TENTATIVE CONCEPT NOTE

Upholding International Humanitarian Law as a Foundation for Peace in Africa

Friday 23rd October 2026, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

A. Introduction

Across the world, armed conflicts are rising at a record high with no end in sight. Africa accounts for about 40% of all armed conflicts worldwide, according to data from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Conflicts are lasting longer, becoming harder to resolve and are increasingly deadly for civilians who bear the brunt of their devastating consequences. Efforts to resolve conflicts are faced with deeply divided global dynamics that continue to fuel instability.

Conflict trends in Africa continue to evolve alongside broader shifts in the global peace and security landscape, including the growing diversity of armed actors, the increasing relevance of digital and cyber domains, and changing geopolitical dynamics. These developments underscore the importance of further strengthening Africa's collective capacities for early warning, preventive diplomacy, mediation and peacebuilding. Across regions including the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes, they provide an opportunity to reinforce African ownership and leadership in addressing the root causes of conflict and advancing sustainable peace.

Building on Africa's rich experience in mediation and dialogue and its established peace and security architecture, there is significant scope to further strengthen early action, inclusive dialogue and African-led peace processes. Greater coherence between conflict prevention, protection of civilians, respect for international humanitarian law and peacebuilding can further contribute to creating conditions conducive to sustainable peace and advancing the shared objective of silencing the gun.

B. How International Humanitarian Law Can Provide a Pathway to Sustainable Peace Internationally.

In this context, preventing and ending human suffering requires a renewed investment in international cooperation, conflict prevention and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) remains a crucial and strategic investment in peace time. It plays a crucial indirect role in paving a path out of war towards peace by:

- reducing harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, enabling societies to rebuild more quickly when hostilities end.
- fostering a minimum of trust between parties, keeping channels of dialogue open even in the harshest moments.
- preventing cycles of revenge, atrocities, and trauma that can undermine long-term stability and,
- supporting post-conflict recovery by addressing the legacy of violence through obligations related to missing people, detainees, the dead and explosive remnants of war.

In a nutshell, IHL reduces human suffering, sustains essential services, limits environmental degradation and preserves the social fabric on which recovery, reconciliation and long-term stability depend. Respect for IHL, combined with a commitment to return to peace, is the only path to reducing the financial burden resulting from the magnitude of humanitarian needs witnessed in today's conflict.

Preserving pathways to peace must remain a deliberate objective that informs decision-making at all levels. This requires ensuring that the legal, institutional and operational systems necessary to fulfil IHL obligations remain functional before a conflict breaks out, throughout hostilities, and during transitions toward peace. A path to peace is lost when parties to a conflict fail to preserve human dignity and humanity.

In this regard, in September 2024 a global campaign "Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law", a multilateral project was launched by six states (Brazil, China, France, Jordan, Kazakhstan, and South Africa) and the ICRC. The Initiative has since generated significant momentum, with more than 118 States having joined by August 2026, reflecting a broadening global commitment to strengthening respect for and implementation of IHL.

The initiative involves both political mobilization and legal technical consultations on the most pressing concerns of IHL. The technical consultation is undertaken across seven different workstreams (thematic areas). One of the workstreams, the IHL and Peace workstream (officially Workstream 3) examines the mechanisms of the rules of war is a practical tool for building long-term peace**,** rather than just rules to be applied during wartime. The workstream is co-led by Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The IHL and Peace workstream fundamentally demonstrates that IHL and peace go hand in hand by showing how a war is fought, directly dictates how easily it can be ended, and sustainable peace is achieved**.** If a conflict is defined by the destruction of schools, hospitals, and or direct attacks on civilians, the generational hatred that results makes post-war reconciliation almost impossible. To ensure sustainable reconciliation, investment in IHL in peace time plays a crucial role.

C. Objectives

- To raise awareness of the role of IHL in enhancing lasting peace
- To mobilize African states to and reinvigorate respect to IHL including investing in it in peace time
- To draw AU member State's attention to implement the recommendations of the Consultations of Global IHL initiative on the IHL and peace workstream by identifying concrete actions to be considered at national, regional and continental level.

D. Expected Outcome of the event

- Enhance awareness on the role of IHL in peace while ensuring the protection of civilians, humanity and dignity.
- Member States have drawn to invest in IHL in peace time and enhance their institutional capacity
- Sensitize on the Global IHL initiative and the recommendations of IHL and peace workstream

E. Target Audience

The Tana forum draws a mix of high-level decision-makers on peace and security drawn from the governmental spheres (Heads of States and Governments, AU organs, and RECs), non-African regional institutions (UN, EU), International organization, Diplomatic community, the African private sector and civil society networks, and scholars and practitioners of peace and security.

The event will:

a. ...

Expected Outputs

a. ...

Format

The Policy and Expert Roundtable will allow key speakers to provide a 15-minute input on the topic, after which the moderator will facilitate a discussion that incorporates participants' views and engages the speakers.

Duration

2 hours

Language

English