WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW?

“Even wars have limits”. The message of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for almost 160 years. International humanitarian law (IHL), also known as the law of war, is a set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian reasons. It protects people who are not participating in hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. IHL is about protecting people from the worst of the wars that rage today in Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan and so many other countries. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 are the most universally ratified treaties in the world.

WHAT are the sources of IHL?
• Internal reporting from the field
• Reports submitted to parties to conflicts
• Internal discussions
• Legal analysis and interpretation
• Minutes of expert workshops
• Minutes of internal and external meetings
• Minutes of diplomatic conferences
• Treaties
• Correspondence with states, parties to conflict, academics, civil society, etc.
• Publications intended for distribution
• The International Review of the Red Cross
• Academic publications
• Other ICRC publications
• Pictures and videos

WHO consults these sources?
• ICRC staff
• Lawyers
• Academics
• Government representatives
• Members of the judiciary
• Armed forces personnel
• Members of non-state armed groups
• Humanitarian practitioners
• Students
• Journalists
• Civil society staff and volunteers

HOW is IHL created and developed?
The IHL “circle of life”
Consequences of warfare and humanitarian problems on the ground -> (Legal) ideas to address them -> Debates, reflection, expert workshops -> Diplomatic conference, new treaty -> Signature, ratification, transposition into national legislation -> Dissemination -> Application, implementation in the field -> Interpretation -> Debate on interpretation and application

The ICRC archives and library:
• constitute a unique tool for understanding the history of IHL, what happened in past conflicts and the extent to which parties complied with IHL
• help us remember and pay tribute to those who benefited from these treaties, and also to the victims of failure to comply with them
• feed into and inform the current practice of IHL
• remind us of the protection to which people are entitled under IHL, and the duties of everyone involved in war.

WHY do archival resources matter so much?
• Internal reporting from the field
• Reports submitted to parties to conflicts
• Internal discussions
• Legal analysis and interpretation
• Minutes of expert workshops
• Minutes of internal and external meetings
• Minutes of diplomatic conferences
• Treaties
• Correspondence with states, parties to conflict, academics, civil society, etc.
• Publications intended for distribution
• The International Review of the Red Cross
• Academic publications
• Other ICRC publications
• Pictures and videos

• ICRC staff
• Lawyers
• Academics
• Government representatives
• Members of the judiciary
• Armed forces personnel
• Members of non-state armed groups
• Humanitarian practitioners
• Students
• Journalists
• Civil society staff and volunteers

• The ICRC archives and library:
• constitute a unique tool for understanding the history of IHL, what happened in past conflicts and the extent to which parties complied with IHL
• help us remember and pay tribute to those who benefited from these treaties, and also to the victims of failure to comply with them
• feed into and inform the current practice of IHL
• remind us of the protection to which people are entitled under IHL, and the duties of everyone involved in war.