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Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 29 July 1899.

Full text

(List of Contracting Parties)

Considering that, while seeking means to preserve peace and prevent armed conflicts among nations, it is likewise necessary to have regard to cases where an appeal to arms may be caused by events which their solicitude could not avert;

Animated by the desire to serve, even in this extreme hypothesis, the interests of humanity and the ever increasing requirements of civilization;

Thinking it important, with this object, to revise the laws and general customs of war, either with the view of defining them more precisely or of laying down certain limits for the purpose of modifying their severity as far as possible;

Inspired by these views which are enjoined at the present day, as they were twenty-five years ago at the time of the Brussels Conference in 1874, by a wise and generous foresight;

Have, in this spirit, adopted a great number of provisions, the object of which is to define and govern the usages of war on land.

In view of the High Contracting Parties, these provisions, the wording of which has been inspired by the desire to diminish the evils of war so far as military necessities permit, are destined to serve as general rules of conduct for belligerents in their relations with each other and with populations.

It has not, however, been possible to agree forthwith on provisions embracing all the circumstances which occur in practice.

On the other hand, it could not be intended by the High Contracting Parties that the cases not provided for should, for want of a written provision, be left to the arbitrary judgment of the military commanders.

Until a more complete code of the laws of war is issued, the High Contracting Parties think it right to declare that in cases not included in the Regulations adopted by them, populations and belligerents remain under the protection and empire of the principles of international law, as they result from the usages established between civilized nations, from the laws of humanity, and the requirements of the public conscience;

They declare that it is in this sense especially that Articles 1 and 2 of the Regulations adopted must be understood;

The High Contracting Parties, desiring to conclude a Convention to this effect, have appointed as their Plenipotentiaries, to wit:

(Here follow the names of Plenipotentiaries)

Who, after communication of their full powers, found in good and due form, have agreed on the following:

Article. 1. The High Contracting Parties shall issue instructions to their armed land forces, which shall be in conformity with the "Regulations respecting the laws and customs of war on land" annexed to the present Convention.

Art. 2. The provisions contained in the Regulations mentioned in Article I are only binding on the Contracting Powers, in case of war between two or more of them.

These provisions shall cease to be binding from the time when, in a war between Contracting Powers, a non-Contracting Power joins one of the belligerents.

Art. 3. The present Convention shall be ratified as speedily as possible.

The ratifications shall be deposited at The Hague.

A 'procès-verbal' shall be drawn up recording the receipt of each ratification, and a copy, duly certified, shall be sent through the diplomatic channel, to all the Contracting Powers.

Art. 4. Non-Signatory Powers are allowed to adhere to the present Convention.

For this purpose they must make their adhesion known to the Contracting Powers by means of a written notification, addressed to the Netherlands Government, and by it communicated to all the other Contracting Powers.

Art. 5. In the event of one of the High Contracting Parties denouncing the present Convention, such denunciation would not take effect until a year after the written notification made to the Netherlands Government, and by it at once communicated to all the other Contracting Powers.

This denunciation shall affect only the notifying Power.

In faith of which the Plenipotentiaries have signed the present Convention and affixed their seals thereto.

Done at The Hague 29 July 1899, in a single copy, which shall be kept in the archives of the Netherlands Government, and copies of which, duly certified, shall be delivered to the Contracting Powers through the diplomatic channel.

(Here follow signatures)

ANNEX TO THE CONVENTION

REGULATIONS RESPECTING THE LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF WAR ON LAND

SECTION I ON BELLIGERENTS

CHAPTER I

On the qualifications of belligerents

Article 1. The laws, rights, and duties of war apply not only to armies, but also to militia and volunteer corps fulfilling the following conditions:

1. To be commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates;
2. To have a fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance;
3. To carry arms openly; and
4. To conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war.

In countries where militia or volunteer corps constitute the army, or form part of it, they are included under the denomination "army."

Art. 2. The population of a territory which has not been occupied who, on the enemy's approach, spontaneously take up arms to resist the invading troops without having time to organize themselves in accordance with Article 1, shall be regarded as belligerent, if they respect the laws and customs of war.

Art. 3. The armed forces of the belligerent parties may consist of combatants and non-combatants. In case of capture by the enemy both have a right to be treated as prisoners of war.

CHAPTER II

On prisoners of war

Art. 4. Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not in that of the individuals or corps who captured them.

They must be humanely treated.

All their personal belongings, except arms, horses, and military papers remain their property.

Art. 5. Prisoners of war may be interned in a town, fortress, camp, or any other locality, and bound not to go beyond certain fixed limits; but they can only be confined as an indispensable measure of safety.

Art. 6. The State may utilize the labour of prisoners of war according to their rank and aptitude. Their tasks shall not be excessive, and shall have nothing to do with the military operations.

Prisoners may be authorized to work for the public service, for private persons, or on their own account.

Work done for the State shall be paid for according to the tariffs in force for soldiers of the national army employed on similar tasks.

When the work is for other branches of the public service or for private persons, the conditions shall be settled in agreement with the military authorities.

The wages of the prisoners shall go towards improving their position, and the balance shall be paid them at the time of their release, after deducting the cost of their maintenance.

Art. 7. The Government into whose hands prisoners of war have fallen is bound to maintain them. Failing a special agreement between the belligerents, prisoners of war shall be treated as regards food, quarters, and clothing, on the same footing as the troops of the Government which has captured them.

Art. 8. Prisoners of war shall be subject to the laws, regulations, and orders in force in the army of the State into whose hands they have fallen. Any act of insubordination warrants the adoption, as regards them, of such measures of severity as may be necessary. Escaped prisoners, recaptured before they have succeeded in rejoining their army, or before quitting the territory occupied by the army that captured them, are liable to disciplinary punishment. Prisoners who, after succeeding in escaping are again taken prisoners, are not liable to any punishment for the previous flight.

Art. 9. Every prisoner of war, if questioned, is bound to declare his true name and rank, and if he disregards this rule, he is liable to a curtailment of the advantages accorded to the prisoners of war of his class.

Art. 10. Prisoners of war may be set at liberty on parole if the laws of their country authorize it, and, in such a case, they are bound, on their personal honour, scrupulously to fulfil, both as regards their own Government and the Government by whom they were made prisoners, the engagements they have contracted. In such cases, their own Government shall not require of nor accept from them any service incompatible with the parole given.

Art. 11. A prisoner of war cannot be forced to accept his liberty on parole; similarly the hostile Government is not obliged to assent to the prisoner's request to be set at liberty on parole.

Art. 12. Any prisoner of war, who is liberated on parole and recaptured, bearing arms against the Government to whom he had pledged his honour, or against the allies of that Government, forfeits his right to be treated as a prisoner of war, and can be brought before the courts.

Art. 13. Individuals who follow an army without directly belonging to it, such as newspaper correspondents and reporters, sutlers, contractors, who fall into the enemy's hands, and whom the latter think fit to detain, have a right to be treated as prisoners of war, provided they can produce a certificate from the military authorities of the army they were accompanying.

Art. 14. A bureau for information relative to prisoners of war is instituted, on the commencement of hostilities, in each of the belligerent States, and, when necessary, in the neutral countries on whose territory belligerents have been received. This bureau is intended to answer all inquiries about prisoners of war, and is furnished by the various services concerned with all the necessary information to enable it to keep an individual return for each prisoner of war. It is kept informed of internments and changes, as well as of admissions into hospital and deaths.

It is also the duty of the information bureau to receive and collect all objects of personal use, valuables, letters, etc., found on the battlefields or left by prisoners who have died in hospital or ambulance, and to transmit them to those interested.

Art. 15. Relief societies for prisoners of war, which are regularly constituted in accordance with the law of the country with the object of serving as the intermediary for charity, shall receive from the belligerents for themselves and their duly accredited agents every facility, within the bounds of military requirements and administrative regulations, for the effective accomplishment of their humane task. Delegates of these societies may be admitted to the places of internment for the distribution of relief, as also to the halting places of repatriated prisoners, if furnished with a personal permit by the military authorities, and on giving an engagement in writing to comply with all their regulations for order and police.

Art. 16. The information bureau shall have the privilege of free postage. Letters, money orders, and valuables, as well as postal parcels destined for the prisoners of war or dispatched by them, shall be free of all postal duties both in the countries of origin and destination, as well as in those they pass through. Gifts and relief in kind for prisoners of war shall be admitted free of all duties of entry and others, as well as of payments for carriage by the Government railways.

Art. 17. Officers taken prisoners may receive, if necessary, the full pay allowed them in this position by their country's regulations, the amount to be repaid by their Government.

Art. 18. Prisoners of war shall enjoy every latitude in the exercise of their religion, including attendance at their own church services, provided only they comply with the regulations for order and police issued by the military authorities.

Art. 19. The wills of prisoners of war are received or drawn up on the same conditions as for soldiers of the national army.
The same rules shall be observed regarding death certificates, as well as for the burial of prisoners of war, due regard being paid to their grade and rank.

Art. 20. After the conclusion of peace, the repatriation of prisoners of war shall take place as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER III

On the sick and wounded

Art. 21. The obligations of belligerents with regard to the sick and wounded are governed by the Geneva Convention of 22 August 1864, subject to any modifications which may be introduced into it.

SECTION II ON HOSTILITIES

CHAPTER I

On means of injuring the enemy, sieges, and bombardments

Art. 22. The right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited.

Art. 23. Besides the prohibitions provided by special Conventions, it is especially prohibited

- (a) To employ poison or poisoned arms;
- (b) To kill or wound treacherously individuals belonging to the hostile nation or army;
- (c) To kill or wound an enemy who, having laid down arms, or having no longer means of defence, has surrendered at discretion;
- (d) To declare that no quarter will be given;
- (e) To employ arms, projectiles, or material of a nature to cause superfluous injury;
- (f) To make improper use of a flag of truce, the national flag or military ensigns and uniform of the enemy, as well as the distinctive badges of the Geneva Convention;
- (g) To destroy or seize the enemy's property, unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war.

Art. 24. Ruses of war and the employment of methods necessary to obtain information about the enemy and the country, are considered allowable.

Art. 25. The attack or bombardment of towns, villages, habitations or buildings which are not defended, is prohibited.

Art. 26. The commander of an attacking force, before commencing a bombardment, except in the case of an assault, should do all he can to warn the authorities.

Art. 27. In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps should be taken to spare as far as possible edifices devoted to religion, art, science, and charity, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not used at the same time for military purposes.
The besieged should indicate these buildings or places by some particular and visible signs, which should previously be notified to the assailants.

Art. 28. The pillage of a town or place, even when taken by assault is prohibited

CHAPTER II

On spies

Art. 29. An individual can only be considered a spy if, acting clandestinely, or on false pretences, he obtains, or seeks to obtain information in the zone of operations of a belligerent, with the intention of communicating it

to the hostile party.

Thus, soldiers not in disguise who have penetrated into the zone of operations of a hostile army to obtain information are not considered spies. Similarly, the following are not considered spies: soldiers or civilians, carrying out their mission openly, charged with the delivery of despatches destined either for their own army or for that of the enemy. To this class belong likewise individuals sent in balloons to deliver despatches, and generally to maintain communication between the various parts of an army or a territory.

Art. 30. A spy taken in the act cannot be punished without previous trial.

Art. 31. A spy who, after rejoining the army to which he belongs, is subsequently captured by the enemy, is treated as a prisoner of war, and incurs no responsibility for his previous acts of espionage.

CHAPTER III

On flags of truce

Art. 32. An individual is considered as a parlementaire who is authorized by one of the belligerents to enter into communication with the other, and who carries a white flag. He has a right to inviolability, as well as the trumpeter, bugler, or drummer, the flag-bearer and the interpreter who may accompany him.

Art. 33. The chief to whom a parlementaire is sent is not obliged to receive him in all circumstances. He can take all steps necessary to prevent the parlementaire taking advantage of his mission to obtain information.

In case of abuse, he has the right to detain the parlementaire temporarily.

Art. 34. The parlementaire loses his rights of inviolability if it is proved beyond doubt that he has taken advantage of his privileged position to provoke or commit an act of treason.

CHAPTER IV

On capitulations

Art. 35. Capitulations agreed on between the Contracting Parties must be in accordance with the rules of military honour.

When once settled, they must be scrupulously observed by both the parties.

CHAPTER V

On armistices

Art. 36. An armistice suspends military operations by mutual agreement between the belligerent parties. If its duration is not fixed, the belligerent parties can resume operations at any time, provided always the enemy is warned within the time agreed upon, in accordance with the terms of the armistice.

Art. 37. An armistice may be general or local. The first suspends all military operations of the belligerent States; the second, only those between certain fractions of the belligerent armies and in a fixed radius.

Art. 38. An armistice must be notified officially, and in good time, to the competent authorities and the troops. Hostilities are suspended immediately after the notification, or at a fixed date.

Art. 39. It is for the Contracting Parties to settle, in the terms of the armistice, what communications may be held, on the theatre of war, with the population and with each other.

Art. 40. Any serious violation of the armistice by one of the parties gives the other party the right to denounce it, and even, in case of urgency, to recommence hostilities at once.

Art. 41. A violation of the terms of the armistice by private individuals acting on their own initiative, only confers the right of demanding the punishment of the offenders, and, if necessary, indemnity for the losses sustained.

SECTION III

On military authority over hostile territory

Art. 42. Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation applies only to the territory where such authority is established, and in a position to assert itself.

Art. 43. The authority of the legitimate power having actually passed into the hands of the occupant, the latter shall take all steps in his power to re-establish and insure, as far as possible, public order and safety, while respecting, unless absolutely prevented, the laws in force in the country.

Art. 44. Any compulsion of the population of occupied territory to take part in military operations against its own country is prohibited.

Art. 45. Any pressure on the population of occupied territory to take the oath to the hostile Power is prohibited.

Art. 46. Family honours and rights, individual lives and private property, as well as religious convictions and liberty, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated.

Art. 47. Pillage is formally prohibited.

Art. 48. If, in the territory occupied, the occupant collects the taxes, dues, and tolls imposed for the benefit of the State, he shall do it, as far as possible, in accordance with the rules in existence and the assessment in force, and will in consequence be bound to defray the expenses of the administration of the occupied territory on the same scale as that by which the legitimate Government was bound.

Art. 49. If, besides the taxes mentioned in the preceding Article, the occupant levies other money taxes in the occupied territory, this can only be for military necessities or the administration of such territory.

Art. 50. No general penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, can be inflicted on the population on account of the acts of individuals for which it cannot be regarded as collectively responsible.

Art. 51. No tax shall be collected except under a written order and on the responsibility of a commander-in-chief. This collection shall only take place, as far as possible, in accordance with the rules in existence and the assessment of taxes in force. For every payment a receipt shall be given to the taxpayer.

Art. 52. Neither requisitions in kind nor services can be demanded from communes or inhabitants except for the necessities of the army of occupation. They must be in proportion to the resources of the country, and of such a nature as not to involve the population in the obligation of taking part in military operations against their country. These requisitions and services shall only be demanded on the authority of the commander in the locality occupied. The contributions in kind shall, as far as possible, be paid for in ready money; if not, their receipt shall be acknowledged.

Art. 53. An army of occupation can only take possession of the cash, funds, and property liable to requisition belonging strictly to the State, depots arms, means of transport, stores and supplies, and, generally movable property of the State which may be used for military operations. Railway plant, land telegraphs, telephones, steamers and other ships, apart from cases governed by maritime law, as well as depots of arms and, generally, all kinds of munitions of war, even though belonging to companies or to private persons, are likewise material which may serve for military operations, but they must be restored at the conclusion of peace, and indemnities paid for them.

Art. 54. The plant of railways coming from neutral States, whether the property of those States, or of companies, or of private persons, shall be sent back to them as soon as possible.

Art. 55. The occupying State shall only be regarded as administrator and usufructuary of the public buildings, real property, forests and agricultural works belonging to the hostile State, and situated in the occupied country. It must protect the capital of these properties, and administer it according to the rules of usufruct.

Art. 56. The property of the communes, that of religious, charitable, and educational institutions, and those of arts and science, even when State property, shall be treated as private property. All seizure of and destruction, or intentional damage done to such institutions, to historical monuments, works of art or science, is prohibited, and should be made the subject of proceedings.

SECTION IV ON THE INTERNMENT OF BELLIGERENTS AND THE CARE OF THE WOUNDED IN NEUTRAL COUNTRIES

Art. 57. A neutral State which receives in its territory troops belonging to the belligerent armies shall intern them, as far as possible, at a distance from the theatre of war.

It can keep them in camps, and even confine them in fortresses or locations assigned for this purpose. It shall decide whether officers may be left at liberty on giving their parole that they will not leave the neutral territory without authorization.

Art. 58. Failing a special convention, the neutral State shall supply the interned with the food, clothing, and relief required by humanity.

At the conclusion of peace, the expenses caused by the internment shall be made good.

Art. 59. A neutral State may authorize the passage over its territory of wounded or sick belonging to the belligerent armies, on condition that the trains bringing them shall carry neither combatants nor war material. In such a case, the neutral State is bound to adopt such measures of safety and control as may be necessary for the purpose.

Wounded and sick brought under these conditions into neutral territory by one of the belligerents, and belonging to the hostile party, must be guarded by the neutral State, so as to insure their not taking part again in the military operations. The same duty shall devolve on the neutral State with regard to wounded or sick of the other army who may be committed to its care.

Art. 60. The Geneva Convention applies to sick and wounded interned in neutral territory.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

International Committee of the Red Cross