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# Navigating counter-terrorism frameworks: How can parliaments protect humanitarian action and support IHL compliance?

## Webinar series for parliamentarians on international humanitarian law

This is the first webinar of a series aiming to raise awareness among parliamentarians and provide them with expertise on international humanitarian law (IHL) and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts. This series is an initiative of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

**Monday 30 March 2026**

**13:00 – 15:00 CEST (Geneva time)**

### BACKGROUND

According to the latest Global Terrorism Index, produced annually by the Institute for Economics & Peace, the number of countries recording a terrorist attack increased from 58 in 2023 to 66 in 2024. The Global Terrorism Database also indicates that, since the 1970s, the overall number of terrorist incidents has surpassed 200,000. These acts, often carried out by non-State armed groups, take many forms, including bombings, hijackings or hostage-taking, and their targets can also vary, from civilians to public infrastructure. In essence, terrorism negates the basic principle of humanity and goes against the underlying principles and core objectives of IHL.

As a response, States and international organizations, over the past two decades, have increasingly resorted to counter-terrorism (CT) measures and sanctions to fight terrorism. Many of these measures aim at denying individuals and entities the means to support or conduct any action considered to amount to terrorism, taking the form, for instance, of asset freezes, travel bans, arms embargoes and criminalization of terrorist acts under national laws.

Amid increased CT regulatory measures and sanctions regimes, armed conflicts continue to rise, with over 130 active armed conflicts worldwide recorded in 2025. Humanitarian needs have escalated (239 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2026), while funding for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action has become increasingly uncertain. Without continued efforts to uphold IHL and support humanitarian action, millions of people risk losing access to essential services, protection and life-saving assistance. At the same time, the CT legal framework and IHL are not mutually exclusive; applied coherently, they can both protect societies and uphold the rule of law.

While the legitimacy and necessity of State measures to ensure security are not in question, the implementation of CT measures and sanctions has at times raised concerns about unintended adverse impacts on humanitarian action. These impacts include jeopardizing the protection afforded by IHL to humanitarian action, criminalizing activities carried out by humanitarian organizations and their personnel, and even restricting access to regions where needs-based, life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection is vital. Taken together, the complex legal, logistical and financial challenges generated by such measures have adversely affected the scope and quality of humanitarian activities protected under IHL and carried out for people affected by armed conflict.

In addition, CT legislation and discourse have increasingly contributed to a blurring of the lines between armed conflict and terrorism. Because many CT laws apply even in situations of armed conflict, overlaps and contradictions with IHL can arise, creating legal uncertainty and encroaching on IHL compliance. This blurring of legal frameworks can reduce incentives for parties to armed conflict to comply with IHL, thereby heightening risks to the civilian population. What is at stake is the integrity of IHL and the interpretation and application of its most fundamental rules.

With a view to preserving the integrity and purpose of IHL while not impeding legitimate CT objectives, it is essential to ensure that CT measures and sanctions comply with IHL, as reaffirmed in [UN Security Council](#)

[resolution 2462](#) (2019). This resolution also underscores the need for States to consider the potential effects of CT measures on exclusively humanitarian activities. Principled humanitarian action – that is, humanitarian activities carried out neutrally, impartially and independently – is protected under IHL. In the recently launched [Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel](#), States have recognized the irreplaceable role of principled humanitarian action as a lifeline for all civilians in times of conflict.

For this reason, it is essential that humanitarian considerations and IHL obligations are fully integrated when States design and implement CT measures and sanctions, so as to limit unintended adverse impacts on principled humanitarian action and to preserve the integrity of IHL. This requires, for instance, reconciling CT legal and policy frameworks with IHL, as well as ensuring that all relevant national stakeholders possess the expertise needed to apply IHL while countering terrorism.

This session will bring together experts in IHL and in CT policy to discuss how CT measures and sanctions interact with IHL, including their adverse impacts on principled humanitarian action and their broader implications for the integrity of IHL. The speakers will highlight available tools and pathways for parliaments to ensure that the implementation of CT measures and sanctions at the national level comply with IHL and protect principled humanitarian action. Parliamentarians from States that have adopted measures or taken action to align their national CT framework with IHL will also share good practices. Participants will have the opportunity to exchange their own experiences in implementing IHL while countering terrorism and pose questions to the experts.

This session will also build on the work of relevant IPU bodies dealing with issues related to IHL and CT, i.e. the Committee to Promote Respect for IHL and the High-level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. While the former has engaged with parliamentary strategies to further national implementation of IHL, the former is currently developing a report on a proposed definition of terrorism grounded in international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, with a view to promote legal clarity and support parliamentary initiatives related to CT frameworks.

The meeting is intended to be interactive and will be held online in English, with interpretation in French, Spanish and Arabic.

### Guiding questions

1. How can parliaments ensure that all relevant national stakeholders understand the potential adverse impacts of CT measures and sanctions on principled humanitarian action and on the integrity of IHL?
2. What steps can parliaments take to ensure that neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action is adequately protected under domestic law and policy, in line with applicable IHL rules, while also fulfilling their responsibilities to counter terrorism?
3. How can coordination within parliament help ensure that humanitarian and IHL considerations are systematically taken into account in legislative, oversight and budgetary processes related to CT?
4. What tools, resources or initiatives could strengthen parliamentary expertise on IHL compliance when examining or adopting CT-related legislation and policies?
5. How can parliamentarians foster cooperation and build partnerships with relevant national actors to ensure that CT legal and policy frameworks are compliant with IHL?

## PROGRAMME

**Moderator:** Mr. Angelo Farrugia, President of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law, and Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta

**Introductory remarks:** Mr. Ben Saul, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

### Panellists:

- Dr. Tristan Ferraro, Senior Legal Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- Ms. Claude Maon, Intersectional Legal Director, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
- Mr. Dingamadji Carlos Rotta, General Rapporteur, National Human Rights Commission (Chad)

*Presentations will be followed by an interactive discussion with participants.*