

India: talking with the military

A two-day seminar entitled "International humanitarian law: its significance in the modern world" and organized jointly by the department of the Judge Advocate General of the Indian army, the ICRC and the Indian Red Cross Society was held in New Delhi on 28 and 29 August 1996. It was the second seminar of its kind, the first having taken place in 1988.

The Indian army Chief of Staff, Gen. Shankar Roy Chowdhury, delivered the opening address and introduced a new booklet, the "Code of conduct for combatants".

Senior officers of the Indian armed forces, from both operations and legal departments, ICRC delegates and representatives of the Indian Red Cross gave presentations on international humanitarian law and human rights law and their applicability in various military operations. The participants felt that the field of application of these two bodies of law needed further clarification, particularly in regard to low-intensity conflicts.

A talk entitled "The applicability of international humanitarian law to United Nations peace operations" was given by Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar, commander of the UN forces in the former Yugoslavia in 1992 and 1993.

The seminar enabled the Indian armed forces, the fourth largest in the world, to reaffirm their commitment to international humanitarian law. This interaction with army officers also provided an opportunity for the ICRC to explain the legal basis for its activities, especially its operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

The ICRC Delegate General for Asia and the Pacific expressed the hope that this dialogue with the army would encourage the Indian government to reconsider signing the two Protocols additional to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

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