American Red Cross Holds Speaker Session with ICRC Delegates for the 2026 International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign (IHL YAC) Summit

IHL YAC Summit Representatives attended a presentation held by ICRC delegates in administrative, legal, and communications backgrounds to learn about the origin and applications of IHL in relation to the Red Cross and ICRC.

July 28th, 2026, 3:00 - 4:00 PM EST
Written by: Shruthi Sankuratri

On Tuesday, July 28th, International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign (IHL YAC) Summit Representatives invited ICRC delegates Lucas Keene, Austin Shangraw, and Steve Dorsey to discuss the events leading up to the founding of the Red Cross and the roles of the major organizations which formed shortly afterwards, with a special focus on actions taken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) during armed conflict. Keene explained that IHL is a set of rules that aims to limit the suffering caused by armed conflict, and that its standards are put in place via actions taken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and Red Cross National Societies. All three speakers emphasized that, while each of these bodies carry out the duties of the Red Cross, they are obligated to do so at varying organizational levels. The ICRC is primarily concerned with providing aid for those affected by armed conflict, whereas the IFRC is a collection of National Societies that directs its focus towards disaster preparedness and relief coordination. The National Societies, in comparison, are individually tasked with disseminating information about IHL throughout local communities and other public spaces. Together, these three bodies maintain the spread of information about the Red Cross and IHL while simultaneously providing humanitarian aid and advocacy for those suffering through armed conflict.

As explained by Dorsey, one especially important quality of the ICRC is its ability to facilitate confidential bilateral dialogue between governing bodies. In this type of negotiation, ICRC delegates are tasked with maintaining private communications between groups to alleviate tension and come to a mutual agreement away from the threat of public scrutiny. This applies to evaluations of high-risk conflict zones for compliance with IHL, such as detention centers, prisoner-of-war (POW) camps, and areas of severe political instability. When confidential bilateral dialogue fails, it is the ICRC's responsibility to denounce these bodies and speak out on behalf of affected populations. This support extends past basic humanitarian initiatives, and often branches out towards legal action and collaboration with the media to ensure that human suffering is at a minimum during conflict. The ICRC is a multifaceted organization, and as explained by Dorsey, Shangraw, and Keene, the legal, communicative, and administrative roles taken up by those working within the ICRC are all necessary in order to maintain this standard of practice.

Together, the ICRC, IFRC, and National Red Cross Societies work to protect civilian lives, assist victims of armed conflict via relief and supplies, prevent potential conflict between states, and cooperate with other organizations in order to provide aid to those in need. Their functions lie primarily with supplying aid, healthcare, and protection, ensuring that all measures have been taken to either reduce or prevent the effects of armed conflict, and bringing information to the public to allow for transparency and visibility. On an individual level, speakers also placed emphasis on improving public awareness of IHL and creating opportunities for engaging in media literacy, as widespread recognition of IHL is crucial for bringing attention to actions taken by the ICRC and Red Cross during armed conflict.

Knowledge of the ICRC's functions sets the foundation for advocates to uphold the principles of these organizations, prompting them to carry the Red Cross' humanitarian mission into the future. By learning how the ICRC translates its initiatives into action, IHL YAC advocates will be prepared to offer aid while simultaneously spreading the core principles of the Red Cross throughout their communities.

Warm Regards,
International Humanitarian Law Youth Action Campaign Summit Representatives

SYNOPSIS: During the IHL YAC Youth Summit in Washington, D.C., speakers Steve Dorsey, Austin Shangraw, and Lucas Keene were invited to discuss the history of the Red Cross and the role of the ICRC in providing humanitarian aid during armed conflict. They explained the various responsibilities of the three major Red Cross organizational bodies (ICRC, IFRC, and National Societies) and went into detail regarding the various scenarios in which IHL applies, allowing Summit Representatives to develop their understanding of IHL and connect their knowledge to potential armed conflict scenarios.