



***National Assembly***

***Remarks during the Inter-Parliamentary Union General Assembly  
General Debate***

**BY**

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ASSEMBLY**

**ON THE OCCASSION**

**OF**

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***“Upholding Humanitarian Norms and Supporting Humanitarian Action in Times of Crisis”***

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**Your Excellency, Dr. Tulia Ackson, President of the IPU**

**Honourable Speakers of Parliaments**

**Your Excellency, Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the IPU**

**Honourable Members of Parliaments**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps**

**Representatives of Civil Society Organisations and the Press**

**Members of the IPU Staff**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my distinct honour to address this August House on this important discussion as we take stock of what we (collectively) have accomplished in setting limits on warfare to protect civilians 76 years since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions. It is only befitting that this discussion is taking place in Geneva, the birth place of the visionary Henry Dunant, the founding father of international humanitarian law. May we continue to be inspired and guided by his humanitarian spirit.

Namibia's historical experience, shaped by a prolonged liberation struggle, informs our understanding of the long-term implications of armed conflict and the necessity of maintaining humanitarian standards in all circumstances.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their three Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, are international treaties that constitute the cornerstone of International

Humanitarian Law. Their key objective is to limit the effects of armed conflict and facilitate a return to peace, by imposing restrictions on the conduct of hostilities.

Specifically, they prohibit attacks against civilians and civilian objects as well as regulate the means and methods of warfare. Moreover, the Geneva Conventions protect people who are not, or are no longer, participating in hostilities, these include civilians, medical personnel, including hospitals, members of humanitarian organisations or journalists, *amongst others*.

Since attaining independence in 1990, Namibia has ratified key instruments of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols. These commitments are reflected in our domestic legal framework, notably the Geneva Conventions Act 15 of 2003. Namibia is also a party to the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. These instruments guide our national policies and legislative efforts aimed at protecting civilians and ensuring accountability for violations.

Parliaments serve as essential institutions in the implementation of international humanitarian law. In Namibia, the National Assembly has enacted legislation to safeguard the rights of refugees, criminalize war crimes, and reinforce mechanisms for legal accountability

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

This discussion is taking place at a time when global politics is marred by raging military conflicts and increasing attacks on multilateralism. More than a hundred military conflicts are ongoing worldwide, causing immense destruction and suffering to millions of civilian populations. Given this backdrop, the Geneva Conventions are more relevant today as they did a couple of decades ago since 1949.

They are living instruments that remain relevant and effective in preserving our shared humanity to protect victims of war, amongst others. These treaties need us acting in our individual capacity and as collective international community to give effect to their provisions.

One of the greatest threats to the effectiveness of the Geneva Conventions is the flagrant disrespect and disregard for international law and international humanitarian law, particularly by some of the most influential members of the United Nations. We are witnessing with concern, a shift from commitment to multilateralism to unilateralism, mainly in pursuit of interests of individual nations.

A good case in point here is the Gaza crisis where international humanitarian organisations could not deliver life-serving aid, including medicines, food, and water to the people of Gaza, not because of the ineffectiveness of international humanitarian law, but because aid was deliberately blocked from entering Gaza, a blatant violation of the principles of the fourth Geneva Convention.

Furthermore, economic sanctions and embargoes on nations such as Cuba and Venezuela restrict access to essential services, disrupt development efforts, and jeopardize the basic livelihoods of affected populations.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is for this reason, that we have been demanding for the reform of the current multilateral system to make it more responsive to current and future challenges facing humanity.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has confirmed that all states have legal obligations under international law in respect of climate change and climate-related crises and environmental threats which also threaten human security.

There is a need for the international community to deliver on their obligations under the Paris Agreement. There is a need for States to align their activities according to the preventative principle and to observe the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Moreover, the fourth Geneva Convention provides for the protection of women and children against any form of indecent assault. Regrettably, sexual violence against women and girls during armed conflict is rampant – making it one of the top challenges to the full implementation of the Geneva Conventions. This regrettable trend accentuates the urgent need for political will to uphold the Geneva Conventions to relieve the plight of women and children in particular during armed conflicts. The surge in sexual violence has, to a large extent, been enabled by growing impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of such violations. Therefore, we have the collective duty to fight against impunity and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

**Dear Colleagues,**

Parliaments have a crucial role to play in ensuring the full respect and effective implementation of international humanitarian law by, *inter alia*, adopting legislation to implement the Geneva Conventions at the national level, and ensure that peacekeeping personnel receive training on international humanitarian law before deployment for peacekeeping missions. At the international level, parliaments have an important contribution to make towards promoting the respect for international humanitarian law and its full implementation by leveraging multilateral forums such as this one.

Nonetheless, legal frameworks must be supported by practical measures. The erosion of multilateral cooperation, reductions in humanitarian funding, and threats to humanitarian personnel and infrastructure, such as medical facilities, pose significant obstacles to effective humanitarian action.

As bodies that ratify international conventions, parliaments also bear a responsibility for implementing international humanitarian law. Ratification alone is insufficient; meaningful implementation is what upholds the spirit of these instruments. Parliamentarians must respect and reinforce the principles enshrined in ratified treaties, ensuring that both financial and human resources are directed toward preventing and mitigating humanitarian emergencies.

Parliamentarians, as lawmakers, play a critical role in ensuring resources are allocated responsibly. Through budgetary control and oversight, they must ensure that state funds are used to alleviate and not perpetuate humanitarian crises. Their accountability mandate includes approving budgets that prioritize human rights and humanitarian needs.

### **Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to conclude by urging all states to recommit to upholding the principles of the Geneva Conventions and call upon those states with influence, to leverage their influence to prevent and put an end to violations of international humanitarian law in conflict areas, in this case, the occupied Palestinian territories, comes to mind.

The Geneva Conventions and related instruments remain foundational to the international humanitarian legal framework. It is incumbent upon parliaments to uphold these standards through legislative action, policy oversight, and international cooperation. Namibia reiterates its support for initiatives such as the International Red

Cross (ICRC)'s Global Initiative and the United Nations Secretary-General's campaign for humanitarian disarmament. We firmly believe that the only viable option to maintaining global peace and security is through peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

**I thank you for your attention.**