

## The Meaning of International Humanitarian Law in Hybrid War

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**ABSTRACT:** The last decades of the 21st century are marked by escalated military conflicts in different areas of the globe, which have brought international humanitarian law, an expression of humanism, to the center of political-military events. Inspired by the feeling of humanity, international humanitarian law today faces great challenges in terms of the conduct of contemporary wars. Thus, the types of current conflicts are confined to characteristics such as asymmetry, terrorism, and hybridization. Therefore, new combat techniques and strategies have led to a new model of approaching war, the hybrid one. In this sense, the interferences between conventional and atypical tactical elements, irregular with contemporary information tools and strategies, are evident. The context presented leads us to initiate a scientific approach inspired by the question: What is the meaning and role of international humanitarian law in the hybrid war of the third millennium? The aim is to reposition international humanitarian law as a direct and fundamental source within the normative spectrum of humanitarian responses generated by the horrors of war.

**KEYWORDS:** international humanitarian law, hybrid war, legal codification, customary and conventional norms, legal humanism

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### Introduction

Armed conflicts of the 21st century take place in a geopolitical environment characterized by instability, strategic competition, and the multiplication of actors involved in the dynamics of present-day international security. Unlike the conventional wars of the last century, contemporary conflicts are marked by ambiguity, fragmentation, and a pronounced diversification of military and non-military means of action. The escalation of violence often occurs outside the classical parameters of armed confrontation, being fueled by emerging technologies, the proliferation of non-state actors, and the spread of information facilities that allow operations to be conducted at multiple levels—land, air, cyber, and information.

In this context, the lines of demarcation between war and peace, between military operations and subversive actions, are becoming increasingly fluid, contributing to the emergence of forms of conflict in which violence is no longer only physical, but also psychological, informational or economic. Digital technologies, network communication, drones, autonomous systems, as well as cyber attacks amplify the offensive potential of actors and increase the vulnerabilities of modern societies. At the same time, geopolitical instability, competition for resources, regional crises and the challenge to the international order create an environment conducive to the rapid escalation of tensions. Therefore, understanding contemporary conflicts requires going beyond traditional paradigms and analyzing a much broader spectrum of instruments and strategies of confrontation, in which military violence is only one element of a complex set of coordinated actions. This evolution raises essential questions regarding the applicability and effectiveness of the existing international legal framework, in particular international humanitarian law, designed to limit human suffering and protect people affected by war.

As a specialized branch of public international law, international humanitarian law (IHL) is supported by a set of customary and conventional norms and a constant process of legal codification, designed to limit the suffering caused by armed conflicts. Referring to the specialized applicability framework of international law, IHL represents “the set of norms of international law, of customary or conventional origin, intended for the purpose of regulating in particular the problems arising in situations of international and non-international armed conflict” (Bulgac & Sîrbu, 2019, p. 8) with two basic branches: “a) The law of armed conflicts (the law of war proper) and b) International humanitarian law (humanitarian law proper)” (Bulgac & Sîrbu, 2019, p. 9). Under this framework springs legal codification, which has played an essential role in the transition from disparate rules, selectively applicable, to a coherent system of protection for victims of armed conflicts. Therefore, the codification of IHL was materialized through the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols that regulate both the treatment of the wounded, prisoners, civilians, and the methods of conducting hostilities. Therefore, the Conventions uphold humanitarian principles, materializing them in clear, predictable and universally applicable norms regarding behavior during armed conflict, eliminating uncertainties and divergent interpretations. The trinomial—customary norms, conventional norms and legal codification—work together to create an integrated architecture of humanitarian protection. Even though IHL represents the result of a historical and legal evolution that has constantly sought to adapt humanitarian protection to the transformations of war, today, IHL can become rigid, inapplicable in the face of new challenges (hybrid wars: cyber attacks, autonomous weapons, etc.). The year 2014 brought to the forefront the attention of the international community that the hybridization of war manifested through new military instruments can “evade

the international norms signed through the 40 international conventions and protocols relating to IHL, the right to wage war, *jus ad bello* or the rules to be respected during war, *jus in bello*” (Dumitru & Bodoni, 2021, p. 87). Therefore, conventional norms must be interpreted dynamically in the light of fundamental humanitarian principles, but they also need to adapt and calibrate to the dynamics of current international conflicts. In the same sense, international legitimacy regarding the conduct of wars brings to the forefront the indispensable link between legal codification, customary and conventional norms.

This trinomial together forms the essential structure of international humanitarian law. It reflects the historical evolution of a moral and legal order that places at the center of conflicts not only military technology or the interests of states, but also human dignity. In an era of hybrid wars manifested in the form of invisible attacks, emerging combat technologies, the normative architecture of IHL must be strengthened and adapted so that the ideal of humanity without borders remains an applicable legal reality. Given the way conflicts are conducted on the international arena, hybrid war according to Hoffman (2007, p. 8), “comprises a wide range of manifestations of different types of war, which includes conventional capabilities, irregular/asymmetric formations and tactics, violent and coercive terrorist acts, and criminal disturbances.” In this sense, hybrid warfare and threats are also of a hybrid nature, which leads us to identify the concept in order to find solutions to counter them: “the complex of subversive and influencing activities, conventional and unconventional (diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state and non-state actors to achieve specific objectives, remaining below the level of a formally declared war” (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016). Therefore, hybrid warfare is characterized by the involvement of conventional and unconventional forces in the manifestation of the struggle, accompanied by “political, military, economic, social, informational or diplomatic means to achieve the proposed political-military goals” (Ioniță, 2015, pp. 23-24). The diversity of the nature of conflicts and the “emergence of new forms of armed struggle” require an adaptive legal codification, which would delimit the framework for the conduct of new forms of military conflicts (Ioniță, 2015, pp. 23-24). Under these conditions, legal codification creates the formal framework, establishes treaties, procedures and responsibilities, custom ensures universality by offering global applicability, especially in the case of states that are not parties to the conventions, and conventions provide normative precision, providing detailed standards for behavior in conflict. In this order of ideas, when conventions are incomplete, custom completes, when custom is ambiguous, treaties clarify, and codification transforms custom into convention. This complementarity guarantees that humanitarian protection can remain constant regardless of the context, it does not depend on the forms of conflicts.

**Adaptation of the international humanitarian law to new types of aggression**

Although built on solid and universally recognized foundations, IHL faces obvious limits when applied to new forms of aggression. Contemporary warfare has transformed radically, going beyond the paradigm of conventional confrontation between states and manifesting much more diverse forms, difficult to attribute and often carried out outside of any official declaration. In this fluid reality, in which the line between peace and conflict is becoming increasingly permeable, and the actors involved are often anonymous or unaccountable, the adaptation of humanitarian norms becomes not only necessary, but imperative. New types of aggression, especially those associated with hybrid war—cyberattacks, information operations, and the use of non-state actors—put traditional IHL principles under pressure. Fundamental norms such as the distinction between combatants and civilians, proportionality, or the limitation of unnecessary suffering are difficult to apply when aggressions are carried out in virtual environments, when civilian infrastructure is deliberately used as a shield, or when aggressors operate below the visible threshold of hostilities. For example, a cyberattack on a hospital or an electricity grid can cause civilian casualties comparable to a classic armed attack, but the legal classification of such an act remains ambiguous, because IHL was not designed to deal with intangible aggressions without traditional weapons. Moreover, hybrid warfare combines military tactics with psychological, economic, informational and political actions, which complicates the attribution of responsibility and the application of international sanctions. In these conditions, state actors may resort to proxy groups, mercenaries or terrorist organizations, thus avoiding direct responsibility. Currently, these groups have “a place and a political and military role that is not negligible in the context of regional conflict developments, having a predominantly destabilizing mission in the areas of presence” (Shahrestani, 2020) in which they operate. Non-state actors, in turn, are not always subject to the same international obligations as states, which creates a normative vacuum and a major legal vulnerability. In this context, IHL risks remaining an insufficient framework for protecting civilians and regulating violence.

Adapting international humanitarian law therefore requires its conceptual and normative expansion. First, it is necessary to develop a new legal framework dedicated to cyber aggression and information operations, capable of defining what constitutes an “attack”, what type of objectives can be considered legitimate and how the principle of proportionality is applied in the digital environment, affiliated with IHL. Second, the status of non-state actors must be strengthened, so that they are explicitly integrated into the normative framework, either through modernized customary norms or through international conventions adapted to current reality. Last but not least, a rebalancing between the imperatives of state security and the demands of humanitarian protection is necessary. States must be encouraged to rethink the rules of engagement of force, to apply operational

transparency and to cooperate in the investigation of atypical violence. The international community—through the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, regional organizations such as the EU and NATO—plays a key role in facilitating dialogue and developing new standards of action and warfare.

Hybrid warfare, waged through stealth tactics, indirect means, and actions that often take place outside the spectrum of traditional armed confrontation, is putting unprecedented pressure on the foundations of legal humanism. This type of conflict, often referred to as “invisible war,” takes place in an ambiguous space, where physical weapons are complemented, or even replaced, by informational, psychological, economic, or cyber tools. In such a reality, the humanitarian principles that underpinned IHL are called upon to transcend the traditional conceptual framework and respond to unprecedented phenomena, where victims can be created without a single gunshot, and responsibility becomes difficult to assign. Legal humanism, as the moral and philosophical foundation of IHL, was built on two major premises: the protection of the human being during armed conflicts and the limitation of the inevitable effects of violence. It presupposes the idea that, regardless of the circumstances, human existence possesses an intrinsic dignity, which must be protected even in the darkest contexts of violence. However, in the face of invisible war, this protection becomes problematic, since aggression is no longer carried out only by physical, visible means, but by subtle interferences designed to destabilize societies, fragment communities and dislocate essential structures of civil life. The “invisible” nature of hybrid warfare stems mainly from the techniques of denial and dissimulation. Cyber attacks on critical infrastructures, disinformation campaigns, manipulation of public opinion, infiltration of communication systems or the use of proxy groups are operations that are difficult to attribute to a clearly identifiable actor. For this reason, the application of IHL becomes complicated, since most of its provisions were designed for situations in which the aggressor is visible and the violence is manifest. In invisible warfare, the suffering of civilians can be massive, even if there is no direct material destruction. A well-orchestrated disinformation campaign can manipulate the population of a country, destabilize democratic institutions and create the conditions for further violence, which may not seem, at first glance, the result of external aggression. In this context, legal humanism is put in the position of responding to forms of violence that no longer have the traditional contours of armed hostilities. For example, a cyberattack on a hospital, which leads to the blocking of medical equipment, can cause loss of life comparable to that of a bombing. However, existing legal frameworks are not always precise enough to quickly and clearly qualify such acts as violations of IHL. This ambiguity threatens the very essence of legal humanism: the immediate and effective protection of civilians, which should be unconditional and adaptable. On the other hand, legal humanism faces the problem of redefining the concept of “victim” in conflict. In hybrid warfare, the victims are not only those killed or physically injured, but also

the millions of people exposed to information manipulation, forced economic dependence, the restriction of civil liberties by indirect means, or artificially generated social panic. These forms of harm do not always fit into the traditional patterns of armed violence, but their consequences for safety, mental health, and social integrity are profound.

Legal humanism is thus obliged to expand, to include the new human vulnerabilities generated by invisible aggressions, but also to identify “community values” and “realism in international relations” (Gâlea, 2013, p. 152). Adapting this moral framework to new types of conflict requires a reassessment of humanitarian principles in light of digital realities. For example, the principle of distinction - which requires the separation of combatants from civilians - becomes difficult to apply in cyberspace, where military and civilian infrastructures can share the same networks. The principle of proportionality is in turn complicated, since the effects of a cyberattack are difficult to anticipate and can have unexpected consequences on the civilian population. In such circumstances, legal humanism must seek solutions of extended interpretation, which include the assessment of digital risks to human dignity and integrity. In this way, legal humanism finds “expression in the legal consciousness of people as well as in the activity of state bodies (persons with responsible positions)” (Baltag & Munteanu, 2013). At the same time, invisible war raises the issue of moral and legal responsibility. If a state actor carries out operations through proxy entities, indirectly, legal humanism cannot accept the absence of responsibility just because the aggression is not formally declared or directly claimed. Thus, the adaptation of IHL also implies a consolidation of the mechanisms of attribution and sanctioning, in order to prevent the legal manipulation of the concepts of conflict and aggression. In the long term, the meaning of legal humanism in the face of invisible war is not to concede to the transformation of war, but to reaffirm that human dignity must remain the cardinal point of any normative intervention. It is made concrete that legal humanism “provides the foundation for all the norms contained in the Geneva Conventions, rules for the application of humane treatment in specific contexts” (Giușcă & Zăvoianu, 2024, p. 48). Hybrid war does not cancel the need for IHL, on the contrary, it amplifies its importance, because it introduces new, extensive risks, difficult to quantify and with devastating potential. In a world where aggression no longer requires direct military presence, but can be executed through simple digital infiltration, the protection of the individual becomes more complex, but also imperative.

### **The imperative extension of the protection of International Humanitarian Law**

As we have presented in the pages above, recent transformations of the security environment have introduced new types of aggression, which go beyond the classical framework for which international humanitarian law was built. Historically, IHL was intended to regulate conventional armed hostilities—direct

confrontations between state forces, the use of traditional weapons and the visible presence of combatants—the present is profoundly different. War is waged in simultaneous spaces: physical and computerized, in social networks and communication systems, in energy markets and critical infrastructures. Attacks no longer only cause physical casualties, but can produce far-reaching psychological, social, political and economic effects, without a single bullet being fired. Thus, expanding IHL protections becomes an urgent necessity to respond to the complexity of the hybrid phenomenon and to prevent the humanitarian degradation produced by invisible forms of aggression. Cyber attacks, including disinformation, manipulative propaganda, psychological warfare and cognitive operations represent the most subtle and powerful weapons of hybrid warfare. They are designed to undermine social cohesion, alter public perceptions, influence electoral processes, cause panic or fuel internal conflicts.

In the traditional sense, these actions are not military in nature, but they produce devastating effects by demonizing ethnic or religious groups, generating violence, by paralyzing the functioning of democratic institutions, by destabilizing health systems, by intentionally spreading false information, by manipulating the population into supporting external aggression. In the context of IHL, the essential problem is that hybrid attacks do not clearly fall into the category of physical hostilities, although they can cause loss of human life indirectly (massive panic, collapse of trust in critical infrastructure, etc.). If traditionally IHL protects the lives of civilians, physical integrity, humanitarian infrastructure and access to vital information in conflict conditions, in the digital age information itself becomes vital infrastructure, but also a means of manipulating, engaging and maintaining various combat techniques, of aggression against the civilian population, which determines IHL to expand its legal scope to the protection of the population against any form of information manipulation, cyberattack, irregular military operations and non-state actors.

In terms of cyberattacks, they are used to disrupt, degrade or destroy critical infrastructures, communication systems, essential services and administrative networks. Unlike traditional attacks, they have knock-on effects across multiple sectors (electricity, water supply, public transport, etc.). If in the past, IHL defined the notion of “attack” as a violent action against an adversary, today the definition of the concept requires greater openness to contemporary reality, when non-physical attacks fall into the category of forms of hybrid warfare. A multidimensional legal construction of the term “attack” is required, since serious phenomena such as the attack on hospital systems in the UK (2017), canceled thousands of operations, endangering thousands of lives. As can be seen, IHL must define information manipulation as a hostile action when it generates massive humanitarian harm, explicitly regulate the use of digital platforms in armed conflicts, and establish positive obligations for states from the perspective of guaranteeing the veracity of vital information. Consequently, the creation of an

international protocol on the information protection of civilians during conflicts is necessary.

Another manifestation of hybrid war is irregular operations by non-state actors, with the aim of avoiding the international responsibility of the state actor that orchestrates them. We believe in this regard that it is vital that IHL expand its legal scope to “military orchestrations” supported either by proxy groups; subversive actions against the civil administration; infiltration of local power structures; fragmented, masked violence or attributed to “spontaneous forces”. Under the influence of these actions, IHL needs to expand its application rules by introducing clear international sanctions for states that use proxy groups, with an emphasis on defining a mixed international responsibility: state and non-state and on adapting the concept of “combatants” to the reality of informal conflicts. In these conditions, extending IHL to the protection of the population against hybrid warfare is not just an option, but a moral and legal necessity.

### **The need for adaptive and multidimensional International Humanitarian Law**

Today, we find that contemporary warfare is no longer an exclusively military phenomenon, but a continuous construction of visible and invisible, physical and digital, direct and indirect actions. The extension of IHL protections to hybrid warfare is not a simple technical reform, but a profound reconfiguration of the foundations of international humanitarianism. This reconfiguration is unequivocally supported by an adaptive and multidimensional vision, which is based on the moral and legal pillars. In essence, IHL, through this vision, contributes to the protection of humanity, regardless of the form that violence takes. Starting from this recalibrated framework, the profound transformation of contemporary conflicts characterized by hybridization sheds light, more than ever, on the two essential pillars of international humanitarian law. Although it was born in the 19th century as a set of rules intended to limit violence during conventional armed conflicts, IHL has gradually transformed into a normative foundation of the modern international order and a treasure trove of humanity, guaranteeing human protection in the midst of the most severe forms of military and humanitarian crisis. Today, IHL can no longer fulfill its mission solely through the mechanical application of legal norms, because aggressions take place in spaces that are difficult to regulate, and the nature of violence is rapidly evolving in diverse forms. Therefore, the moral and legal pillars of IHL become crucial, as they represent the value foundation that guides the interpretation, expansion and adaptation of the legal framework to the new realities of war. In the following, we will detail the mechanism through which the moral and legal pillars of IHL stand out in the context of the current conflagrations.

From the perspective of the moral pillar, attention must be directed towards three directions: human dignity as a cardinal principle, the universality of human protection, the limitation of violence through ethical principles. These directions



confirm that IHL is not only an instrument for limiting suffering, but also an expression of a moral-universal conception that human dignity cannot be suspended even in the most extreme circumstances, nor in various forms of conflict. It is also noteworthy that the protection offered by IHL does not depend on nationality, military status, religion or political alliances, but is based on the fundamental humanitarian principle—every human being as a moral subject benefits from inherent protection, regardless of the conflict. This universality is more relevant than ever in modern conflicts, in which violence affects diverse populations, including communities in the digital environment exposed to information manipulation. At the same time, principles such as distinction and proportionality have an intrinsic moral value before being legal, because the protection of civilians and of the goods indispensable to their survival reflects a moral imperative of compassion and responsibility. The prohibition of means that cause unnecessary suffering derives from the idea that war cannot justify the total annulment of human morality. In an era marked by autonomous weapons, cyber operations and psychological warfare, this moral principle must extend beyond the physical realm. Therefore, the moral pillar on which IHL is based in modern conflicts aims to maintain a minimal order of humanitarianism, with the role of blurring the boundaries of war, in a context in which the means of aggression are multiplying.

As for the legal pillar, IHL provides the normative framework that limits the use of force and establishes precise obligations for the actors involved in the conflict. However, in the era of modern conflicts, the legal pillar is supported by three major directions: establishing minimum standards of behavior, ensuring legal accountability, strengthening the international order in hybrid conflicts. According to hybrid conflicts, in which violence becomes fragmented and often informal, maintaining minimum standards for waging war is the only legal instrument that prevents the unlimited escalation of hostilities. As we have mentioned, modern war is marked by the proliferation of non-state actors, proxy groups and masked aggressions. In this case, IHL can intervene through new legal mechanisms, which provide the framework for attributing responsibility to states for the actions of the entities that control them; serious violations such as: crimes against humanity, war crimes can be sanctioned; international investigation procedures are established, etc. Without this pillar, hybrid warfare would take place in a space of total impunity. At the same time, IHL contributes to strengthening the international order by maintaining trust between states; preventing the arbitrary escalation of conflicts and harmonizing military behavior with international norms. IHL cannot therefore be reduced to a system of formal rules, as its effectiveness depends on the internalization of its principles by states, militaries, organizations and populations.

This multidimensional and adaptive action is defining in modern conflicts, because it defines the legitimacy of military actions, which depends not only on their legality, but also on the morality perceived as an instrument of humanizing

war. According to this context, IHL serves as a “moral-legal” benchmark, providing an objective criterion for evaluating armed interventions; an instrument for condemning illegal aggressions, war crimes. While war becomes increasingly cold, technical and impersonal, IHL introduces an anchor of humanity. It reminds us that behind military decisions are people, not just systems; victims are not statistics, but human beings, and war cannot become a space of moral suspension. This vision is crucial in hybrid conflicts, in which psychological, computer and economic violence can be “rationalized”, being non-military, although it deeply affects human dignity. Therefore, the future of IHL must be multidimensional, covering all forms of aggression, and adaptive, capable of responding to a constantly changing war. These meanings are engaged by the proactive function, which anticipates emerging technologies, and the inclusive function, which also integrates non-state actors into the legal order.

## Conclusions

In the era of hybrid wars, of invisible aggressions, IHL becomes more than a set of norms, it becomes a standard of the ethics of war, an instrument of legitimization for the conduct of hybrid hostilities, a mechanism of human protection and, ultimately, a guarantee of human dignity and humanitarianism. As the conflict moves into spaces that are difficult to regulate, the legal morality of IHL must expand intelligently, adaptively and firmly, to ensure the protection of man in all dimensions of his existence: physical, psychological, digital and socio-economic. It must be treated as an unparalleled treasure of humanity, as the foundation of international responsibility. In its traditional form, IHL is not just a set of norms intended to regulate belligerent conduct, but constitutes one of the central pillars of international responsibility. In the era of globalization and hybrid conflicts, in which the demarcation between peace and war is becoming increasingly fragile, IHL provides the indispensable normative framework for attributing, sanctioning and restoring the violated legal order in the event of conflicts. Its role goes far beyond the technical management of hostilities; it gives the international community an instrument to guarantee international justice in times of war, protecting the universality and indivisibility of fundamental rights even in the extreme conditions of armed conflict.

Given that the international responsibility of states is enshrined in public international law, we believe, however, that IHL gives it a specialized content applicable exclusively in situations of armed conflict. Its norms establish clear positive and negative obligations: states must ensure the protection of civilians and non-combatant objectives, treat persons in their power with humanity and avoid means of warfare that cause unnecessary suffering. Thus, any serious violation of IHL – be it atrocities against the civilian population, attacks on hospitals, the use of prohibited weapons or the inhuman treatment of prisoners – entails the responsibility of the state from which the action originates or on whose territory it

occurred. States are also required to exercise due diligence in preventing violations committed both by their own forces and by actors they directly or indirectly support. A symbol of “global governance towards maintaining humanitarian intervention” (Ungureanu, 2025, p. 105) during wartime is that of the United Nations, which holds a monopoly on the relations of the international community.

In modern conflicts where non-state actors have frequently become intermediaries of aggression, IHL must clarify the fundamental principle that states cannot exonerate themselves by invoking “lack of direct control” if there is systematic, logistical, financial or operational support. IHL therefore operates as a legal filter that allows the assessment of states’ behavior in relation to minimum international standards, providing the normative basis for the analysis of culpability, complicity or tolerance of unlawful acts. Without IHL, international responsibility would be fragmentary, optional or interpretable. IHL provides the international community with a coherent framework for protecting fundamental human values, maintaining global stability, preventing the unlimited escalation of conflicts, and sanctioning those who undermine the international order. At the same time, its function is not only legal, but also deeply geopolitical, since war, however it evolves, must be limited by the norms of humanity. In this context, IHL becomes the foundation of international responsibility because it can draw the legal limits of violence, clarify the responsibility of states and non-state actors, deliberate on the individual sanctioning of leaders who commit atrocities, and provide clear mechanisms for investigation and trial. In a world where conflict is diversifying and the means of violence are becoming increasingly sophisticated, IHL must remain the indispensable element that prevents the proliferation of barbarity. Its moral-legal function, reinforced by mechanisms of international responsibility, guarantees that humanity is not lost even in the face of the most complex forms of aggression of the 21st century.

In conclusion, legal humanism must evolve beyond traditional forms of violence and respond to new forms of suffering generated by invisible war. Adapting IHL to this reality does not mean losing its identity, but consolidating its universal role - guaranteeing human protection regardless of the form of aggression. In this sense, the modernization of humanitarian norms represents not only a legal necessity, but also an ethical one, indispensable for preserving a minimum of humanity in an era in which war is becoming more subtle, more sophisticated and less visible. Let us not forget that IHL is above all a moral system, born from Dunant's sense of humanity. The universality of its principles imposes a collective obligation on all actors, whether state or non-state, to respect the standards of humanity in war. In other words, war must be waged with morality as a source of law, since IHL is not justified only by treaties or the consent of states, but by the moral imperative of protecting the human being. This common morality is what allows for the convergence of norms across cultures, the strengthening of protections even in the absence of formal ratification, the

internalization of rules by armies and political decision-makers. In conflict, the law may be violated, but humanitarian morality remains the ultimate benchmark. It is the universality of IHL principles that prevents progress towards unlimited violence (prohibition of torture, protection of civilians, prohibition of means that cause unnecessary suffering, dignified treatment of detainees). These obligations are not conditional, they apply in any conflict, in any region, regardless of the circumstances.

Currently, the fundamental creed of international humanitarian law may be expressed as the principle that *humanity must have no legal borders*, expressing the universal guarantee of the right to life regardless of the form of warfare. In an era marked by hybrid conflicts, the universality of humanitarian principles becomes the indispensable element for maintaining civilian protection; preventing impunity; preserving the international moral order; guaranteeing dignity in the face of violence. Regardless of the actors involved, as well as the technological factors, context or form of aggression, the protection of humanity must remain a universal imperative. Among all the transformations imposed by war, humanitarian principles are the only constants, materialized in moral standards that protect man when everything around him collapses. The need to adapt international humanitarian law to new types of aggression derives from the increasingly obvious rupture between modern forms of conflict and existing legal instruments. If IHL is to retain its fundamental function of protecting human dignity in war, it must evolve with the reality of conflict. Only in this way can it remain a viable and effective normative benchmark in an era in which war itself no longer respects traditional borders, rules or patterns, in which humanity must be treated as a universal and timeless principle, as the last bastion against barbarity.

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