

EVAP Ep. 8: Ezequiel Heffes

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SPEAKERS

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Ezequiel Heffes



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 00:12

Welcome to Expert Voices on Atrocity Prevention by the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect. I'm Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, Research Director at the Global Centre. This podcast features one-on-one conversations with practitioners from the fields of human rights, conflict prevention and atrocity prevention. These conversations will give us a glimpse of the personal and professional side of how practitioners approach human rights protection and atrocity prevention, allowing us to explore challenges, identify best practices, and share lessons learned on how we can protect populations more effectively. Today we are joined by Ezequiel Heffes. Ezequiel is a Senior Policy and Legal Adviser at Geneva Call, a humanitarian NGO that promotes respect of humanitarian norms by armed non-state actors. He holds an LLM in IHL and Human Rights from the Geneva Academy and a law degree from the University of Buenos Aires School of Law. Ezequiel is currently finishing his PhD at the University of Leiden. Prior to joining Geneva Call, he worked for the ICRC in Colombia, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He is widely published on different international law issues, including authoring the book, *Detention by Non-state Armed Groups under International Law*, and co-editing, *International Humanitarian Law and Non-State Actors: Debates, Law, and Practice*. Thank you for joining us today, Ezequiel.



Ezequiel Heffes 01:36

Thank you very much for having me.



Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 01:40

Before we get started on your story, I'm wondering if you could inform our listeners on what exactly International Humanitarian Law or IHL is.



E

Ezequiel Heffes 01:50

So, International Humanitarian Law is a set of rules that seek, for humanitarian purposes, to limit the effects of armed conflicts on individuals. So, it does so by protecting people who are not or who are no longer participating in the conflict and it restricts, I would say, the prerogatives of the parties with conflict, I'm speaking about states and non-state armed groups, or armed non-state actors as we use it at Geneva Call. So, it puts a limit to what they can do, or they cannot do in armed conflict. And the main treaties, that form, actually, the international humanitarian law, or the Geneva Conventions of 1949, there are three additional protocols, two of them that were adopted in 1977 and one that was adopted in 2005. And then there are also a number of rules that are considered to be customary in nature. So that means that the practice, the repeated practice of states and their beliefs that these rules are mandatory, have confirmed that these rules are customary in nature. And these rules, they're applicable in, there are two types of conflicts in which some of the rules apply. One type of conflict is international armed conflicts that are those conflicts between two or more states, and non-international armed conflicts that are those conflicts between a state and a non-state actor, or between two or more armed non-state actors themselves.

J

Jaelyn Streitfeld-Hall 03:32

And what initially drew you to working in this field?

E

Ezequiel Heffes 03:35

So, I have always well, I'm a lawyer, as you read in my bio, I'm a lawyer, I studied law at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina, and I have always been quite a fan of the law and what the law can achieve in societies. I believe that the law is tool protect individuals. And I think armed conflicts are one of those situations in which individuals need to be protected the most because, sometimes, well because, of course, the process of violence, because services are no longer present, so individuals don't have access to health care, they don't have access to education, they don't have access to food. They are sometimes under the control of entities that are not the state. Sometimes they're under the control of a foreign state. So, they are taken out of their normal environment and I believe these are situations, as I said, in which individuals need to be protected the most, and I think the law provides certain tools in that regard. So I mentioned before, the Geneva Conventions, the official protocols, and customary international humanitarian law that exists alongside international human rights law, that is, the framework, the legal framework that applies both in times of peace and in times of war that also protects individuals. So for me, it was a matter of, conceiving the tools at hand. So I would say this case, international humanitarian law, the law of armed conflict, international human rights law as protective elements, and because of my background in law, this was one of the reasons why I actually, I ended up working in various conflict areas and with various armed actors.

J

Jaelyn Streitfeld-Hall 05:32

So, that brings me to my next question, which is actually that, you know, once you have a law degree, you can obviously go in many different directions with it, and you ended up taking positions where you went into the field. And so I'm wondering what sort of positions your work

at ICRC entailed?

E

Ezequiel Heffes 05:56

Thank you very much. So, it's interesting, because one of my first experiences was in Argentina, my, well say one of my first official jobs was working for the National Security Ministry in Argentina that was created in 2010, and had an office that was formed by civilians, so by people who were not members of the internal security forces of Argentina, and we would have to deal with internal security forces of Argentina with respect to their behaviors, their activities, and how they would, I would say, they would conduct their law enforcement operations. And this was actually a great experience, because it allowed me to be in touch, allowed me to be in touch with internal security forces, so the internal federal police, the border police, it is an experience that I didn't have, I hadn't had before. And, afterwards, I went to Geneva to pursue my LLM at the Geneva Academy. I realize it's this interesting feeling in which you studied with and everyone studying around you is pursuing the same objective and we had a similar vision of what the law can achieve in conflict settings, and that was a very, very important feeling. For me, that was different to Argentina because in Argentina I would take courses on different legal subjects, but at the Geneva Academy, I think this is incredibly valuable, because you're sharing the course with, sharing courses with thirty, thirty-five people, sometimes even more, that are looking at the law in the same way, are looking at the law as a protective tool. And then, what happened is, I was lucky enough to be selected as, what is called at the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, to be a delegate. And so, of course, I'm a huge fan of the law, but at the time I was lucky enough because I didn't have any experience working in conflict settings. I had this experience at the Ministry of Security in Argentina but I was elected to be a delegate and then I had the opportunity to fulfill different roles in different nations. So, my first mission was in Colombia in a city called Bucaramanga. Then I spent there a bit more than a year and then I went to Afghanistan, where I was based in [Lashkar Gah](#) in the Helmand Province in the south. And then I went to the DRC, to the Democratic Republic of Congo where I was in Uvira, that is, next to the border with Burundi. And these experiences, from a humanitarian perspective of course, were very, very interesting because I was able to see how the law that I had studied from a theoretical perspective, is applied by state actors, armed non-state actors, and of course, the relation between the humanitarian sector and the local communities, but also how the different armed actors would interact with this local community. So it was, and the three contexts are very different, because of course Colombia, not only in terms of it was a Spanish speaking country, I'm a Spanish speaker, so, I'm from Latin America so I could relate relatively easy with the different, with the people there, than in Afghanistan, working with an interpreter in a different language, a very different culture to the one in Colombia. Then the DRC also a different place because some people would speak French, some people would speak local languages such as Kinyarwanda or Swahili. So it, the three experiences were fantastic. And then I had the opportunity to move to Geneva Call and work specifically on armed-non states actors and international law.

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 10:00

And what is your work at Geneva Call involve? How do you, how does the organization approach working with various armed groups?



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Ezequiel Heffes 10:08

So, Geneva Call, perhaps a bit of the story of Geneva Call is Geneva Call was created as a result of the movement that was looking to ban anti-personnel mines in the nineties. And so, that, this movement, I mean, this led to the Ottawa Convention in 1997 but the group of people at the time said, you know, this is very interesting that there is a situation of landmines being used by armed non-state actors, and armed non-state actors cannot become parties to the Ottawa Convention. So, there should be a system that exists in parallel to this state-centric lawmaking system, in order to start involving armed non-state actors in legal discussions. So Geneva Call was originally created to engage armed groups on issues related to the prohibition of using landmines. But what happened is that Geneva Call started engaging armed groups from different parts of the world, and I can speak later about how Geneva Call gets in touch with the groups and all the gateway processes, but the interesting aspect is that, suddenly in, I would say, four or five years, Geneva Call was talking to forty, fifty groups about the prohibition of using landmines. And many of these groups were engaging positively on this, so destroying this stockpile of anti-personnel mines or deciding not to use anti-personnel mines. So, some key actors, after a couple of years, said, you know, if you're already talking to these groups about their use of, the prohibition of using anti-personnel mines, why don't you also talk about the prohibition of using and recruiting children in hostilities? Or why don't you also start talking about the prohibition of sexual violence such as discrimination? You're already discussing with them about international law, so what is preventing you from doing that? So we've, since that NGO that originally engaged armed groups on the prohibition of using land mines, then we are now dealing with child protection issues, the prohibition of sexual violence, of gender discrimination, cultural heritage, protection of cultural heritage, protection of health care, prohibition of forced displacement, international humanitarian law in general, and this year, we started our, officially, our program on starvation, the prohibition of starvation and the protection of environment. And, the interesting aspect about Geneva Call, there, for me, there are a couple of things, I mean, the first one is that the engagements that Geneva Call has with armed groups, these thematic engagements, these thematic dialogues that it has with groups are public, so you can, Geneva Call has this engagement tool that we use, it's part of different activities that we have but I think the branding tool of Geneva Call is what we call the Deed of Commitment. And the Deed of Commitment is a sort of unilateral declaration that armed groups sign in Geneva together with Geneva Call and a representative of the Canton of Geneva, it's a thematic declaration, so, there is a representative of the armed non-state actor, who comes to Geneva - and in the "Alabama Room", where the first Geneva Convention was adopted in 1864, they sign, together with someone from Geneva Call, someone from the Canton of Geneva, a declaration, for instance, not to use or recruit children in hostilities, and to treat children who are in detention well, and to ensure or to, you know, to try that these children who are living in the territories they control, that they access education and healthcare. And it's quite a fascinating process because this allows Geneva Call to monitor the respect of these obligations. So, we have our headquarters in Geneva when we have offices in different conflict settings. And my colleagues, I have done it in the past, but my colleagues on a daily basis, they monitor the respect of these commitments. So they go and check whether there are children checkpoints. They go and check whether there are children at the military camps of the armed non-state actors. They talk to community leaders to see how the situation of children and there is one Deed of Commitment on children, but there's also a Deed of Commitment on sexual violence and gender discrimination, one on healthcare, one on the prohibition of landmines and we have just launched one on the prohibition of starvation. And again, the aspect here that is very important is that that commitment allows Geneva Call to monitor the obligations, the respect of the obligations that are contained therein. And the other important aspect is that Geneva Call, the groups actually commit through these declarations to allow Geneva Call to publicize situations of compliance and non-compliance. So, if we go there,

and we engage with a group and the group, for instance, after being engaged with Geneva Call, they decide to release the children from the ranks, we can publicize this situation of respect. And on the other hand, if the armed group, you know, we see that there are persistent violations after the signing of the deed, we can also publicize this situation. So, it's part of the, of the engagement process that we have with the groups. One last point that of course, Geneva Call is, it focuses exclusively on engaging armed non-state actors that other humanitarian or international organizations that have recognized the importance of engaging with armed non-state actors in the last few years, you know, on how these engagement can be useful to achieve protected outcomes. So, this is a point that I want to say is not that we are just, you know, an isolated actor, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, but it is being highly, you know, increasingly recognized at the UN, and even by the UN Secretary General. So, yeah, just to put what we're doing in a bit of a framework.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 16:12

This is such fascinating work, especially from an atrocities prevention perspective because we study, you know, so many countries where non-state armed groups are very relevant to the conflicts and don't have that level of engagement ourselves, and so it's always interesting to think about how you can get their behavior to change, how to communicate policy recommendations beyond just states. And so your work is very fascinating to us. So, what are some of the biggest challenges that you and Geneva Call face in engaging the armed groups either, you know, prior to signing these documents or afterwards when they're failing to uphold their obligations?

E

Ezequiel Heffes 17:03

Thank you. Yes, this is, I mean, of course, working in conflict settings entails various challenges. I can name, just engaging with armed groups, of course, and non-state actors is also very problematic, I mean in terms of, I mean not problematic, that is, its challenging in different aspects. So the first one, I would say that easy access to these armed non-state actors. These armed non-state actors, sometimes they are located in places where, in remote places that is very difficult to access to them and to suddenly sit down and having an actual discussion or an international discussion, with them. So this is obviously a problem. We also, I mean, as part of the humanitarian sector where there are also challenges with respect to the possible counter-terrorism laws and how counter-terrorism laws may forget humanitarian engagement with certain armed actors in conflict setting, so this is another challenge that as part of the humanitarian community we face. Then specifically, when I'm thinking about the engagements that we get from the armed groups, armed groups, they are very dynamic entities. So the armed group is not, even if we say the armed group is a party to the conflict, it has been a party to the conflict for many years, the armed group can change its behavior, its attitudes with respect to international law and its engagement with the humanitarian community during the conflict that group is part of. So, for instance, it can be, you know, it's like if I'm thinking about certain groups that, you know, we certainly see and they can be engaged, but in six months, it is foreseen that that group may split or may fracture into two parts, you know, keeping those engagements is going to be is going to be challenging. If I think about, of course there are some groups that they don't want to be engaged. I would say that this has to be differentiated, there's some groups that they don't want to be engaged on international law and some groups that they don't want to be engaged on certain specific issues. So, it is not that armed groups

are, every group, every armed group is negative about engaging with international law and this is something that is something that we have to demystify because there is this perception that armed non-state actors, because often they're constituted in violation of the domestic law of the state, they don't want to be engaged on international humanitarian law or sometimes on international human rights law, and this is not always the case. So there are armed groups that have engaged on international humanitarian law with humanitarian organizations, with states signing agreements, with other groups, and this has happened in the past. So, just to say that, again, a challenging aspect can be that certain groups are, they don't want to be, they don't want to talk about specific rules or they don't agree with what the international law says about specific rules. So, just to give you an example, I was in touch with, you know, some groups, you know, and they would say, you know, they wouldn't be against the protection that civilians they have in their international humanitarian law, but they suddenly wouldn't be in agreement with the minimum age for using and recruiting the children hostilities. And so just to be to give a bit of a background, the international humanitarian law says that it's fifteen, the Rome Statute says fifteen, you know, under fifteen is a war crime. International human rights law says eighteen. And it's interesting, because, you know, they say, yeah, I mean, we agree civilians shouldn't be attacked but we don't agree with the eighteen years old standard, this is a standard that Geneva Call uses because we believe that there has to be the most protective one. So it's not that they were against the international humanitarian law in general, but, you know, the exercise was a thematic one. Then there are groups that are, they don't want to be engaged on international law in general, and for those cases we have to develop other strategies of engagement. So, perhaps we develop strategies, terms of engagement with societal actors, or relying on certain local values, this is something that we might do as well. So, just a couple of the challenges that come to mind.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 21:16

It's interesting. So there, are there particular moments that you can seize upon where it's easier to interact with the groups, like whether it be when they've signed recent agreements with their own government, or something else changing in the conflict?

E Ezequiel Heffes 21:33

It's a very good question because as I mentioned before, armed groups are dynamic entities, and part of the exercise of humanitarian engagement is to identify when is that window of opportunity. And some groups, for instance, they might be willing to discuss about IHL in general at certain moments in time, but not about for instance, as I said before, child protection issues. And then you have the peace agreement, and you have the FARC committing not to use and recruit children in hostilities during the peace negotiations in Havana. And this is, you know, they had a rule saying that they wouldn't do that below the age of fifteen, but, you know, it's like, during the peace negotiations, they suddenly started increasing the age, the minimum age, you know, until they said like they would release the children from the ranks. So, that's part of the exercise that the humanitarian sector does, or at least Geneva Call does in terms of identifying which thematic area we can engage on and which moment. But, of course, we sit down, and we try to talk through and to see why they don't want to engage on a specific rule and to see, to look for alternatives and to see whether we can actually create that window of opportunity.

J

Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 22:49

I think you hinted at this a little bit when you're talking about your previous experience in Colombia versus Afghanistan versus Congo, but, with the work you do at Geneva Call, are the sort of challenges and even successes you have context-specific or are there a lot of similarities between groups regardless of what conflict you're looking at?

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Ezequiel Heffes 23:16

There are challenges that are specific to the conflicts and there are challenges that are, can be observed from a more broader perspective. So, I would say, for instance, there are, I'm thinking specifically, for instance, in terms of the interpretation of the law, I mean, in certain contexts, you can have groups that are, they actually, they relate more to international law because of, they could be, they are looking for some sort of legitimacy at the international level, so they, they commit more to the international legal system, than groups that, for instance, might be more community, that for them international law is not that relevant, but the relation with the local community, or the local leader, or the religious leader, that is in the village, is the driver to influence or to change or to have an impact on the behaviors of the armed actor. So, again, I think it's quite different from, it is, I will say that the analysis has to be done in terms of what, you know, the literature has discussed in terms of typologies. You know, where certain, a certain type of groups, you know, which groups form certain types of groups and some people have said, you have groups that are seeking for legitimacy, you know, like, so these groups are going to be more, I would say, closer to coming to international law, than groups that are not seeking for legitimacy before the international community because, you know, they don't care about what the international community says. But again, I repeat this quite often, but I think it is true, I mean, armed groups, they change their behavior, so, you know, certain, you know, you may have at certain moments in time, you may have a commander or a deliberate decision of the group to be, to look for legitimacy at the international level but then that might change if that commander dies, that commander is arrested, if there is a fracture, fragmentation inside of the structure of the group, and then you have new commanders deciding differently. And then this is, again, we come back to the challenges before, you might negotiate access to a certain territory with one specific commander, and then three months afterwards, that commander is no longer there, so that can be a challenge. But I would say, again, differentiating according to the types of groups and not so much according to the region or the country where they work. So, of course, it really depends on how the typology for, if, you know, as part of the typology you have groups that are, I don't say, what comes to my mind, groups that are more politically motivated, groups that have more religious motivations, groups that have relations to the community, to the local communities, groups that don't have relations to the local community. So these factors of influence are going to be of relevance.

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 26:22

And given these challenges, and I guess some of the progress that you have seen groups make after signing agreements, do you think that you have facilitated a decrease in violations of IHL and prevented atrocities through that process?

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Ezequiel Heffes 26:42

I think, I think we have, I think Geneva Call has. Of course, it is always difficult to measure situations of respect. It is always, it seems to be always easier to measure situations of violations. But there have been situations of respect. So for me, the big challenge first is that, you know, from an international legal perspective, we say that armed actor is a party to a conflict, and then we go back to the obligations, you know, IHL, possibly human rights law, depending on the actor, but, so, we say they are parties to the conflict, so they have international obligations. But on many occasions, they don't know what obligations are we talking about. No one actually has sat down with them and discussed what they have to respect according to these legal frameworks. So, you know, there is this assumption in international law that suddenly they're parties with conflict and they have the knowledge and capacity to apply all these rules and that's not always the case. So, you know, if you kind of like let's, let's leave aside for a moment the situation of an armed conflict, but when you think in any, about any given society, the circle of people who are always aware of their international obligations is very small. You know, you think about the people who actually know about the law in any given society, and it's not, it's not a lot. And when you think about the people who know about international law is even smaller, and the people who know about international humanitarian law is even smaller, and the people who know the differences between human rights law, international humanitarian law, international criminal law, like the ICC Statute, you know, it's even even smaller, and we think, I mean, again, this is a reflection about how international law deals with these actors, we think that because they are parties to the conflict, and they exercise a certain degree of violence, they know their international obligations. That's not necessarily the case. So, one step that we do at Geneva Call is we actually sit down with them and discuss about their international obligations. And this is part of this engagement process I was telling before is, you know, you cannot use or recruit children below the age of eighteen, or you cannot, you know, place your military barracks next to a healthcare facility because if the other side comes and attacks you then it's going to put in danger that military facility. You know, these things need to be part of the discussions with these armed actors because otherwise is going to be very difficult that they comply with international law, and this is a very, I would say, pragmatic approach on what to do in this situation. And the other point that I actually wanted to say, so, of course, the first step is to discuss about the legal obligations and once they discuss, we discuss the legal obligation, the other, I mean, there are other steps. So, for instance, they need to internalize these obligations through the adoption of the Code of Conduct. They have to disseminate the content of this Code of Conduct by training to their members. Then they have to adopt a certain system of, a certain mechanism that, you know, is triggered if there are violations of that Code of Conduct. And then, so, when you put this in place, and when you discuss as, you see that the reasons why international law is violated is not as straightforward as you say, you know, yes, the group is deliberately decided not to do this or to do that, so, there are a lot of intricacies, I would say behind situations of respect and situations of violation. The role of emotions, you know. What it's like when you have a child who has been recruited when he or she was young, and you know that same person is recruiting again children. So it's like, how individual emotions play a role in that same violation occurring again. And like that, I can give you different examples, but again, at Geneva Call we've been working to enhance the respect of international law by armed non-state actors in conflict settings, and we have achieved several results. Groups have released children from the ranks, they have, for instance, moved their military barracks far away from schools, they have, they were occupying schools, they, you know, they realize that they couldn't do it, and they also left the school unoccupied. They destroyed their stockpile of anti-personnel mines. They adopted rules, internal rules on sexual, on the prohibition of sexual violence and gender discrimination. They received, they have given trainings internally of these issues, so, of course, I'm not saying this is, these are of course steps among the many different engagements that we have, but

some, yeah, some good practices and good examples are out there. The problem is again, that we hear a lot more about violations than about situations of respect, but we have seen that in certain situations, you know, decrease in violations may happen, when certain issues are present. And having said that, when situations of violations decrease, or more situations of respect are present, then, you know, for instance, perhaps peace processes or transitional justice processes can also be influenced positively. You know, so it's like if, again, if the armed non-state actor stops using anti-personnel mines, then the whole de-mining issue afterwards is, it might be easier, or the whole idea of transitional justice and reconciliation for the communities when violations have decreased during the conflict.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 32:21

I really appreciate that, your conception of situations of respect are harder to measure than violations because we obviously deal with the same thing all the time with R2P and the idea of prevention, and how do you measure an atrocity you've prevented, versus, you have obviously very clear evidence when you've failed because atrocities are taking place. So it's a common struggle for both of us.

E Ezequiel Heffes 32:53

Absolutely, I mean, when you, you know when a civilian building is attacked but is, and of course you can measure the, you know, the amount of attacks that, unfortunately be happening in many of the conflicts. You know, the amount of hospitals that have been bombed, the amount of schools that have been bombed, sometimes the amount, the number of civilians who have been killed. But it's, then, when you move away from that, and you say, like, okay, how many attacks didn't happen because a commander said, let's not do that because that's a violation of IHL, that's more difficult to measure. But for, I mean, for us again, it's part of the engagement that we discuss with the armed non-state actors in this respect, and other key stakeholders such as you know, again, members of the local community, religious leaders, the humanitarian sector in general, NGOs working in those conflicts that we're also working. So, we of course, we gather information of those violations, and it is also important because Geneva Call, traditionally, we have had a thematic engagement. So as I said before, we started with anti-personnel mines, then we would deal with child protection issues and all these thematic areas. And, we wouldn't raise the issue of anti-personnel mines if the group that we are engaging is not using anti-personnel mines, and has never used anti-personnel mines. But also, it's part of this thematic idea, this thematic engagement is also important for us, and for that we do an analysis of the situations of violations and respect, of course, restraint by the groups.

J Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 34:28

I want to ask a question that speaks to, I think, your broader expertise on IHL, beyond just Geneva Call since you have such an immense background in this area. How do you think the scope of compliance with IHL has evolved in recent years? And what impact do you think this has had on civilians?

E Ezequiel Heffes 34:52

What do you mean by scope of IHL compliance?

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 34:55

Is it trending upwards or downwards, and, you know, is it, I guess, even, who is, if anyone is getting better at compliance, what do those actors look like? Is it non-state actors? Is it states themselves?

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Ezequiel Heffes 35:13

It's very difficult to measure because as I said, you know, in, I would say in every situation of an armed conflict, in every armed conflict, I mean, there are situations of respect and situations of violations, and I doubt very much that there is any party in a conflict that has never committed an IHL violation. Having said that, again, there are situations of respect that do not receive much attention, and the question is how we measure those situations of respect. What are the elements that we use to measure the situation of respect? So it could be, for instance, the commander or the individuals there say, like, you know, let's not do that because international law, you know, says that we cannot do that. But it could be because they signed an agreement with a humanitarian actor committing not to do it, it could be adopting rules saying that. So it's very difficult. But the other point is, I think it's quite relevant in terms of IHL compliance is that in certain contexts, where IHL might not be relevant, you have local norms, or local sources, that they also influence the behavior of parties, or as I said, emotions, you know, so it's like, it could be a positive emotion or a negative emotion. But, so, again, from a legal perspective there's a lot of attention on how IHL relates to the parties to the conflict, you know, and certain groups, you know, they might decide not to do something, not because international law says that they cannot do it, but because there is a local custom saying like they cannot do it, and that, the power of the local custom is much stronger than the international law. So this is something that of course, again, the humanitarian sector is working on but it needs more attention as well on the synergies, on the confluences, the convergences between these local norms and international law. Again, it's something that has gained some attention in the last few years. So, again, I would say it's, these, I'm not sure I can make a statement about whether IHL is more respected now than before, especially because again, we turn on the TV and we see violations happening all the time, which, it's of course, violations do happen, I don't want to be misinterpreted, but, again, in many of these situations of armed conflict there are situations of respect as well, and if there's a situation of respect, again, there may be situations of violations in the future, if there are situations of violations now, there might be situations of respect in the future, conflicts are much more complicated than the information that we get, and you know this better, you know this as I do because you also work in certain conflict-related areas. So, again, it's a complex picture, but for us, the examples that at Geneva Call we have is engaging directly with the armed non-state actor can lead to positive steps that can lead to situations of respect of the law. So again, we have had some examples in this regard, which shows that, you know, we have to continue to doing that. It's a step to decreasing the violations of international humanitarian law, and the affectation of the civilian population.

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Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall 38:32

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