

Humanitarian and human rights law, as an internationally negotiated and accepted code of ethics, provides those organizations seeking to negotiate humanitarian ceasefires with firm ground on which to stand. Not only does it provide them with extra leverage for bargaining with the conflicting parties, it may, in some circumstances, contribute to the moderation of conflict and the establishment of long-term peace. Article 144 of the Fourth Geneva Convention asks all High Contracting Parties to disseminate as widely as possible the text of the Conventions, and to include the study of them in military and civilian programs. The thinking here is that education will influence behaviour. Reference to the applicable statutes in the laws of war when negotiating a ceasefire can only contribute to this process of education. It will contribute, as well, to an appreciation by the conflicting parties of the relationship between human rights and the values for which they are fighting. They might, then, begin to understand that the implementation of human rights for all, as far as possible and without distinction, is the surest way of achieving their goals.

1.3: Humanitarian Ceasefires Defined

There are no pat definitions of humanitarian ceasefires. They are usually arranged on an ad-hoc basis when a humanitarian need in a war-zone becomes, or has the obvious potential of becoming, particularly acute. The need, whether it be child immunization to raise immunization levels in the conflict-zone and prevent a mass epidemic, or food delivery to prevent mass starvation, tends to override the immediate military-strategic interests of the conflicting parties. It becomes what is known as a superordinate goal: a goal about which it is in the mutual interest of the combatants to cooperate, and the fulfilment of which detracts from neither their military nor their political/strategic position. A distinguishing feature of a humanitarian ceasefire, then, is that it proposes that a concrete action take place which is linked to a moral appeal to stop the fighting. The overt purpose for negotiating a humanitarian ceasefire is to create the conditions that will make possible successful implementation of the concrete action in a time-frame sufficient to relieve the acute need.

Humanitarian ceasefires are distinct from traditional ceasefires in that they are not arranged for the express purpose of creating time for the disputants, or the disputants plus