

What are the basic rules of international humanitarian law?

| DISTINCTION | TREATMENT | WEAPONS AND TACTICS | SPECIFIC PROTECTION |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p>When planning or carrying out an attack, distinction must be made between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attacking civilians is prohibited. 2. Attacking civilian objects (houses, hospitals, schools, places of worship, cultural or historic monuments, etc.) is prohibited. 3. Before an attack, every possible precaution must be taken to minimize the potential harm to civilians and civilian objects. 4. The use of weapons that are not able to distinguish between civilians and military targets is prohibited. | <p>Civilians and combatants who are <i>hors de combat</i> must be protected and treated humanely.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Murder, torture, and cruel or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited. 2. Sexual violence is prohibited. 3. Forced displacement of civilians is prohibited. 4. Starving civilians is prohibited. 5. Using human shields to protect military objectives is prohibited. 6. Wounded, sick or shipwrecked enemy combatants must be searched for, collected and cared for. There should be no preferential treatment, except on medical grounds. 7. Captured civilians and enemy combatants must be given adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical care and must be allowed to correspond with their families. 8. Everyone must receive a fair trial. | <p>The only legitimate objective of war is to weaken the enemy's military forces.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The use of weapons that cause unnecessary suffering is prohibited. 2. Taking hostages is prohibited. 3. Killing or wounding a surrendering enemy is prohibited. 4. Ordering or threatening that there shall be no survivors is prohibited. 5. Pretending to be a civilian while fighting is prohibited. 6. Destroying objects necessary for the survival of civilians (foodstuffs, farming areas, drinking water installations, etc.) is prohibited. 7. Attacking medical and religious personnel and objects lawfully using the red cross/red crescent/red crystal emblem is prohibited. 8. Misusing the red cross/red crescent/red crystal emblem is prohibited. | <p>Certain categories of people and objects must receive additional protection.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruiting or using children under the age of 15 in armed conflict is prohibited. 2. Medical personnel and facilities (hospitals, clinics, ambulances, etc.) as well as religious personnel must be respected and protected. 3. Humanitarian relief personnel, supplies and operations must be respected and protected. 4. Cultural property must be respected and protected. 5. The specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected. |

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DEFINITIONS

civilian: any person who is not a combatant

When civilians take a direct part in fighting, they lose their protection from attack. (When there is any doubt about a person's status, he or she shall be considered to be a civilian.)

civilian object: any object that is not a military objective

When a civilian object is used in support of military action, it becomes a legitimate military target and loses its protection. (When there is any doubt about whether a civilian object is in fact being used in support of military action, it shall be considered to be a civilian object.)

combatant: member of armed forces, member of an armed group under the orders of a party to the conflict

military objective: object which by its nature, location, purpose or use makes an effective contribution to military action and whose destruction offers a definite military advantage

hors de combat: literally means 'out of the fight' and describes combatants who have been captured or wounded or who are sick or shipwrecked and thus are no longer in a position to fight

principle of proportionality: the expected number of deaths or injuries to civilians or damage to civilian objects must not be excessive compared to the anticipated military advantage