

**P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

Brussels, 12 August 1999

10394/99 (Presse 247)  
P 77/99

**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of  
the 50th Anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions**

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the adoption of the four Geneva Conventions the European Union recalls the primary importance that it attaches to the four Geneva Conventions as the basic treaties of international humanitarian law.

The anniversary of the four Geneva Conventions is a time to take stock and to promote the implementation of international humanitarian law in all armed conflicts. The Member States of the Union seize this opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to respect and promote international humanitarian law.

The Conventions were a major step forward in the development of humanitarian law and an impetus for the subsequent development of an impressive body of international instruments. The Conventions are as necessary today as they were fifty years ago and the Union stresses the importance of full compliance with the provisions of the Conventions.

The Conventions were drawn up solely for the protection of the individual in times of armed conflicts. As such they represent the basis of the principles of humanity and together with the Additional Protocols of 1977 they are the main instruments of humanitarian law. The Union calls upon all countries that have not yet done so to become a party to the Geneva Conventions as well as to all major treaties in the humanitarian field.

Respect for, as well as protection and humane treatment of the victims of armed conflicts are the main duties of the parties to the Conventions. The implementation of the provisions of the Conventions is of paramount importance. The Union recognises the achievements since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions. However, the Union deplores the persistent violations of humanitarian law. In today's conflicts the important distinctions between combatants and civilians have often become blurred; the safety of humanitarian workers is not respected and children and other vulnerable groups have become targets of the conflicts.

Bridging the widening gap between existing international norms and respect for them should be the main objective and the issue should be put more forcefully on the agenda of the international community.

Prosecution of violations of international humanitarian law is an important means to promote compliance with the Conventions. In this context the Union welcomes the adoption of the Statute of a permanent International Criminal Court to try the most serious crimes and violations of humanitarian law and calls for an early ratification of this statute.

The Union pledges its continuing appreciation and support to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The role of the ICRC in ensuring that the humanitarian rules are respected is vital. The work that the ICRC has carried out throughout the years in very difficult circumstances is impressive. The ICRC anniversary publication "People on War" on the experiences of both combatants and civilians is timely and one way to promote the knowledge of international humanitarian law.

The International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies, the National Societies and many other groups and individuals have worked and are working for the promotion of international humanitarian law and the Union pays tribute to their courageous actions.

The Union recalls also the important role of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian law and notes in particular that international humanitarian law has been an important topic during the United Nations Decade of International Law.

---