volunteer hours logged
- Creativity of campaign activities
- Engagement throughout the year
- Overall campaign impact
- Years of participation in the program
- References from YAC Mentors

The Annual IHL Youth Summit

The Annual International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Youth Summit is the culminating event of the IHL Youth Action Campaign year and one of the highest honors within the program. Each spring, a select group of outstanding IHL YAC Ambassadors from around the world is chosen by a panel of Red Cross professionals to participate in this prestigious hybrid, multi-week experience. Through collaboration, interactive learning, and engagement with experts, participants deepen their understanding of IHL while strengthening their leadership, advocacy, and professional skills.

The program concludes with a fully funded, in-person experience at Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., where Ambassadors connect with peers, Red Cross senior leaders, and professionals working at the intersection of humanitarian law, government, and policy. United by a shared passion for IHL, participants leave the Summit with expanded networks, valuable insights into the role of IHL in the United States and around the world, and renewed inspiration to advance humanitarian principles in their communities.



Have Fun!

While meeting requirements is important, the most rewarding campaigns are those that allow you to explore an issue you care about, engage your community, and grow as a humanitarian leader. Be creative, take advantage of available resources, connect with other Ambassadors, and use your campaign as an opportunity to make IHL meaningful and accessible to others.