

What is a war crime?

War crimes are serious violations of IHL that are committed in relation to an armed conflict.

For example, certain acts committed against wounded or sick combatants and prisoners or civilians qualify as war crimes. These include:

- wilful killing;
- torture, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury;
- wilfully depriving someone of the right to a fair trial.

The following acts are also war crimes:

- intentionally attacking the civilian population or civilian objects;
- destruction of property not required by military necessity;
- starving civilians;
- using human shields to protect military objectives;
- killing or wounding a surrendering combatant;
- ordering or threatening that there shall be no survivors;
- killing or wounding an enemy while pretending to be a civilian;
- taking hostages;
- unlawfully forcing civilians to move to another location;
- using prohibited weapons or methods of warfare;
- sexual violence;
- recruiting children into armed forces or groups or using them in armed conflict;
- intentionally attacking persons or objects lawfully using the red cross/red crescent/red crystal emblems;
- misusing the red cross/red crescent/red crystal emblems

Source: Paraphrased from Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.