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Protection of Human Rights During Armed Conflicts: Challenges and Opportunities for the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law

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Abstract. Armed conflicts remain one of the greatest challenges for the international community, threatening fundamental international values and declared guarantees. The article analyses the current challenges and opportunities for the implementation of international law in the field of human rights protection during armed conflicts, in particular in the context of the war in Ukraine. Particular attention is paid to the effectiveness assessment of international legal mechanisms, such as the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the role of regional institutions, in particular the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights.

The article examines the key aspects of human rights violations during the war in Ukraine, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of humanitarian law. The problems ensuring accountability for these crimes are analysed, including difficulties in documenting violations, collecting evidence and bringing perpetrators to justice.

In the context about the war in Ukraine, is examined the role of international organisations such as the UN, OSCE and International Committee of the Red Cross in monitoring the situation and promoting compliance with humanitarian law. It also analyses the contribution of civil society and the media in highlighting human rights violations and creating international pressure on aggressor states.

As a result, recommendations are made to improve the international legal mechanisms for the protection of human rights during armed conflicts. In particular, the author emphasises the need to strengthen cooperation between States, international organisations and civil society to ensure effective implementation of international law.

Thus, the article contributes to the understanding of current challenges in the field of human rights protection during armed conflicts and suggests ways to improve existing legal instruments to ensure justice and accountability.

Keywords: human rights protection, armed conflicts, international humanitarian law, challenges, legal mechanisms, law enforcement, international law, human rights, humanitarian protection, international organisations, legal order, civil society, cooperation.

Introduction

The issue of human rights protection during armed conflicts is of particular relevance in the current global challenges context, which the war in Ukraine has become one of the most acute examples.

The armed aggression, accompanied by numerous violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, in particular against civilians, prisoners of war and persons under occupation, requires a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of exis-

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ting international legal mechanisms. Despite the existence of clearly defined norms enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, their practical implementation is subject to numerous challenges, such as insufficient accountability aggressors, political interests of states and limited resources for monitoring and enforcement.

In this context, there is a need to study not only the legal aspects of human rights protection, but also to find new approaches to ensuring compliance with international law in the context of modern armed conflicts.

The analysis situation in Ukraine demonstrates the urgency of improving international mechanisms of accountability for war crimes and the importance of strengthening the role of international organisations in preventing violations and protecting victims.

Literature Review

The protection of human rights during armed conflicts is one key topics of modern international law, which attracts considerable attention scholars and practitioners. In particular, a special emphasis in this context is placed on analysing the effectiveness of the implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) in the context of active hostilities. The war in Ukraine, which has been going on since 2014 and has become widespread since 2022, has tested the existing legal mechanisms and at the same time stimulated their further improvement.

In the works of domestic and foreign scholars, in particular, G. Acre, R. Alyamkina, P. de Geert, M. Hnatovsky, P. Grim, S. Dietrich, A. Korynevych, T. Korotkyi, A. Krusian, A. Manea, K. Manuilov, N. Nogas, V. Papaconstantinou, O. Razumovsky, M. Shcherbyna, S. Hill, a number of aspects related to the protection of human rights in armed conflicts are studied. In particular, an important place is occupied by the issues the states actions compliance and non-governmental organisations with international law, access to justice for conflict victims, as well as responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Considerable attention is paid to the analysis the role of international organisations such as the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and other institutions in monitoring and ensuring compliance with law.

In the context the war in Ukraine, scholars focus on numerous challenges, including: massive violations of civilian rights, including the right to life, freedom from torture, forced displacement and sexual violence; destruction civilian infrastructure; use prohibited weapons; and restrictions on humanitarian access to the affected regions. An important area of research is also the study mechanisms for documenting crimes, collecting evidence and preparing cases for international judicial bodies.

Thus, the current state research on the protection human rights during armed conflicts demonstrates a significant interest in this topic, both in theoretical and practical aspects.

The war in Ukraine has become a catalyst for rethinking the existing legal mechanisms and searching for new approaches to their implementation. At the same time, the effectiveness of the international human rights protection system remains an open question, requiring further study and improvement.

Purpose

Of this scientific article is to study the current challenges and prospects for the implementation international law in the field of human rights protection during armed conflicts, in particular in the context of the war in Ukraine.

According to the purpose of the study, it is necessary to analyse the main international legal instruments regulating the protection civilians and war prisoners and to identify the problems of their application in the context of modern armed conflicts. It is also important to assess the effectiveness human rights mechanisms in the context of the war in Ukraine, to determine the role of international organisations in ensuring compliance with the law, and to develop recommendations for improving the legal framework for the protection of human rights in armed conflicts.

Particular attention is paid to the violations analysis of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions, and the assessment possibilities of bringing to justice those responsible for such violations.

Methodology

The methodology of the study involves a comprehensive approach that combines theoretical

and empirical analysis. As part of the theoretical part of the study, the author reviews international legal documents, such as the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols thereto, international human rights treaties, and decisions of international judicial bodies. Particular attention is paid to the compliance analysis the actions of parties to the conflict with international humanitarian and human rights law. The empirical part includes the study specific cases of human rights violations during the war in Ukraine, using the content analysis methods of reports of international organisations (UN, OSCE, ICRC), Ukrainian and international human rights organisations.

A comparative method is also used to analyse similar conflicts in the world. The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach, taking into account the political, social and historical contexts. The conclusions offer recommendations for improving human rights protection mechanisms at the national and international levels, in particular by strengthening accountability for war crimes and improving monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Results and Discussion

Armed conflicts are one of the biggest challenges for international law and the human rights protection system. Under such conditions, violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms become widespread, and civilians become the most vulnerable category.

Many centuries before the creation of the modern international human rights regime, the law of war established that people deserve protection from atrocities and arbitrariness in time of war. The emergence of international humanitarian law is due to natural needs and a prerequisite for the consolidation of human rights at the international level [1].

International humanitarian law (hereinafter referred to as IHL), which aims to regulate the behaviour of parties to a conflict, provides mechanisms for the protection of civilians, war prisoners and other categories in need of special protection. However, the implementation of these norms faces numerous challenges, especially in the context of modern hybrid wars, such as the war in Ukraine.

According to Professor E. David, international humanitarian law is designed for exceptional situations and is applied when many norms cease to be in force. It is the last bastion erected in the midst of the barbarism of war to prevent even greater barbarism, which would be a violation of these norms...' [1]. Of course, 'the law of armed conflict applies in relations between the parties to the conflict', since 'international humanitarian law contains rules that were designed for practical application in the realities of war, not for discussion in courtrooms' [2, p. 627].

In fact, among all the branches of international law, international humanitarian law is almost the only one that ... establishes a legal regime that comes into force only if a number of requirements are met – when a certain situation is classified as an armed conflict of an international or non-international character'.

It is important to emphasise that IHL is specifically designed to apply only during armed conflicts. It does not cover situations of internal state tension or isolated acts of violence.

During the 20th century, a significant number of international treaties were concluded to protect people in peacetime and during armed conflicts, which became the basis for the protection of the fundamental rights of every person.

In the context of the study, the legal framework of international humanitarian law was analysed, in particular, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 [3] and their Additional Protocols of 1977 [4].

These documents set out the rules for the conduct of armed conflicts aimed at limiting the suffering of civilians and non-combatants. In particular, the Geneva Conventions provide for the protection of civilians, the wounded, sick, prisoners of war and medical personnel [5].

Civilians need protection under IHL in two ways: 1) during the active phase of an armed conflict – from being the object of an armed attack and the consequences use force against enemy military objectives and combatants; 2) when they come under the enemy authority (in particular, when they are on the enemy territory state). In the first case, we are talking about the application distinction principles and proportionality, as described below. In the second case, the main applicable source of IHL is the Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of August 12 1949, which protects persons who, at any time and in any circumstances, find themselves in conflict or occupation under the authority of a party to the conflict or of an occupying power of which they are not nationals.

The Geneva Convention (IV) [6] relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War contains general rules applicable to all persons protected by IHL (sanitary and safe zones, evacuation, medical assistance) and to those relating to 'protected persons' within the meaning of Article 4 of the Convention (guarantees of humane treatment). The Geneva Convention contains rules relating to enemy nationals who are on the territory of a party to the conflict. The Geneva Convention also regulates the protection of civilians in the occupied territory [7, p. 45].

Under international humanitarian law, parties to an armed conflict are obliged to protect civilians. In particular, not to build military facilities on the territory of populated areas, not to use the population as human shields, and not to endanger civilians.

In addition to the Geneva Conventions, the Hague Conventions [8], the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court [9], and numerous UN Security Council resolutions [10] play an important role in regulating armed conflicts.

The International Committee of the Red Cross [11], which monitors compliance with international humanitarian law, also has important powers in this context.

However, the application of these norms in modern armed conflicts faces a number of problems.

Modern armed conflicts are often accompanied by systematic violations of international law. For example, during the war in Ukraine, numerous cases of shelling of civilian infrastructure, use of prohibited weapons and torture of prisoners of war were recorded. Such actions contravene the basic principles of IHL, in particular the principles of proportionality, distinction and humanity.

In her study, T. Syroyid notes that 'during many conflicts, basic norms of international humanitarian law are regularly violated in conditions of almost complete impunity. Impunity remains a widespread phenomenon in all armed conflicts and contributes to further violations' [12, p. 651].

Violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) during armed conflicts is one of the most critical problems in the modern world. One of the key problems is the lack of proper accountability for violations of IHL. The impunity that accompanies such actions becomes a catalyst for further crimes. It creates an atmosphere in which parties to a conflict

do not feel any real consequences for their actions. For example, in many modern conflicts, we see systematic attacks on civilians, the destruction of medical facilities, the use of prohibited weapons and other serious violations. In most cases, the perpetrators of such actions remain unpunished.

The reasons for impunity are multifaceted. Many conflict-affected countries lack an effective judicial system that can investigate and prosecute such crimes. International justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, often face limitations in their work due to political pressure or lack of cooperation from states. In addition, many states and international organisations are not interested in bringing perpetrators to justice, as this may contradict their political or military interests.

Today, not all states are parties to the Rome Statute, which significantly limits the ICC's jurisdiction. For example, such major powers as the United States, Russia, China and India have not ratified the document, which creates 'legal loopholes' in prosecution.

Impunity has a devastating impact not only on specific conflicts but also on the international system as a whole. It undermines the credibility of international law, encourages the repetition of crimes and sets precedents for new violations. In addition, the lack of justice for victims of IHL violations increases their suffering and can become a source of long-term social and political tensions.

There is no doubt that political factors have a significant impact on the activities of international judicial bodies. Political pressure from major powers or geopolitical interests may prevent investigations from being opened or decisions from being made.

For example, N. Berezhna notes that politics often becomes an 'invisible barrier' to justice when the issue of accountability for war crimes becomes part of diplomatic negotiations or an instrument of influence in international relations [13].

To fight impunity, it is necessary, first and foremost, to work on strengthening the political will of states to ensure the implementation of IHL and bring to justice all perpetrators, regardless of their status or role in the conflict.

Another significant problem is the lack of coordination between international and national justice mechanisms. Ukrainian experts note that, despite the efforts of the international community,

many states do not have adequate legislation to implement IHL into their national legal systems. This complicates cooperation between states and international justice bodies.

According to O. Zerkal, only the integration of international standards into national legal systems will ensure effective prosecution of criminals [14].

In the case of Ukraine, this problem is particularly relevant in the context of Russian aggression. Ukrainian scholars and human rights activists are actively working to document war crimes and cooperate with the ICC. However, they also emphasise the need to establish a special international tribunal to investigate the crime of Russian aggression against Ukraine, as this crime is currently not covered by the ICC's jurisdiction.

Thus, addressing the problem of impunity for violations of IHL requires a comprehensive approach. This includes the ratification of the Rome Statute by as many states as possible, strengthening the independence of international judicial bodies from political influence, and improving national legal systems.

Ukrainian researchers emphasise that only through global cooperation and strengthening of international law can justice be achieved and the most serious crimes against humanity prevented from happening again.

International organisations, such as the Red Cross, the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and others, whose main mandate is to monitor and respond to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights during conflicts, also face serious challenges.

According to Ukrainian human rights activist M. Arakelyan, the activities of these organisations are often limited by insufficient funding, lack of qualified personnel and political dependence on member states. For example, in the case of the conflict in Ukraine, the OSCE faced difficulties in ensuring the safety of its observers and access to the occupied territories [15].

European researcher T. Hamburger points out that international organisations often lack the capacity to respond quickly due to bureaucratic procedures and the need to coordinate actions between numerous participants. This significantly slows down the decision-making process and reduces the effectiveness of the response to human rights violations [16].

The duration and scale of armed conflicts create additional challenges. Ukrainian legal scholar O. Zadorozhnyi notes that in protracted wars, such as the war in our country or the war in Afghanistan, the resources of international organisations are depleted, and the attention of the international community is gradually decreasing. This leads to the fact that many human rights violations remain without proper investigation and accountability [17, p. 613].

Scholar A. Müller adds that protracted conflicts are often accompanied by humanitarian crises that require significant material resources to resolve. In such circumstances, human rights monitoring becomes a secondary task, as the primary task is to help the affected population [18].

Another important aspect is political restrictions. As noted by Ukrainian international law expert M. Hnatovsky, many international organisations depend on the consensus of their member states, which complicates decision-making in cases where one of the parties to the conflict is an influential member of the organisation. For example, in the UN Security Council, Russia, as a permanent member, blocks any decisions regarding its aggression against Ukraine [2].

A similar opinion is expressed by European analyst M. Brown, who points out that the political bias of some member states can impede the independence of international organisations. This creates a risk of selectivity in monitoring and responding to human rights violations [19].

Thus, the limited resources of international organisations in monitoring and responding to human rights violations during conflicts is a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive approach. As the experience of Ukraine and other countries shows, protracted conflicts place special demands on the effectiveness of international structures.

To overcome these problems, it is necessary to reform the funding mechanisms of international organisations, ensuring greater transparency and independence from individual states. Another effective mechanism could be the creation of specialised rapid response teams to address human rights violations during conflicts. Such structures could

operate independently of political influence and provide prompt reports on the situation.

The war in Ukraine has become a major test for the system of international humanitarian law. Despite numerous efforts by the international community, the protection of human rights remains insufficiently effective. In particular, the mechanisms for monitoring human rights violations often face obstacles in the form of limited access to the occupied territories or the unwillingness of the parties to the conflict to cooperate.

However, it is worth noting the positive role of establishing special investigative commissions to document war crimes and prepare materials for international courts.

It is extremely important to strengthen mechanisms of accountability for violations of international humanitarian law In today's environment, when armed conflicts are becoming increasingly complex and their participants more diverse, traditional accountability mechanisms are not effective enough. Therefore, it is necessary not only to strengthen existing mechanisms but also to adapt them to new challenges. One of the important areas is the creation and improvement of international institutions that investigate and prosecute perpetrators of violations of IHL. For example, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is an important tool in this context. However, its jurisdiction is limited, and its processes are often delayed due to political factors. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the powers of international judicial bodies, ensure their independence from political influence, and increase their efficiency.

It is also important to improve national accountability mechanisms. States should create a legal framework for the prosecution of war criminals at the national level, ensuring that their legislation is harmonised with IHL. This includes both the criminalisation of violations of IHL and the establishment of specialised courts or units within national judicial systems to try such cases.

Equally important is the introduction of compensation mechanisms for victims of IHL violations. This may include the establishment of special funds to compensate for damage caused by war crimes or other violations.

Modern armed conflicts are increasingly characterised by the involvement of non-state actors, the

asymmetric nature of hostilities, the use of new technologies (including autonomous weapons and cyber-weapons), and the changing nature of victims of conflicts – from military to predominantly civilian populations. In this regard, there is a need to adapt IHL to these new realities.

A clear legal framework for regulating the activities of non-state armed groups needs to be developed. This includes defining their status within the armed conflict, as well as establishing clear obligations to comply with IHL.

It is also necessary to improve the regulation of the use of new types of weapons. For example, autonomous weapons that can make their own decisions on the use of force raise serious ethical and legal issues. IHL should take these challenges into account and set clear limits on the use of such technologies.

The development of new international legal instruments or amendments to existing ones is an urgent need of our time, given the rapid development of hybrid warfare and new technologies that significantly change the nature of modern conflicts.

Hybrid warfare, which combines traditional warfare with cyber attacks, information campaigns, economic pressure and other asymmetric methods, poses new challenges to international law, which is often not flexible enough to respond to these threats. In addition, the rapid adoption of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons systems, quantum computing and biotechnology, requires a review of existing norms to ensure that they are in line with modern realities. In particular, it is necessary to develop a clear legal framework to regulate the use of cyber weapons, protect critical infrastructure from cyber attacks, and define the responsibility of states and non-state actors in cases of hybrid methods.

An important aspect is also the adaptation of humanitarian law to the conditions of modern conflicts to ensure the protection of civilians and compliance with the principles of proportionality and distinction. Making such changes requires broad international consensus, an interdisciplinary approach and consideration of the ethical aspects of the use of new technologies in the military sphere.

And, above all, it is necessary to strengthen the protection of civilians in modern armed conflicts. This includes both stricter regulation of attacks on

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civilian infrastructure and the expansion of humanitarian aid for the victims.

Implementation of these measures requires coordination at the international and national levels, as well as active cooperation between states, international organisations and civil society.

Conclusions

Summing up the above, we can state that the implementation of international humanitarian law is a complex but necessary task to ensure the protection of human rights in armed conflicts. The challenges faced in this area require a comprehensive approach that combines the improvement of national legislation, strengthening of international cooperation and implementation of innovative solutions.

Only through the joint efforts of states, international organisations and civil society can we ensure the effective implementation of IHL and

protect fundamental human rights even in the most difficult circumstances.

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Захист прав людини під час збройних конфліктів: виклики та можливості імплементації міжнародного гуманітарного права

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Анотація. Збройні конфлікти залишаються одним із найбільших викликів для міжнародної спільноти, ставлячи під загрозу фундаментальні міжнародні цінності та задекларовані гарантії. Стаття присвячена аналізу сучасних викликів та можливостей реалізації норм міжнародного права у сфері захисту прав людини під час збройних конфліктів, зокрема в контексті війни в Україні. Особливу увагу зосереджено на оцінці ефективності міжнародно-правових механізмів, таких як Женевські конвенції, Римський статут Міжнародного Кримінального Суду, а також ролі регіональних інституцій, зокрема Ради Європейського суду з прав людини.

У статті розглянуто ключові аспекти порушень прав людини під час війни в Україні, зокрема воєнні злочини, злочини проти людяності та порушення норм гуманітарного права. Проаналізовано проблеми забезпечення відповідальності за ці злочини, зокрема труднощі в документуванні порушень, збиранні доказів та притягненні винних до відповідальності.

У контексті війни в Україні розглядається роль міжнародних організацій, таких як ООН, ОБСЄ та Міжнародний комітет Червоного Хреста, у моніторингу ситуації та сприянні дотриманню норм гуманітарного права. Також аналізується внесок громадянського суспільства та медіа у висвітленні порушень прав людини і формуванні міжнародного тиску на держави-агресори.

У підсумку сформовано рекомендації щодо вдосконалення міжнародно-правових механізмів захисту прав людини під час збройних конфліктів. Зокрема, наголошується на потребі посилення співпраці між державами, міжнародними організаціями та громадянським суспільством для забезпечення ефективної реалізації норм міжнародного права.

Отже, стаття робить внесок у розуміння сучасних викликів у сфері захисту прав людини під час збройних конфліктів і пропонує шляхи вдосконалення чинних правових інструментів для забезпечення справедливості та відповідальності.

Ключові слова: захист прав людини, збройні конфлікти, міжнародне гуманітарне право, виклики, правові механізми, правореалізація, міжнародне право, права людини, гуманітарний захист, міжнародні організації, правовий порядок, громадянське суспільство, співробітництво.