



**American
Red Cross**

**Int'l Humanitarian Law
Youth Action Campaign**

An Introduction to Journalism and Armed Conflict

This presentation by the American Red Cross discussed next year's topic for the International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign (IHL YAC).

Tuesday, July 8, 2025, 8:00 - 9:00 PM ET

Written by: Emina Catic

SUMMARY: The American Red Cross hosted its 2025-2026 International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign (IHL YAC) Curriculum Reveal, where it revealed that the topic will be Journalism and Armed Conflict. Speakers Madison Menard, Charlsie Doan, and Leena Alsayab discussed the role of journalists in times of armed conflict, the different protections received by different types of journalists under IHL, and their Prisoner of War (POW) status if captured. Participants learned how IHL applies to journalism and the media in conflict with real-world instances and interactive Q&A scenarios.

The American Red Cross announces the topic for IHL YAC for the 2025-2026 year is Journalism in Armed Conflict. With the media constantly changing, it has become increasingly important for nations to unite and define the protections of journalists reporting to the world on a large scale. To endorse their work, international collaboration and adherence to established rules and legislation are crucial.

In every major conflict, from the battlefields of ancient Rome to modern-day war zones, journalists have been on the front lines: not with dangerous weapons, but with pens and cameras. While war correspondents have just recently been recognized as a profession, their foundations trace back centuries, with documentation of conflict proving essential for public awareness and engagement. In America, the rise of journalism played a crucial role in the victory of the Revolutionary War, as colonists

were informed of the war's progress and any updates regarding the conflict, thereby increasing overall morale and unifying public sentiment (Morris, 2007). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the presence of reporters in war zones only increased, emphasizing the need for clear legal protections as journalists experienced life-threatening encounters and continued to risk their lives to report the truth to the people.

The growing role of journalists in armed conflict eventually prompted the development of formal protections under IHL. Initially, journalists were given general civilian protections under the 1949 Geneva Conventions. However, as their work in conflict zones became more prominent and more dangerous, additional measures were taken. In 1977, Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions explicitly recognized war correspondents as civilians accompanying armed forces, granting them protection from attack and prisoner-of-war (POW) status if captured (Hessel, 2005). In 2005, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) established that journalists are not to be targeted, maintaining civilian status, as long as they do not engage in hostilities (2017). These developments reflect a broader commitment to preserving the flow of independent information during conflict, reinforcing that protecting journalists is essential not only for their safety, but for transparency and humanitarian accountability.

In the webinar, speakers Madison Menard, Charlsie Doan, and Leena Alsayab addressed the Red Cross's mission to uphold the IHL principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, and more. They applied them to journalism in armed conflict. They provided further detail, addressing the three types of journalists that IHL defines, as well as their civilian and POW status during times of conflict. Their engaging presentation presented real-life scenarios and asked questions for the viewers to interact with and answer, clarifying the distinction between the status given to journalists and war correspondents, among other topics. Now, with the rise of digital literacy and media in the 21st century, defining the rules of war has become increasingly prominent, and it is essential for the youth to be made aware of these rules. The members of the American Red Cross IHL YAC will continue to create campaigns in regions worldwide to increase public awareness of this pressing issue and highlight the Red Cross's ongoing efforts to help while upholding its principles.

Warm Regards,

International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign Summit Representatives

References

Hessel, D. J. (2005). *Humanitarian accountability and the protection of journalists*. Yale Law School

Legal Scholarship Repository. <https://openyls.law.yale.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9aab61a-2009-4963-a4e9-4b36a8d254a4/content>

International Committee of the Red Cross. (2017). *The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*. Médecins

Sans Frontières. <https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/journalists/#:~:text=Protection%20of%20Journalists%20within%20the,are%20considered%20prisoners%20of%20war>.

International Committee of the Red Cross. (n.d.). *Protection of journalists*. ICRC Casebook.

<https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/protection-journalists>

Morris, R., Jr. (2007, February). *The Pen & the Sword: A Brief History of War Correspondents*. Warfare

History Network. <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/the-pen-the-sword-a-brief-history-of-war-correspondents/>