

# Reducing Suffering During Conflict

## The Interface Between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

International Conference of The International Committee of the Red Cross

Location: Dambulla, Sri Lanka

Date: 4–6 September 2019

### First Circular Announcement

The conference webpage is at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/reducing-suffering-during-conflict-interface-between-buddhism-and-international>. It includes details of the conference (partly reproduced below), and at its end, downloadable pdfs of these details and of a Position Paper written by a group of Buddhist Studies scholars.

Though there are over half a billion Buddhists around the world, there has so far been no systematic and focused study of the interface between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The core of IHL—also known as “the law of war” or “the law of armed conflict”—is formed by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. Its purpose is to minimize suffering during armed conflict by protecting those who do not – or no longer – participate directly in hostilities, and by regulating the means and methods of warfare.

Buddhism has grappled with the reality of war throughout its long history. But what guidance does Buddhism provide to those caught up in the midst of hostilities, and how do Buddhism and IHL compare in this respect? It is timely and relevant to explore these two distinct bodies of ethics and legal traditions from inter-disciplinary perspectives.

This conference, organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in collaboration with a number of universities and organizations, will explore correspondences between Buddhism and IHL and encourage a constructive dialogue and exchange between the two domains. The conference will act as a springboard to understanding how Buddhism can contribute to regulating armed conflict, and what it offers in terms of guidance on the conduct of, and behavior during, war for Buddhist monks and lay persons – the latter including government and military personnel, non-State armed groups and civilians. The conference is concerned with the conduct of armed conflict, and *not* with the reasons and justifications for it, which fall outside the remit of IHL.

In addition to exploring correspondences between IHL and Buddhist ethics, the conference will also explore how Buddhist combatants and communities understand IHL, and where it might align with

Buddhist doctrines and practices: similarly, how their experience of armed conflict might be drawn upon to better promote IHL and Buddhist principles, thereby improving conduct of hostilities on the ground.

Papers presented at the conference must address at least one of the following lead questions:

1. What correspondences are there between Buddhist ethics and IHL?
2. Where does IHL fit into Buddhist doctrines and practices? Which Buddhist teachings and traditions are most relevant to IHL and situations of armed conflict?
3. What measures are helpful in regulating warfare and reducing suffering during armed conflict according to Buddhist teachings and traditions?
4. How do Buddhist communities conceptualize and understand IHL, and where can IHL be seen to align with Buddhist doctrines and practices?
5. What level of agreement and commitment for IHL – in general, and its various specific aspects – can be expected from Buddhist communities? What is a Buddhist theoretical position on IHL and how can Buddhists engage with this body of law?
6. What practical guidance and resources can Buddhist teaching and practice provide to Buddhist combatants and communities involved in armed conflict, and also what direct experiences of armed conflict can be drawn upon to help improve the conduct of hostilities?
7. To examine and document Buddhist religious teaching, practices and approaches to specific IHL-related problems such as the handling and treatment of casualties and dead bodies during armed conflict, and the treatment of prisoners of war/detainees.
8. To examine how the application of Buddhist principles has had a positive effect on the conduct of armed conflict in Buddhist history.

Note that abstracts on the reasons and justifications for war, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, mediation, conflict resolution, post-conflict reconciliation and identity politics fall outside the remit of Buddhism as it relates to IHL, and will *not* be accepted. Otherwise, this conference aims to generate a positive spirit of understanding and cooperation between diverse participants for the promotion of IHL and Buddhist principles which might minimize suffering in armed conflict situations.

A number of respected Buddhist scholars are working with the ICRC to produce a first exploratory position Paper on Buddhism and IHL that attempts to explore some of the territory to be covered in

terms of topic, sources and approaches, in such a way as to familiarize readers with some of the existing coverage and potential themes and questions that they might address. This and other documents related to the content and arrangement on the conference will be refreshed on this page in the coming weeks and months.

Should researchers remain in doubt about the exact focus of the conference – which is entirely understandable given that this subject matter has rarely, if ever, been tackled before – please do not hesitate to contact us (see below).

The organizers look forward to receiving abstracts of 200–300 words together with extended abstracts of 1000 words and a brief CV of not more than one page of A4 from researchers and professionals of all relevant disciplines. In addition to Buddhist and legal scholars, for example, candidates might also include active or former combatants, military personnel or other professionals. Presentations at the conference will last 20 to 30 minutes, followed by a short period for questions.

The main working languages for the conference (and of the papers submitted) will be English and Sinhala, although papers in other languages, including Thai, Burmese and Tamil, can also be accommodated (please enquire for further details). Simultaneous translation will be arranged by the organizers at the conference.

Please send your abstracts, extended abstracts and brief one-page CV by email to Mr. Budi Hernawan at [bhernawan@icrc.org](mailto:bhernawan@icrc.org) by **25 April 2019**.

Further enquiries concerning the content/academic aspects of the conference, requirements for submissions and other more practical matters should be addressed to:

Mr. Sylvester Worthington at [syworthington@icrc.org](mailto:syworthington@icrc.org), office: (+94)112503346 ext.118, mobile (+94)772268290 (for Sinhala speakers and those in Sri Lanka).

Mr. Budi Hernawan at [bhernawan@icrc.org](mailto:bhernawan@icrc.org) (for those in South and Southeast Asia)

Mr. Andrew Bartles-Smith at [anbartlessmith@icrc.org](mailto:anbartlessmith@icrc.org) (for those elsewhere).

The ICRC and its network of Buddhist and IHL experts will then endeavour to assist.

The organizers intend to secure travel allowances for selected participants who have no academic affiliation or are unable to cover their travel costs. Accommodation will be provided for all accepted speakers. In the abstract, please indicate whether you would like to apply for a travel allowance.

The ICRC is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavors to reduce suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. For more information on the ICRC, please check our website.