

This is an ominous portent. It indicates that mankind's traditional rejection of civilians as legitimate military targets in war is more in danger of being eroded by the constant tide of conventional conflict than it is of being swept away in a nuclear holocaust. This danger argues strongly for international efforts that call attention to, and address the situation of, civilians in war zones, where death as a direct result of the conflict is as common as death by hunger and disease -- both indirect byproducts of war.

The plight of the civilian in war-zones is one in which the circumstances of war are in conflict with the basic human rights of the population. It is, as well, a situation where humanitarian assistance is often necessary to relieve the suffering of civilians, while calling attention to, and helping to restore to them, at least some of their basic human rights. A formidable obstacle to such assistance, however, is the ongoing war. One way to overcome this obstacle, tried and proven in El Salvador (1985), Lebanon (1987) and the Sudan (1989), is to arrange for a temporary cessation of military hostilities in order that the victims of war may be provided with humanitarian relief. The grounds for the ceasefire, of course, will depend upon the nature of the relief required or proposed. But whatever the grounds, they alone may not be enough to convince the parties in conflict to agree to a temporary halt in fighting. Further leverage for those seeking to arrange such "humanitarian ceasefires" can be found in the appropriate international statutes regarding human rights, humanitarian assistance and the obligations of parties in armed confrontation.

1.2 The Laws of War

In the Charter of the United Nations, Articles 1, 55 and 56 establish the link between peace, human rights, the resolution of problems of a humanitarian nature and the responsibility of United Nations members to promote all three.⁴ Article 1 states, in part, that the purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and promote and encourage respect for human rights. More explicitly, Article 55 refers to the

⁴ *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1987.