

Conventional Weapons and the Civilian Population

At the first ICRC Conference of Government Experts in 1971, a number of countries led by Sweden proposed that the use of certain types of conventional weapons which are particularly dangerous to civilians should be outlawed in the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. During consideration of an item entitled "Human Rights in Armed Conflicts" in the Third Committee at the 1971 session of the General Assembly, Sweden tabled a resolution which, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on napalm and other incendiary weapons, and invited the Second ICRC Conference of Government Experts "to devote special attention to ... legal restraints and restrictions on certain methods of warfare and weapons that have proved particularly perilous to civilians ...". The Secretary General's report on napalm and other incendiary weapons was given preliminary consideration at the 1972 session of the General Assembly in the First (Disarmament) Committee.

At the second ICRC Conference on Government Experts in 1972, Sweden and 18 other countries proposed that "the ICRC should arrange a special meeting to consult with legal, military, and medical experts on the question of express prohibitions or limitations of use of such conventional weapons as may cause unnecessary suffering or be indiscriminate in their effect. The Canadian intervention on this question was influential in persuading the ICRC that its report should confine itself to creating a solid factual basis for subsequent discussion of this subject in the most appropriate forum.

In February 1973, the ICRC convened a meeting in Geneva of medical, military, and legal experts to assist the ICRC in preparing a documentary report which was published under the title "Weapons that may Cause Unnecessary Suffering or have Indiscriminate Effects". In addition, at the 1973 session of the General Assembly, the U.N. Secretariat presented a two-volume survey on "Existing rules of international law concerning the prohibition or restriction of certain weapons".