



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Ivan Jurkovič, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer
of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the
33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
Geneva, 11 December 2019

Madame President,

The Holy See Delegation is honored and grateful to take the floor on the occasion of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and recognizes the outstanding contributions of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the protection of the most vulnerable.

That minimum protection of the dignity of every person, which ought to be guaranteed with great vigilance through the implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL), is all too often violated in the name of so-called military necessity or political demands. Such progressive erosion and piecemeal compliance with IHL are alarming, as the globalization of indifference to the sufferings of others, seems to be the new normal.

Madame President,

The Holy See wishes to reaffirm the importance it gives to international humanitarian law and urges everyone to respect its norms in every circumstance, clarifying and reinforcing IHL in light of the new realities of conflicts where appropriate, especially with regard to non-international armed conflicts and to the protection of persons deprived of freedom.

Preserving the centrality of the human person and his/her dignity, safeguarding the basic principles of humanity and defending the supreme value of life, should remain firm before our consciences. In this regard, I have the honor to share two formal commitments that the Holy See is pledging to carry out during the next four years:

- 1) To continue to promote initiatives for the ongoing formation of Catholic military chaplains in international humanitarian law;
- 2) To foster greater awareness of the ethical foundation of international humanitarian law and to promote its further development in relation to the protection of humanitarian workers, civilian religious personnel and places of worship in the context of armed conflicts, especially those involving non-State armed actors.

Madame President,

The 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a small but significant step in building mutual trust and fraternity among peoples, invites us to look anew at our shared humanity and common destiny. Regrettably, it has been proven, time and time again, that law by itself is not sufficient to eradicate conflicts and violence.

In this regard, Pope Francis has highlighted the need to reject the temptation of viewing the “other” merely as an enemy to be destroyed and has urged everyone “never to tire of remembering that even amid the devastations of war and conflict every person is immensely sacred”.¹ This Delegation deems it opportune to recall the enduring relevance of the Martens Clause. Indeed, that which is not prohibited by law is not therefore automatically acceptable. Thus, “where humanitarian

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Fifth International Course of Formation of Catholic Military Chaplains on International Humanitarian Law, 31 October 2019.

law presents hesitations and omissions, may individual consciences be able to acknowledge the moral duty to respect and protect the dignity of the human person in every circumstance.”²

Madame President,

This is particularly important when we consider how new technologies and artificial intelligence are being weaponized. For instance, how would fully autonomous weapons systems be able to respond to the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience? Removing human agency as the fundamental reference from the moral equation is problematic, not only from the point of view of ethics, but also from the foundation of law, including IHL. Indeed, the application of rules and principles of IHL requires prudential judgment in the timely interpretation and understanding of particular contexts and situations that are not programmable, for which the human person is irreplaceable.³

Madame President,

The Holy See appeals to the international community to remain vigilant and tireless in calling attention to the needs of people who find themselves in the midst of humanitarian crises, including protracted and forgotten situations. At the same time, it is equally urgent, on the basis of our shared humanity and dignity in the search for integral human development, to address the root causes of the many problems affecting our interconnected world.

Thank you.

² Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the Conference on International Humanitarian Law, 28 October 2017.

³ Statement of the Holy See to the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, 26 March 2019.