

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on the right to education; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Ref.: AL IRN 13/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

4 August 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran; Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on the right to education; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order and Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 58/21, 55/5, 62/8, 53/4, 59/12, 57/7 and 58/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law resulting from the joint military campaign launched by the United States of America and Israel against the Islamic Republic of Iran since 28 February 2026, which has caused **extensive civilian casualties, and widespread destruction of civilian objects, including educational, medical and public health facilities, cultural and religious sites, healthcare and scientific research infrastructure, and areas of environmental and cultural significance, as well as mass internal displacement.** The environmental impacts and damage reportedly resulting from armed attacks attributed to the armed forces of the USA and the State of Israel against civilian-related infrastructure in the Islamic Republic of Iran have been addressed in separate letters to the USA (AL USA 18/2026) and Israel (AL ISR 9/2026). We also raise concern about the apparent violation of the international prohibitions on the use of force and aggression under article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter and customary international law.

According to the information received:

Background and Context

On 28 February 2026, the United States and Israel launched a joint military campaign against Iran, designated "Operation Epic Fury" by the Pentagon and "Roaring Lion" by Israel. The strikes killed Iran's Former Supreme Leader within the first twelve hours, along with several senior military and government officials, and triggered a wider regional conflict that has drawn in proxy forces across the region and disrupted commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

Since the launch of military operations, the stated objectives of the United States have evolved. On 2 March 2026, the US Secretary of Defense outlined three goals: the destruction of Iran's ballistic missile arsenal, the destruction of its navy, and the elimination of its capacity to develop a nuclear weapon. President Trump subsequently identified a fourth objective: eliminating Iran's capacity to fund, arm and direct regional allies.

Public statements were made by senior officials of both States since the outbreak of hostilities. President Trump has on several occasions since late March 2026 threatened the destruction of Iran's civilian infrastructure, stating that Iran would be bombed "back to the Stone Ages" and warning, in early April 2026, that absent a deal, "a whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again." Earlier reported statements by President Trump also included threatening to "blow up and completely destroy all of their power plants, oil wells, and Kharg Island (and possibly all of their desalination plants)" absent an agreement, a threat that appears to have materialized in the strikes on water infrastructure documented below. Israeli officials have made comparable statements: the Israeli Minister of Defence stated that Israeli forces would continue to "hunt down" Iran's leadership and threatened to destroy Iran's national infrastructure.

According to the available information, the armed conflict continued until the first day of the ceasefire on 8 April 2026, with sporadic strikes during the ceasefire. The hostilities resumed on 8 June, until a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on 14 June, intended to lead to a comprehensive settlement.

On 8-9 July 2026, following Iranian attacks on commercial vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, the United States declared the ceasefire "over" and conducted a renewed wave of strikes on multiple Iranian cities mainly in the South of the country, including Iranshahr, Bandar Abbas, Konarak, Chabahar, Bushehr. In the course of these developments, the President of the United States publicly renewed earlier threats to target Iran's electricity and water infrastructure, stating that the United States would "take out" such facilities if attacks continued.

Overall Scale of Civilian Harm

United States and Israeli military operations have resulted in significant civilian casualties and the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, including educational institutions, cultural heritage sites, places of worship, medical and scientific research facilities, and sports facilities, together with mass displacement, environmental damage, and severe disruptions in access to healthcare and education.

The figure provided by the Iranian authorities for fatalities until 8 April 2026 is more than 3000, and at least 50 since the resumption of strikes in July; however, this figure does not distinguish between civilians and security forces. In a recent incident on 15 July 2026, a missile attack attributed to US forces struck troop

accommodation facilities in Bampur, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, killing 7 individuals during their mandatory military service.

According to civil society assessments, 6,324 unique incidents representing 12,798 attacks were documented up to the ceasefire on 8 April 2026. At least 3,636 fatalities have been reported, among them 1,701 civilians, including at least 307 children, and 714 individuals whose identities and civilian or military status could not be determined.

Attacks on Schools and Educational Facilities

Information received indicates widespread harm to schools, educational facilities, and children. Iranian authorities have reported that 763 schools were affected, compared to reports by civil society organizations reporting at least 108 educational facilities being affected between 28 February and 8 April 2026, including at least three schools that were directly targeted or otherwise affected.

Higher education facilities

Between 28 February and 30 March 2026, according to Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT), 21 universities in Iran sustained damage as a result of strikes, affecting 154 buildings and campus sites across western and central provinces, including Tehran.

In Tehran, the following universities sustained damage: the Iran University of Science and Technology (IUST, established in 1929), one of the oldest technical universities in the region; Amir Kabir University of Technology (est. 1958), also known as Tehran Polytechnic; Malek-Ashtar University of Technology (est. 1984), where research facilities and laboratories were affected; the Iran University of Art (est. 1918), the country's largest art university, where two buildings were damaged; Imam Hossein University (est. 1986), where several buildings were affected; and the National Research Institute of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (est. 1989), whose main building was struck.

On 3 April, Shahid Beheshti University (est. 1960) was struck, resulting in the substantial destruction of one faculty building and a research centre. On 5-6 April, Sharif University of Technology, a leading institution in science and engineering, was struck, reportedly with a bunker-buster munition, causing at least 34 deaths including six students, with damage to key infrastructure including a data centre supporting artificial intelligence systems and digital services.

Beyond Tehran, approximately half of the affected universities are major provincial academic centres. In Isfahan province, the Isfahan University of Technology (IUT, est. 1977) was reportedly targeted on multiple occasions between mid- and late March 2026; at least one confirmed strike resulted in injuries to university personnel and damage to nine buildings. The Isfahan Science and Technology Town (ISTT) also sustained damage. The Isfahan University of Art (est. 1999), which occupies several historic structures,

sustained serious damage to five buildings, including its central library and sports complex.

In West Azerbaijan province, 13 buildings at the University of Urmia (originally founded in 1879) were damaged. In Ilam province, the student dormitory complex and the provincial technology centre at the University of Ilam (est. 1976) were affected. In Khuzestan province, blast waves caused damage to 16 buildings at Jundi-Shapur University of Technology (est. 1972), and the perimeter wall of Khorramshahr University of Marine Science and Technology (est. 1936) was fully destroyed. In Sistan and Baluchestan province, six buildings at Chabahar Maritime University (est. 1976) sustained damage. Additional damage was reported at Malayer University in Hamadan province, the male student dormitory at Persian Gulf University (est. 1991) in Bushehr province, and 14 sites belonging to the National University of Skills (est. 2011) across multiple cities. We note that a substantial proportion of the higher-education facilities reportedly struck are technical, engineering and applied-science institutions.

Primary and secondary schools

According to available documentation, at least 195 children and teachers lost their lives during the first two weeks of the conflict, across incidents affecting approximately 120 schools.

The most significant single incident involved the Shajareh Tayyebah Primary School in Minab, Hormozgan province, which was completely destroyed on 28 February 2026. The attack reportedly took place before midday and resulted in a high number of civilian casualties. While casualty figures remain contested, available information indicates that at least 156 civilians were killed, including 120 children. Iranian authorities reported the death of approximately 30 teachers, school staff members and parents, and 110 additional individuals were injured. We further note that, while earlier reporting of this attack indicated that the victims were schoolgirls, information subsequently received strongly indicates that both girls and boys were killed in the attack, with multiple reports citing a higher number of boys among the victims.

We are aware of no information indicating that the school was used for any military purpose. Independent investigations suggest that the school building, targeted by guided weapons, has been used as a school since 2015, and was adjacent to the interior boundary of an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Naval Forces compound. It was part of the IRCG compound prior to 2015. Satellite imagery and other sources suggest that the school was walled off from the rest of the IRGC compound and had a separate entrance to the street. Open-source research indicates that many of the buildings in the immediate surroundings of the school were visibly civilian in character, including a clinic, cultural center, café, supermarket, and car wash. Children were attending the school on the morning of 28 February 2026, and schools were closed only after the initial strikes began.

This strike was among the incidents specifically cited by United Nations Special Procedures mandate holders on 12 March 2026 as warranting independent investigation as a possible grave violation of international humanitarian law. United States' officials have publicly acknowledged an ongoing investigation into responsibility for the Minab strike but have not published any findings.

Casualties at other school facilities have been documented across multiple provinces:

- Fars province: 5 children and 1 teacher killed
- Ilam province: 2 children and 1 teacher killed
- East Azerbaijan province: 2 children killed, 1 teacher injured
- Tehran city: 3 children killed, 2 students injured
- Qazvin province (Abyek, Imam Reza Boys' School): 1 child killed
- Tehran Counties: 1 child and 1 teacher killed

Structural damage has also been reported at additional schools, either directly or by nearby attacks throughout the conflict, including: three schools in Parand (Tehran province); Imam Reza; the Esmat Girls' School in Urmia; the Hijab Girls' High School in Kurdistan; the Narjes high school in Kahrizak, the Nemouneh Dowlaty Hejab, and the Payambar Azam, Sayyah Moghadam, and Golhaye Enghelab, Hedayat, Al-Yasin, Allameh-Helli, Shahid Hamedani, and Shahid Mahalati schools in various districts of Tehran.

Medical Research Centers, Public Health Facilities and Healthcare Personnel

Information received raises serious concerns regarding attacks affecting medical facilities, healthcare personnel, and access to healthcare. According to information received, attacks affected 50 medical facilities between 28 February and 8 April 2026, including 21 hospitals, 12 specialized medical facilities, 8 emergency medical bases, 8 Iranian Red Crescent bases, and 1 blood transfusion center. According to the same source, 15 healthcare workers were killed during the conflict, including three medical workers killed in one attack on an emergency medical base in Zibashahr, Shiraz, on 5 March 2026. Iranian authorities have reported that more than 334 healthcare facilities were damaged.

Research institutions in the medical and health sciences have also been affected. According to the World Health Organization, more than 20 verified attacks on healthcare infrastructure have been recorded in Iran.

On 31 March 2026, the Tofigh Daru Research & Engineering Company (est. 2000), a facility engaged in the development of active pharmaceutical ingredients for oncological, cardiovascular, and immunomodulatory treatments, was struck, damaging its production and research and development units.

On 2 April 2026, the Pasteur Institute of Iran (est. 1920) was hit, resulting in destroying the Institute's headquarters and 13 national reference laboratories. The Institute also hosts three biobanks, and two WHO Collaborating Centres, and has reportedly been rendered unable to continue its role within the global Pasteur Institute Network, including its functions in national and regional disease surveillance. The Institute plays a central role in Iran's public health system, including vaccine production, infectious-disease control, diagnostic laboratory services and scientific research.

Furthermore, on 3 April the Laser and Plasma Research Institute of Shahid Beheshti University, an educational and health research laboratory, was reportedly damaged, with an impact on infrastructure and several sensitive research instruments.

Destruction of Cultural and Religious Sites

Information received indicates extensive damage to cultural and religious sites, with at least 122 sites damaged between 28 February and 8 April 2026, including 91 historical monuments and heritage sites, 12 places of worship, 11 museums, 4 cultural centers, 2 cinemas, and 2 libraries. Separate Iranian governmental materials allege damage and loss to 116 museums and historical-cultural monuments across 16 provinces and 21 cities.

Several of the affected sites hold UNESCO World Heritage designation and are subject to the protections afforded by the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, its two Protocols, and relevant provisions of the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. UNESCO has expressed concern regarding the security of cultural, educational, and environmental sites in Iran, and has warned of threats to world heritage infrastructure

Sites in Teheran

In Tehran, a range of historically and culturally significant structures sustained damage, including: Golestan Palace (a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2013 and the former seat of the Qajar dynasty), which was struck on 1 March 2026 despite protective measures including the display of a Blue Shield on the rooftop, the internationally recognised symbol of cultural heritage protection under the Hague Convention. Reported damage includes destruction of windows, arches, and intricate decorative elements; approximately 80% of the ornamental arches in the Mirror Hall, a structure over 120 years old, were reported destroyed.

Additional damaged sites in Tehran include: Marmar Palace; the Tehran Grand Bazaar Complex, a centre of everyday commercial and social life for the city's population for over two centuries; Saadabad Cultural and Historical Complex; Farahabad Palace-Museum; the Sepahsalar Mosque, a nineteenth-century mosque and theological seminary in central Tehran; the Islamic Consultative Assembly Building; the Abgineh Museum; Azadi Tower; the Pasteur Institute building; and numerous other listed historical buildings in the city's central and

southern districts. A total of 60 historical monuments and museums in Tehran were reported as damaged.

Sites in Isfahan

Isfahan, designated as Iran's capital during three historical periods and home to a concentration of cultural heritage from the Al Buyeh, Seljukian, and Safavid eras, sustained extensive damage.

Naqsh-e Jahan Square Complex (a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the largest public squares in the world, which continues to function as a living commercial, religious and social space for the city's residents), including the Shah Mosque (Abbas Grand Mosque), sustained damage to tilework on the northern and western iwans on 9 March 2026. The following day, Chehel Sotoun Pavilion and Garden Museum (also a UNESCO World Heritage Site) suffered severe damage to its Safavid-period decorations.

Subsequent strikes on 9 March caused damage to additional sites within and adjacent to the complex, including the Ali Qapu Mansion, the Rekib Khane Building (Museum of Decorative Arts), Ashraf Hall, Jebel Khane, Timuri Hall, and the Tohid Khane Complex. Further damage was reported to the historical fabric of the city of Khansar, as well as to multiple heritage buildings in Isfahan's wider urban area.

Sites in other provinces

In Lorestan province, the Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in Khorramabad sustained damage to several structures; the complex had displayed the Blue Shield symbol. The Lorestan cultural heritage department building was reported destroyed, and archaeological and anthropological collections housed within the Falak-ol-Aflak castle were severely damaged.

In Kurdistan province, the Salar Saeed Archaeological Museum, the Khosrow Abad complex, and the Asef Vaziri historical Mansion (Kurdish House/Anthropology Museum), among other sites, sustained damage in Sanandaj and surrounding areas.

Additional reported damage to heritage sites in other provinces includes: the Sulaymaniyah Palace Museum and Samsam Castle (Alborz); Sabzabad Mansion and the White House in Siraf Port (Bushehr/Mazandaran); the Tabriz Senjesh Museum (East Azerbaijan); the Darrehshahr Archaeological Museum (Ilam); Kohe Khajeh Site in Zabol (Sistan and Baluchestan); the Jame Mosque and the Jahangir Khan School of Qom; the Dezful Anthropological Museum (Khuzestan); and heritage sites in Fars, Guilan, and Mahabad (West Azerbaijan). In total, damage to historical areas has been reported in six cities: Tehran, Isfahan, Sanandaj, Kermanshah, Qom, and Khansar.

Iranian sources also allege damage to dozens of libraries across multiple provinces and the destruction of the Hazrat Seyyed al-Shohada Library in Zanjan, including a specialized Imam Hussein Studies Library.

The reported damage to historical and heritage sites is in addition to that caused by acid rain and smoke, resulting from strikes on fuel reservoir facilities in Tehran on 7 March 2026, addressed in separate letters to the governments of the USA (AL USA 18/2026) and Israel (AL ISR 9/2026). The acid rain and black precipitation resulting from the combustion of large quantities of petroleum products have affected the facades and ornamental features of an estimated 400 cultural and historical monuments, more than 150 museums, and the historic urban fabric of Tehran, an area exceeding 250 hectares. The materials most commonly used in Qajar-era and earlier architecture are assessed as particularly vulnerable:

- Limestone and marble, used in palaces and historic mansions, are susceptible to acid-induced corrosion and surface erosion.
- Traditional brick, found in structures such as the Tehran Grand Bazaar, historical mosques, and older residential buildings, may lose structural integrity and undergo surface exfoliation due to prolonged exposure to acidic deposits.
- Glazed tilework, mirror work, and stucco ornamentation, present in abundance in structures such as the Sepahsalar Mosque and Qajar-era houses, are at risk of discoloration, loss of surface lustre, and gradual dissolution.
- Museum collections face additional risks from the infiltration of gaseous and particulate pollutants through damaged windows and ventilation systems, with documented effects including fading of paintings and textiles, corrosion of metal objects, and deterioration of paper-based and fibre-based artefacts.
- Historic gardens, including Ferdows Garden, Negarestan Garden, and Qasr Garden Museum, may face long-term degradation of ancient trees and vegetation due to soil acidification.

The acid rain generated by these fires thus constitutes a compounding threat to cultural heritage that is distinct from direct physical strikes: it is diffuse, cumulative, and likely to produce irreversible damage over an extended time horizon, affecting sites that were not themselves directly targeted.

Natural Heritage

Concerns have also been expressed regarding the impact of ongoing strikes on the Zagros region, one of 32 recognised global biodiversity hotspots, spanning an area from West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan to Fars province and home to 242 endemic plant species. Extensive bombing of this ecosystem has been assessed as posing a serious threat to its ecological integrity, with consequences that extend beyond Iran's borders to the broader international community. Similar concerns have been raised about the biodiversity of species in Kharg

Island, targeted extensively during the conflict, including since the resumption of strikes.

Religious sites

Information received also report damage to sites of religious significance across multiple faiths present in Iran. These include the Sepahsalar Mosque in Tehran; the Jame Mosque of Qom, a major Shia congregational mosque; and the Jahangir Khan School, a historic theological seminary (madrasa) in Qom.

Qom is also the seat of the Assembly of Experts, the constitutional body responsible for the selection of the Supreme Leader. It is alleged that the Assembly was in session following the death of former Supreme Leader when it was reportedly struck on 3 March 2026.

We are further concerned by reports that, on 7 April 2026, the Rafi'-Nia Synagogue in central Tehran, a historic site of the Iranian Jewish community, was destroyed in an airstrike; Israeli authorities reportedly stated that the synagogue was not the intended target and that its destruction resulted from collateral damage.

Other Residential Areas and Civilian Objects

Information received indicates substantial harm to civilians in residential areas, with 689 incidents involving damage to residential buildings and areas, including single-family homes, apartment complexes, and mixed-use residential and commercial properties in Arak, Khorramabad, Tabriz and Ilam. In one of the strikes reportedly with the highest civilian casualties, two 20-unit residential buildings in the Resalat area of eastern Tehran were struck on 9 March 2026, killing 40 civilians. The Iranian Red Crescent Society estimated that around 100,000 residential units were damaged during the conflict.

The strikes were allegedly carried out in a manner inconsistent with the obligations of distinction, proportionality and the prohibition on indiscriminate attacks under international humanitarian law and customary law. Civil society organizations report the use of air-to-ground, high explosive munitions in densely populated areas in Iran. It is alleged that these strikes failed to adequately distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects, causing civilian fatalities and damage to critical civilian infrastructure.

Civilian infrastructure, including railways, bridges, and electricity and water infrastructure, has also been extensively damaged. Reports indicate that ongoing strikes in the southern part of the country continue to impact such infrastructure and the provision of essential services, in one instance, reportedly, cutting off drinking water to 20 villages and more than 10,000 people in Jask, Hormozgan. On another instance, the Aq Tekeh Khan Bridge in northern Iran was targeted and damaged in a cruise missile strike. The bridge has strategic role in commerce and is a critical segment of the transnational corridor connecting Iran to other countries in the region.

During the latest resumption of USA strikes in July 2026, fishery infrastructure along Iran's southern coast was reportedly damaged in multiple locations. Available information indicates that, on 8-9 July, at least 30 fishing boats moored at the Panj-Pelleh dock in Bandar Abbas were destroyed after two military projectiles reportedly affiliated with US forces struck the area. Similarly, the Governor of Asaluyeh also reported that 10 fishing boats caught fire at the Bonud dock following the impact of two projectiles. These incidents have reportedly disrupted the livelihoods of local fishing communities that depend on these vessels and facilities for their income.

Iranian authorities reported at least 30 civilian fatalities as the result of the resumed strikes on the Southern parts of Iran.

Lamerd and Abyek

Information received indicates that, on 28 February 2026, at least two strikes hit residential buildings, and a sports hall located approximately 300 meters apart in Lamerd, Fars Province. Reports show that at least 21 people were killed. Those reportedly killed included girls aged 11 and 12 years who regularly played volleyball at the sports hall, with the youngest victim reportedly aged two. Publicly available images indicate that the sports hall was regularly used for schoolchildren's volleyball tournaments and student examinations.

Independent assessments suggest that the projectile visible in the footages was likely a United States-made Precision Strike Missile, based on its shape, dimensions, blast characteristics and the absence of visible nose-mounted controls. While the munition used against the sports hall could not be conclusively identified from the available video, photographs of the aftermath reportedly showed fragmentation patterns consistent with a Precision Strike Missile warhead. The intended target may have been an IRGC base located adjacent to the sports hall; however, the base appeared undamaged in high-resolution satellite imagery dated 9 March 2026.

On 31 March 2026, the Azadi Hall (12,000-seat capacity) within the Azadi Sports Complex in Tehran was struck and destroyed, along with the dormitory complex of the Cycling Federation and associated federation offices. Blast damage was reported to the Azadi championship swimming pool and parts of the Rowing Federation facilities. The national judo team training camp was also reported destroyed in the same series of strikes. Additional affected sports facilities include: Be'sat Sports Complex (Mothers' Sports Hall) in south-eastern Tehran, Shahid Esma'eili Sports Complex, Eskandarlou Sports Hall, and a sports hall in Lamerd, Fars province, where 19 individuals were reported killed.

Warnings and Access to Information

Information received also indicates only a small proportion of attacks were preceded by effective warnings by the US and Isreal, with warnings often being too vague lacking sufficiently specific, timely and actionable information for civilians to act. Warnings were mainly disseminated through social media

platforms that were inaccessible to many civilians because of internet shutdowns and domestic platform restrictions imposed by the Iranian authorities. If confirmed, these circumstances would be relevant to assessing both whether the governments of USA and Israel took all feasible precautions to give civilians effective warning, and whether the Iranian authorities met their responsibility to protect civilians and not to impede their access to potentially life-saving information.

Internal displacement

Intense airstrikes in several provinces, causing extensive damage to homes and the collapse of basic services and critical infrastructure, have triggered the displacement of over 3 million people within the first weeks of the conflict. Reportedly, most were forced to flee from Tehran and other urban areas towards rural areas and northern provinces to seek safety. Many displaced persons have relied on their own resources and informal support networks to relocate to safer areas. Return has been constrained by the extent of damage to homes and infrastructure and the availability of basic services. The resumption of hostilities in July 2026 threatens new and repeated displacement, including families who had returned during the ceasefire.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we express serious concern that the reported attacks described above may violate international human rights law, including the rights to life, to security of person, to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food and water, to education, and to cultural rights, as well as children's rights during armed conflict, protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all ratified by Iran. The allegations received also raise serious concerns regarding violations of international humanitarian law.

We express great concern towards the irreversible destruction of Iranian's historical, cultural and religious significant sites and assets, and the resulting devastating impact on the rights of people to enjoy and access cultural heritage, to develop and express their identity, to maintain knowledge of and transmit their history and to fully take part in cultural life.

We further express concern about the internal displacement resulting from the hostilities. We are particularly troubled that displacement has been driven not only by the destruction of housing, but by attacks on critical infrastructure that have rendered urban areas increasingly uninhabitable through the disruption of water, electricity, transport, healthcare and education services. We further express concern at the risk of renewed and repeated displacement following the resumption of hostilities, noting that secondary displacement may progressively erode the capacity of affected persons to cope.

These allegations raise concerns regarding direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks in populated areas, and the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in civilian neighborhoods. In

particular, they also raise serious concerns regarding apparent failures to distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives; the proportionality of attacks expected to cause significant civilian harm; the adequacy of precautions taken to verify targets, select the timing and means of attack, provide effective advance warnings, and cancel or suspend attacks where necessary; respect for the special protection afforded to medical units and personnel, cultural property and places of worship; and the availability of prompt, impartial and effective investigations and remedies for victims and their families, including prosecutions for war crimes.

We remind your Excellency's Government that, in addition to and without prejudice to the threshold concerns raised above regarding the legality of the resort to force by the USA and Israel, the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution in attack, including the prohibitions on attacking civilians and civilian objects and launching indiscriminate attacks; the presumption of civilian status in case of doubt, are fundamental rules of customary international humanitarian law (see International Committee of the Red Cross, Customary International Humanitarian Law Rules), including under the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, binding on all parties to the armed conflict.

Attacks directed against civilian objects, including educational institutions, cultural and religious property, water and health facilities, and oil storage and electricity facilities, are prohibited. Where attacks are launched in the expectation of causing excessive civilian harm relative to the anticipated military advantage, or where feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects are not taken, such acts may constitute violations of international humanitarian law and may attract individual liability under international criminal law, both as war crimes and, in light of the pattern and scale of destruction described above, potentially as crimes against humanity.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights and humanitarian law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights and humanitarian law instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comments you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on the measures taken, to the maximum extent feasible, to avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas, schools and other civilian facilities, and to remove civilians and civilian objects from the vicinity of military objectives, including with respect to the location of Shajareh Tayyebah Primary School adjacent to the IRGC Naval Forces compound in Minab and the sports hall adjacent to an IRGC base in Lamerd.
3. Please indicate what measures were taken to protect the civilian population against the effects of attacks, including evacuation measures, the

provision of shelters, civil defence arrangements, and the dissemination of warnings and safety information to the population. Please provide disaggregated data on fatalities and injuries resulting from the hostilities, distinguishing between civilians and members of the armed and security forces, and disaggregated by age and sex where available.

4. Please indicate what measures have been taken to safeguard cultural property under your Government's control against the foreseeable effects of armed conflict, in accordance with the 1954 Hague Convention and its protocols.
5. Please set out the legal and factual basis for the decision to suspend internet access for the population, including the applicable legal authority, the factual circumstances relied upon, and the assessment supporting the necessity and proportionality of the measure. Please also explain how the suspension affects the population's ability to receive warnings, emergency communications, and information relating to security measures, and to access medical assistance and humanitarian aid. Please provide information about any measures implemented to mitigate those impacts.
6. Please explain what measures your Excellency's Government has undertaken or intends to undertake to address the impact of military operations on the right to health, including the destruction of medical and scientific research facilities, and the long-term environmental damage resulting from strikes on oil infrastructure, including soil and water contamination affecting agricultural land and public health, damage to biodiversity, and the secondary impact of acid precipitation on cultural heritage sites.
7. Please provide information on the measures taken to protect and assist persons internally displaced by the hostilities with access to adequate shelter, and on the conditions in place for voluntary, safe and dignified return.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please be informed that a letter on this subject matter has also been sent to Israel and the United States of America.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Annex

Reference to international human rights and humanitarian law

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to recall your Excellency's Government's obligations under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law, as well as authoritative guidance on their interpretation.

The Human Rights Council notes in resolution 9/9 that both international human rights law and international humanitarian law apply to situations of armed conflict and provide complementary and mutually reinforcing protection. International humanitarian law may inform the interpretation and application of human rights obligations in relation to the conduct of hostilities, but the two bodies of law are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. All human rights require equal protection, and the protection provided by human rights law continues in armed conflict. International human rights are subject only to derogations taken strictly in accordance with international human rights law.

We recall that article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, subject only to the narrow exceptions of individual or collective self-defense recognized in article 51 and to enforcement action authorized by the Security Council under Chapter VII. No resolution of the Security Council authorized this military campaign, and reports indicate that it was launched while diplomatic negotiations between Iran and the United States remained ongoing. On 12 March 2026, a group of United Nations Special Procedures mandate holders publicly stated that the attack on Iran was "entirely illegal under international law and constitutes an act of aggression" and warned that responsible political and military leaders could be liable for the international crime of aggression under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We share these serious concerns.

These statements were characterized by numerous international law experts, parliamentarians, United Nations officials and commentators as threats to commit war crimes and as raising serious concerns as to genocidal intent within the meaning of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. We recall that similar rhetoric by Israeli officials in relation to Gaza has been cited as an example of incitement to genocide in proceedings before the International Court of Justice.

International Human Rights Law

The Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States and the State of Israel are all parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, respectively since 24 June 1975, 8 June 1992 and 3 October 1991. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel are also parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Iran: 24 June 1975, Israel 3 October 1991) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Iran 13 July 1994, Israel 3 October 1991).

Although the United States has signed, but not ratified, the latter two instruments (respectively on 5 October 1977 and 16 February 1995), its signature

creates an obligation under article 18 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties not to defeat the object and purpose of the treaty, and thus an obligation of good faith to refrain from acts manifestly contrary to the rights enshrined therein. It is also bound to those rights as a member of the United Nations, as these rights are also affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and are part of the UN Charter. Many provisions of the ICESCR and CRC have also become customary international law.

Right to life

Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that every human being has the inherent right to life, that this right must be protected by law and that no one may be arbitrarily deprived of life. The right is non-derogable, including during armed conflict and other public emergencies. Article 6 requires States to refrain from arbitrarily depriving persons of life, take appropriate measures to protect persons against reasonably foreseeable threats to life and investigate alleged or suspected violations. Such investigations must be independent, impartial, prompt, thorough, effective, credible and transparent.

In its general comment No. 36, the Human Rights Committee stated that article 6 continues to apply during armed conflict, including to the conduct of hostilities. The Committee considered that practices inconsistent with international humanitarian law that place civilian lives at risk may also constitute arbitrary deprivations of life. These include attacks directed against civilians or civilian objects, indiscriminate attacks and failures to comply with proportionality and precaution requirements.

The Committee has interpreted a state party's jurisdiction under article 6 as extending to persons outside its territory whose enjoyment of the right to life is affected by its military or other activities in a direct and reasonably foreseeable manner.

Prohibition of incitement to hatred and violence

Article 20(2) of the ICCPR states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) defines genocide to include acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such; article III prohibits, among other acts, direct and public incitement to commit genocide. We recall that statements by senior State officials threatening the destruction of a State's population or "civilization" may be relevant both to establishing individual intent under the Genocide Convention and to the prohibition on incitement under article 20(2) of the ICCPR.

We recall that the US and Israel have ratified CERD, respectively on 24 October 1994 and 3 January 1979, including article 4 relating to the prohibition and punishment of incitement to racial hatred.

Right to health and occupational health

Article 12(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognizes the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Article 12(2) identifies measures necessary for the full realisation of that right, including: “the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene”; “the prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases”; and “the creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.”

In its general comment No. 14, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights explained that the right to health includes both healthcare and the underlying determinants of health, including safe water, adequate sanitation, housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions and access to health-related information.

Health facilities, goods and services must be available, accessible, acceptable and of adequate quality. Availability requires functioning hospitals, clinics, public-health facilities, trained personnel, essential medicines, diagnostic services and disease-prevention capacity in sufficient quantity.

The Committee has stated that States parties must respect the enjoyment of the right to health in other countries and refrain from actions that interfere with that enjoyment. It has also stated that access to health services must not be limited as a punitive measure during armed conflict in violation of international humanitarian law.

Attacks affecting hospitals, emergency medical bases, blood-transfusion centers, healthcare workers, disease-surveillance facilities, vaccine-production institutions, diagnostic laboratories, public-health research facilities, pharmaceutical production and industrial workplaces may impair healthcare, disease prevention, occupational health and the safe functioning of essential services.

Right to education

Article 26 of the UDHR (10 December 1948) affirms the right of everyone to education. It provides that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Article 13 of the ICESCR recognizes the right of everyone to education. Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognize the right of the child to education and address the purposes of education. The destruction of educational infrastructure, including primary schools and universities, directly undermines this foundational right.

In its general comment No. 13, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights explained that education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. Availability requires functioning educational institutions and programmes in sufficient quantity. Accessibility requires physical and economic access without discrimination. Attacks that destroy or damage schools, kill or injure students and

teachers, render educational premises unsafe, interrupt attendance or cause schools to close or be used as emergency shelters may interfere with the availability and accessibility of education. Appropriate measures may be required to restore safe access, provide temporary or alternative education and meet the needs of children affected by hostilities and displacement. The deliberate or reckless destruction of primary schools and universities violates each of these dimensions simultaneously and causes intergenerational harm by depriving a generation of children and young people of their right to education at the most formative stages of their lives.

We also wish to draw attention to the United Nations Secretary-General's reporting on attacks on schools and hospitals, and to Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), which recognize attacks on schools as one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. We further recall the commitments made by the United States upon endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration on 13 January 2025, by which the United States formally recognized the severe and lasting harm that can result from violence directed against civilian students, staff, and educational facilities, and committed to applying good practices for the protection of civilians in military operations that may affect schools. The Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, endorsed alongside the Declaration, provide that parties to armed conflict should avoid using schools and universities for military purposes and should endeavor to find alternative sites. The actions described in the present communication appear difficult to reconcile with these commitments.

We further draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, A/80/479, on the right to education in armed conflict as a human rights imperative. Building on earlier reports on education in emergencies (A/HRC/8/10 and A/66/269), the report maps States' binding and soft-law obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education in situations of armed conflict and sets out eight urgent, actionable priorities for international and national actors, including the criminalization of attacks on education and of the military use of schools and universities, the strengthening of accountability and transitional-justice mechanisms for education-related violations, and full compliance with the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict referenced above. The pattern of destruction described in this communication, affecting 21 universities and more than 760 schools, engages precisely the concerns this report identifies as most urgent.

Rights of the Child

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 3 requires that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Article 6 recognizes every child's inherent right to life and requires States to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the child's survival and development. Article 24 recognizes the right to health.

Article 38 requires States parties to respect and ensure respect for applicable rules of international humanitarian law relevant to children and to take all feasible measures to ensure the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict.

Cultural rights

Articles 27 of the UDHR and 15(1)(a) of the ICESCR recognizes the right of everyone to take part in cultural life. Article 15 of the ICESCR also guarantees the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications (15(1)(b) and the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity. This includes access to, participation in and contribution to cultural life, as well as access to cultural heritage, historic sites, museums, libraries, monuments, archives and cultural and religious institutions.

In its general comment No. 21, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stated that States parties must respect and protect cultural heritage in all its forms in times of war and peace. Cultural heritage should be preserved and transmitted to future generations, and States should refrain from interfering with access to cultural goods and institutions and take appropriate measures to protect them against interference by third parties.

Furthermore, the 2003 UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage stresses the responsibility of States to take all appropriate measures to protect cultural heritage in conformity with the principles and objectives of, inter alia, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, to which Iran, the USA and Israel are respectively parties to since 26 February 1975, 2 December 1973 and 6 October 1999, the 1968 Recommendation concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works, the 1972 Recommendation concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1976 Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (Section IV), as well as not to intentionally destroy their own heritage, “whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization” (Section VI).

We draw the attention of Your Excellency’s Government to the reports of successive Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights, particularly regarding the right to access and enjoy cultural heritage (A/HRC/17/38) and the intentional destruction of cultural heritage (A/71/317). As cultural heritage represents values linked to the cultural identity of individuals and groups, States have a duty not to destroy, damage or alter cultural heritage, and to take measures to preserve and safeguard it from destruction or damage by third parties (A/HRC/17/38, paras. 78 and 80; A/HRC/31/59, paras. 52, 53, 60). The report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights (A/HRC/31/59) affirms that the intentional destruction of cultural heritage constitutes a serious violation of cultural rights and may amount to an international crime, with profound and long-lasting consequences for affected communities, including the erasure of collective memory and identity. Given the largely irreversible nature of the destruction of cultural heritage, which constitutes a *prima facie* violation of cultural rights, effective efforts must be made to prevent and stop it at the earliest possible time (A/71/317, para. 5).

The Human Rights Council has reiterated, including in resolution 33/20 (2016), the irreversible harm caused by the destruction of cultural heritage and its devastating impact on communities and their identities, and has called on States to take preventive

measures, including the enactment of laws and policies that criminalize the intentional destruction of cultural sites, and to ensure accountability for those responsible.

Freedom of religion or belief

Articles 18 of the UDHR and of the ICCPR protect freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom, individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. Article 27 of the ICCPR further provides that persons belonging to religious minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to profess and practice their own religion.

In general comment No. 22, the Human Rights Committee explained that worship includes ritual and ceremonial acts and practices integral to the conduct of religious communities, including the building and use of places of worship. Damage to or destruction of mosques, synagogues, churches, shrines and other religious sites may therefore interfere with the ability of individuals and communities to manifest their religion or belief.

Investigations, remedies and reparation

Article 2(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires States parties to ensure an effective remedy for violations of Covenant rights. In relation to the right to life, this includes the obligation to investigate potentially unlawful deaths and to provide effective remedies and reparation.

Investigations should establish the facts, identify victims and those responsible, preserve and examine relevant evidence and permit appropriate participation by victims and their families. Where sufficient evidence exists, those responsible should be subject to appropriate judicial or disciplinary proceedings.

Victims of violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law must have access to effective justice, adequate and prompt reparation, and relevant information concerning the violations and available remedies. Reparation may include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.

International Humanitarian Law

The resort to armed force between the US, the State of Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran gives rise to an international armed conflict governed by international humanitarian law. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949, other applicable treaty obligations and customary international humanitarian law apply to the conduct of the parties. The rules governing the conduct of hostilities apply equally to all parties, irrespective of the legality of the initial or continued resort to force. Relevant provisions of additional protocol I are referred to below only insofar as they reflect customary international humanitarian law or otherwise provide relevant guidance.

These include the protection of civilian hospitals, their personnel and the wounded and sick under articles 16 and 18 to 20 of the Fourth Geneva Convention; the

customary rules of international humanitarian law on distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, including the presumption of civilian status in case of doubt reflected in article 52(3) of additional protocol I; the protection of medical units under article 12 of additional protocol I, reflecting customary international humanitarian law; and the obligation to investigate and prosecute grave breaches under articles 146 and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary law.

Proportionality – AP I, article 51(5)(b); ICRC Customary IHL rule 14

Article 51(5)(b) of additional protocol I prohibits attacks expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, or damage to civilian objects that would be excessive in relation to the anticipated concrete and direct military advantage. Customary IHL rule 14 confirms the prohibition of disproportionate attacks.

Military necessity – AP I, article 52(2); ICRC Customary IHL rule 8

Article 52(2) of additional protocol I requires that attacks be directed only against military objectives, namely objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage. ICRC Customary IHL rule 8 confirms this definition as a rule of customary international humanitarian law. In addition, **AP I article 54** prohibits attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, subject only to narrow exceptions, including direct support to military action and, in limited circumstances, imperative military necessity. This prohibition is also reflected in customary IHL rule 54.

Distinction and military objectives

International humanitarian law requires parties to an armed conflict to comply with the principles of distinction and precautions in attack. Parties to an armed conflict must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks may be directed only against combatants and military objectives. Civilians are protected against attack unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities. Under additional protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, indiscriminate attacks are prohibited, including attacks “which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects... which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated” (arts. 51(4) and 51(5)(b)). The prohibition on indiscriminate attacks is reflected in ICRC Customary IHL rules 11 and 12.

An object constitutes a military objective only where, by its nature, location, purpose or use, it makes an effective contribution to military action and where its total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage. Both elements must be satisfied. Previous military ownership or use, a general association with the armed forces, or proximity to a military installation does not in itself transform a civilian object into a military objective. Those who plan or decide upon an attack are required to do “everything feasible” to verify that the objectives to be attacked are neither civilians nor civilian objects (AP 1, art. 57(2)(a)(i); see also ICRC Customary IHL rule 15) and to “take all feasible

precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack with a view to avoiding, and in any event to minimizing, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects” (AP 1, art. 57(2)(a)(ii) and ICRC Customary IHL rule 17).

Schools, residential buildings, sports facilities, hospitals, laboratories, pharmaceutical facilities, museums, libraries and places of worship remain protected as civilian objects unless and for such time as they meet the definition of a military objective. Where there is uncertainty concerning the current status or use of an object, the attacking party must do everything feasible to verify that it is a military objective before directing an attack against it. (AP 1, art. 52(3)).

Article 51(4) of the 1977 additional protocol I provides: “Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited.” According to article 85(3)(b) of additional protocol I, it is a grave breach of the Protocol to launch “an indiscriminate attack affecting the civilian population or civilian objects in the knowledge that such attack will cause excessive loss of life, injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects as defined in article 57. This includes attacks that are not directed at a specific military objective, attacks employing means or methods that cannot be directed at a specific military objective and attacks whose effects cannot be limited as required by international humanitarian law.

Military necessity does not operate as an independent exception to these rules. It cannot justify conduct that is otherwise prohibited under international humanitarian law. A general invocation of military necessity is insufficient; the attacking party must identify the specific military objective concerned and the definite military advantage anticipated in the circumstances ruling at the time.

Proportionality and precautions in attack

Article 51(5)(b) of additional protocol I, which reflects customary international law (ICRC Customary IHL rule 14), prohibits attacks “which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated”. Even where an attack is directed against a lawful military objective, it is prohibited if it may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians or damage to civilian objects that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. **Article 57(2)(a)(iii)** requires military planners to evaluate the expected incidental damage against the military objective *before* launching an attack. Therefore this assessment must be made prospectively before the attack, on the basis of the information reasonably available to those planning, approving or carrying out the attack. It must take account of the civilian population and civilian objects likely to be affected and the reasonably foreseeable incidental effects of the attack. The presence of a military objective within or near a populated area, school, medical facility, cultural site or place of worship does not displace the obligation to assess proportionality.

In the conduct of military operations, constant care must be taken to spare civilians and civilian objects. Those who plan or decide upon an attack must do everything feasible to verify that the intended target is a military objective; assess the presence of civilians and civilian objects; choose means, methods and timing that avoid

or minimise incidental harm; and refrain from launching an attack expected to be disproportionate.

These obligations are also reflected in ICRC Customary IHL rules 15-18

Article 57(2)(b) requires that an attack must be cancelled or suspended if it becomes apparent that the target is not a military objective, is entitled to special protection, or that the expected incidental harm would be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. Where a choice is possible between several military objectives offering a similar military advantage, the objective expected to present the least danger to civilians and civilian objects should be selected, as required under ICRC Customary IHL rule 21.

Feasible precautions are those practicable or practically possible in the circumstances ruling at the time, taking account of humanitarian and military considerations. The use of artificial intelligence or automated decision-support systems in target identification, generation, validation or approval does not alter these obligations. Human decision-makers remain responsible for the reliability, currency and limitations of the information used and for compliance with the requirements of distinction, proportionality and precautions.

Advance warnings and precautions against the effects of attacks

Article 57(2)(c) of Additional Protocol I requires parties to give “effective advance warning [...] of attacks which may affect the civilian population, unless circumstances do not permit” (see also ICRC Customary IHL rule 20). Whether a warning is effective depends on whether it reaches the affected population, identifies the relevant area or danger with sufficient clarity, is understandable, is given sufficiently in advance and provides civilians with a meaningful opportunity to take protective action.

Warnings that are excessively broad or lack sufficiently specific and actionable information may not be effective. The accessibility of the means used to communicate a warning, including the effect of internet shutdowns, platform restrictions or telecommunications failures known to the attacking party, is relevant to that assessment.

A warning does not release the attacking party from its other obligations under international humanitarian law. Civilians who do not or cannot leave an area following a warning remain protected.

Parties must also take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects under their control from the effects of attacks. To the maximum extent feasible, they must avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas, endeavor to remove civilians and civilian objects from the vicinity of military objectives, and take other necessary precautions to protect the civilian population.

Article 28 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the use of protected persons (civilians) to render points, areas, or military forces immune from military operations. Article 51(7) of **additional protocol I** also explicitly states that the civilian population or individual civilians shall not be used to shield military objectives from

attacks or to shield, favor, or impede military operation (see also ICRC Customary IHL rule 97). A failure by the defending party to comply with its obligations does not, however, release the attacking party from its own obligations concerning distinction, proportionality and precautions.

Schools and educational facilities

Schools and other educational facilities are ordinarily considered civilian objects and therefore protected under customary international humanitarian law. Their location within or near a military or security compound does not in itself remove their protection.

Where a school was previously associated with military personnel or institutions but was later transferred to civilian administration or use, the attacking party must take feasible steps to verify its current status and function. Reliance on outdated, incomplete or insufficiently corroborated information may be inconsistent with the obligation to verify that an intended target is a military objective. Article 52(3) of Additional Protocol I specifically states: “In case of doubt whether an object which is normally dedicated to civilian purposes, such as ... a school, is being used to make an effective contribution to military action, it shall be presumed not to be so used” (emphasis added).

ICRC Customary IHL rule 135 provides that children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection. We recall Security Council resolution 1998 (2011), which strongly condemns attacks against schools as a grave violation against children in armed conflict, and resolution 2143 (2014), calling on parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian character of schools.

Medical units, personnel and public-health facilities

Article 12(1) of additional protocol I states that “Medical units shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack” (see also ICRC Customary IHL rule 28). This protection applies whether the medical unit is military or civilian, provided it is exclusively assigned to medical purposes. Corresponding protection for civilian hospitals is set out in article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the conditions under which such protection may cease, including the requirement of due warning setting, whenever appropriate, a reasonable time limit, are set out in article 19 of the Convention.

Medical personnel exclusively assigned to medical duties, and medical units and transports exclusively assigned to medical purposes, must be respected and protected and must not be made the object of attack. Medical units may include hospitals, clinics, emergency medical bases, blood-transfusion centers, preventive-medicine centers, medical depots, and other facilities organised for diagnosis, treatment or disease prevention.

Medical units lose their special protection only where they are used, outside their humanitarian function, to commit acts harmful to the enemy. Even then, protection may cease only after due warning has been given, setting, whenever appropriate, a reasonable time limit, and after that warning has remained unheeded.

The following do not constitute acts harmful to the enemy: the treatment of wounded or sick members of the armed forces, the presence of military medical personnel, the possession by medical personnel of light individual weapons for their own defence or that of their patients, and the presence of small arms and ammunition taken from wounded persons and not yet handed over to the competent authorities.

Whether a public-health research institute, scientific laboratory or pharmaceutical facility qualifies as a specially protected medical unit depends on its organisation and actual function. Where it does not meet that definition, it remains protected as a civilian object unless and for such time as it becomes a military objective. Its public-health functions and the foreseeable consequences of its destruction remain relevant to the assessment of proportionality and precautions.

These obligations have also been reaffirmed by the United Nations Security Council in resolution S/RES/2286 (2016) and subsequently S/RES/2601 (2021). The Council urged all parties to armed conflict to “respect the civilian character of schools and educational facilities in accordance with international humanitarian law.” Similarly, in resolution S/RES/1998 (2011), the Security Council strongly condemned “attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access by parties to armed conflict and all other violations of international law committed against children in situations of armed conflict.”

Cultural property and places of worship

A specific framework governs the protection of cultural heritage in times of armed conflict. The fundamental standards include the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

The United States of America, the State of Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran are parties to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Article 19(1) of this Convention provides: “In the event of an armed conflict not of an international character occurring within the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the provisions of the present Convention which relate to respect for cultural property.”

Customary international humanitarian law also requires special care in military operations to avoid damage to buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes and to historic monuments, unless they are military objectives (see ICRC Customary IHL rules 38-40). Property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people must not be made the object of attack or used for purposes likely to expose it to destruction or damage except as permitted under the applicable rules governing imperative military necessity. Feasible measures to implement these obligations may include accurate mapping, the maintenance and use of no-strike or protected-object lists, the dissemination of current information concerning cultural and religious sites to those involved in targeting decisions, and the selection of means and methods of attack that avoid or minimise damage.

Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the intentional directing of attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments and hospitals, provided that they are not military objectives, may be considered a war crime in the context of an international or non-international armed conflict (article 8(2)(b)(ix) and (e)(iv)). Furthermore, the destruction of cultural property for discriminatory purposes may be considered a crime against humanity, and the deliberate destruction of cultural and religious property and symbols may be regarded as evidence of an intention to destroy a group within the meaning of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Places of worship that do not independently qualify as cultural property remain protected as civilian objects unless and for such time as they become military objectives.

We also recall the International Law Commission's Draft Principles on Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (2022), which recommend the designation of areas of environmental importance, including areas of cultural importance, as protected zones in the event of armed conflict (principle 4).

Investigations, responsibility and reparation

ICRC Customary IHL rule 156 provides that serious violations of international humanitarian law constitute war crimes.

States must investigate war crimes allegedly committed by their nationals or armed forces, or on their territory, and, where appropriate, prosecute the suspects (ICRC Customary IHL rule 158). Relevant evidence should be preserved, including targeting records, intelligence assessments, imagery, legal reviews, communications, weapon-system data, collateral-damage estimates, battle-damage assessments and post-strike civilian-harm assessments.

A State is responsible for violations of international humanitarian law attributable to it, including violations committed by its organs and armed forces, and is required to make full reparation for the loss or injury caused (ICRC Customary IHL rules 149 and 150).

Internal displacement

We would further like to recall the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement which establish that all authorities shall respect their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to the displacement of persons. The Guiding Principles clarify that the prohibition of internal displacement includes displacement in situations of armed conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. They also set out specific protection for internally displaced persons, including non-discrimination, the right to protection and assistance, and the rights to life, family and adequate standard of living. Particular attention must be paid

to children, women, older persons, persons with disabilities and others with specific protection needs.

Any use of force by a State that causes the displacement of individuals in another State—whether internally or across borders—must fully comply with the applicable norms of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the Guiding Principles and relevant provisions of refugee law.