

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW of the Red Cross

Call for Papers: “Protection of the Dead: The Contemporary Law and Policy Framework”

Deadline for Proposals: 21 May 2024

Full Papers Invited By: 1 July 2024

Deadline for Full Papers: 1 November 2024

The importance of protecting and respecting the dead, including by treating them with dignity, is of great concern across cultures and religions. When people die during wars, other situations of violence, disasters, or while migrating, it is critical that their remains be handled with respect and dignity, and that remains be searched for, recovered, and identified, wherever possible.

Those who die as a result of armed conflict are specifically protected under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). During armed conflict, among other IHL obligations, parties to armed conflict must take all possible measures to search for, collect and evacuate the dead without adverse distinction and to prevent the despoilment of the dead; they must record all available information prior to disposal of the dead, and mark the location of graves, with a view to identify those that have died, and they must endeavor to facilitate the return of their remains; and the dead must be disposed of in a respectful manner and their graves respected and properly maintained. Beyond IHL, other bodies of law, such as international human rights law and international disaster response law, also contain obligations and standards that are of relevance for the dead and their families. Unlike IHL, however, other than the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, human rights treaties do not contain provisions dealing specifically with the treatment of the dead.

In any case, despite the existence of international obligations related to the dead, notably under IHL for armed conflict situations, treatment of the dead raises issues that cannot be answered by law alone. Cohesive law, policy and action are pivotal in this area, as it brings with it many challenges. Locating and analyzing human remains is often difficult, as graves are often unmarked or secret and the number of unidentified remains is sometimes astronomical. The dead are, themselves, sometimes inaccessible when, for example, they perished at sea, or are in areas contaminated with explosive or toxic remnants of war. In other instances, the dead are sometimes used as “bargaining chips” between Parties to an armed conflict, preconditioning their return to the families on certain demands. The work of protecting and respecting the dead itself carries a heavy psychological toll, even as the families and loved ones of those who have perished bear a still greater psychosocial burden. Meanwhile, though recent technological advancements can enable remarkable speed and reliability in the location and identification of remains, those technologies are costly and rarely accessible to those tasked with seeking respect and protection for the dead and with ensuring respect for international obligations and standards regarding the dead. Finally, questions remain on the scope of the international obligations that protect the dead outside of armed conflicts, including for instance on the status of the right to the truth in human rights law. Furthermore, there are challenges to the implementation of international legal frameworks, including relevant obligations under international humanitarian law, and debates have arisen regarding the contemporary scope of the IHL right of families to know the fate and whereabouts of their relatives.

In response to these challenges, “humanitarian forensics” has emerged as a unique discipline, combining tools found in forensic anthropology, archeology, genetics, and law and reimagining and applying them to humanitarian action. Meanwhile, policymakers and lawyers focused on this topic have continued to adapt their understandings of the law based on the tools available and realities we face in the modern world.

The scientific literature in this area is robust. To complement that scientific exploration, the *Review* is compiling a special edition exploring the law, policy and practice of the protection of the dead during armed conflict and other humanitarian emergencies.

Call for proposals

The *Review* calls for papers that explore law, policy and action relating to the protection of the dead during armed conflict and other humanitarian emergencies, for publication in Fall 2025. We particularly value proposals with a forward-looking perspective that offer recommendations to improve current legal, policy and humanitarian problems, as well as papers that present innovative and creative arguments that may have an impact on future law and policy.

Submitting your proposal

We invite anyone interested to submit a proposal by **21 May 2024**. That proposal should consist of an abstract of maximum 500 words, as well as a biography of maximum 300 words (or a CV). Note that, if you are invited to submit a paper based on your proposal, the target length for a completed traditional article should be between 8,000 and 10,000 words, including footnotes – though we are open to proposals for other formats, such as opinion notes. Our selection process will prioritize innovative proposals that have clear potential to contribute to and advance legal and policy debates in this space in the years ahead.

In your 500-word abstract, please include:

1. Proposed title;
2. The main arguments you intend to develop; and,
3. An explanation as to how your topic adds to the existing literature and fits within the *Review*'s editorial line.¹

Please send your abstract and bio as a single Word document to review@icrc.org and ensure that “Proposal: Protection of the Dead” is in the email’s subject line. Note that, in line with our ongoing commitment to provide a space for a diverse array of voices in this field, we encourage submissions by established and emerging voices alike.

You will be notified as to the status of your proposal by **1 July 2024**. If you are invited to submit a full-length article, a draft of your completed article will be due no later than **1 November 2024**.

Please note that submissions to this edition will be reviewed by a jury, the membership of which will be announced in the coming weeks.

¹ For further information on the Review’s editorial line, please consult our [Guidelines for Authors](#).