

From the Field to Political Forums: Strengthening the Application of International Humanitarian Law to Guarantee Access to Healthcare

International Humanitarian Law (IHL), in particular the Geneva Conventions, establishes clear obligations to protect civilians and ensure access to healthcare during armed conflict. However, humanitarian organizations working on the ground face growing difficulties in ensuring that these norms are respected. The politicization of aid, insecurity, access restrictions, and the erosion of respect for IHL increasingly undermine the ability of populations to receive essential healthcare.

This session aims to highlight how violations of humanitarian law directly hinder access to healthcare for conflict-affected populations. Humanitarian practitioners working in crisis settings will share testimonies from the field, describing a situation many consider unprecedented since the Second World War.

Building on these field perspectives, the discussion will revisit the core principles of international humanitarian law and explore current initiatives designed to strengthen the protection of patients, healthcare workers, and medical facilities.

The session will also promote several key initiatives, including:

- The Global Initiative to Galvanize Political Commitment to International Humanitarian Law led by the International Committee of the Red Cross;
- RIAH – Researching the Impact of Attacks on Healthcare, which examines the consequences of attacks on healthcare systems;
- The CHH–Lancet Commission on Health, Conflict and Forced Displacement, which studies health systems and access to care in contexts of conflict and displacement.

As the depositary city of the Geneva Conventions, Geneva holds a particular responsibility to foster this debate.



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