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Mobile Technology in the Interest of Law and the Protection of Civilians

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*[Geneva Call](#), a Geneva-based NGO, launches *Fighter not Killer*, a mobile quiz to raise awareness of the law of armed conflict among armed groups.*

Making international humanitarian law more accessible

Today's conflicts are mostly qualified under international humanitarian law (IHL) as being of a non-international character, i.e. a State against one or several armed non-State actors (ANSAs) or even a conflict among different ANSAs. It is thus critical to secure these actors' compliance with international norms. The reasons for lack of compliance are diverse: strategic arguments (asymmetric warfare), the complexity of the different treaties and the lack of knowledge of applicable norms, and sometimes defiance toward international norms. These issues make the respect and implementation of IHL by ANSAs challenging, often leading to dramatic consequences for civilian populations.

While the level of knowledge of IHL varies among the different ANSAs, they all share common features. Their members are not necessarily professional combatants and have not been systematically trained on IHL. An uneven level of education and difficulties in accessing areas where ANSAs are operating impede dissemination of and training on IHL norms.

Since 2000, Geneva Call has been engaging in dialogue with more than 100 ANSAs to encourage them to

respect IHL and enhance the protection of the civilian populations during armed conflict. In its daily work, the organization enters into dialogue with armed groups and invites them to sign *Deeds of Commitment*, through which ANSAs publicly commit to respect specific international humanitarian norms. It also supports the dissemination of IHL to commanders, combatants, political leaders of armed groups, and local communities.

Fighter Not Killer: A mobile quiz on IHL

To support this engagement with ANSAs, Geneva Call has developed a set of innovative tools to make IHL accessible to ANSA members. This set includes a mobile phone application, called ‘Fighter not Killer’.

This application takes the user through 28 scenarios where a combatant is faced with complex and credible situations in which he has to make the right decision. It was developed with the support of international IHL experts and covers topics such as the conduct of hostilities, humanitarian aid, basic rights, child protection, methods of warfare and the use of weapons.

Example Scenario (click image to enlarge)

“You are on patrol and you come across a wounded enemy in great pain. He begs you to shoot him to put him out of his misery. He says international law permits mercy killing.”

“Does the Law of Armed Conflict permit mercy killing?”

No. You may not harm an enemy fighter who is defenseless due to injury.



The main challenge in designing the scenarios was finding the right balance between making IHL accessible and understandable, on the one hand, and accurate and ‘legally correct’, on the other. Where IHL does allow certain types of violence, it has proven difficult in a quiz with a playful approach to inform the user that he is allowed to shoot to kill the enemy in those circumstances.

Example Scenario

At a shop, the clerk tells you that she wants to join your organization. Your organization has made a commitment to not recruit or use children under 18. You ask how old she is. She says “18”. You can’t tell if she’s 16 or 18, but you need recruits, and if she says so...

Do you need to verify her age?

Yes

Correct. If in doubt you must take measures to verify the age of recruits.

You ask to see her birth certificate. She says she doesn’t have one, but she can undergo a medical examination.

Can you accept the results of the medical examination as proof of age?

No

Correct. Medical assessments are not reliable enough to prove age.

She tells you she came from a province where all the records were destroyed in the previous conflict.

But she can get notes from the village mayor, her parents and school teachers.

If she provides all of these notes, and they are authentic, can you accept them as proof of age?

Yes

Correct. If official documents are unavailable, multiple sources should be used to confirm age.

The application is part of a set of tool that includes [9 short video clips](#) and 4 [illustrated booklets](#) to disseminate and make IHL accessible to armed groups. These tools were broadly used in [Syria](#) as well as Burma/Myanmar or Sudan over the last two years. The application complements these existing tools and will be launched over the next few months in the context of the Syrian conflict first.

Law and technologies



The application is available on both Android and iOS phones in three languages (Arabic, English and French) (*Arabic version shown left; click image to enlarge*). Some ANSAs have said they would not use it as they don't use smartphones for security reasons. However for many of them, a mobile application is an easy way to disseminate IHL at a very low cost.

“We hope to see the mobile application developed by Geneva Call given to the people even in the areas that are difficult to reach” said a leader from the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army, Geneva, November 2014.

The YPJ-YPG, the main Kurdish armed forces in Syria, announced they will install this application on all new android phones sold in the areas they control.

The use of smartphones has increased significantly in the past few years even in conflict-affected areas and is expected to increase further. Although its use to disseminate and promote law is increasing, its potential is still under-utilized.

Fighter not Killer can be downloaded for [iPhones](#) and [Android phones](#).



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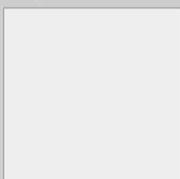
One Response

Heiko

[May 31, 2015 at 0:09](#)

This is a very convincing app.

Nicolas Sion and Annyssa Bellal



Annyssa Bellal joined Geneva Call in October 2014 as legal adviser. She received her PhD in public international law from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and an LLM in Philosophy of Law from the University of Grenoble. Prior to joining Geneva Call, she worked as a legal adviser for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs and the ICRC. Nicolas Sion, Communications and External Relations Officer, holds a Master's degree in International Management from ESCP Europe and London City University. He has worked in the private and NGO sectors and specialized in new technologies, media and communication.

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