

EDITORIAL

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In 2021, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) estimates that – worldwide – around 600 armed groups have the capacity to cause violence of humanitarian concern. These groups’ features are extremely diverse, ranging from armed gangs in a town to sophisticated organizations, exercising full governance and State-like control over large chunks of territory and impressive numbers of people. From those 600, more than 100 can – as a matter of international humanitarian law – be considered parties to a non-international armed conflict, i.e. as non-State armed groups (NSAGs), and are therefore bound by international humanitarian law. These numbers, and the corresponding concentration of power such groups are able to project, underscore the continuing reality of NSAGs, and why continued scholarly analysis remains warranted.

Thus, ten years after the *International Review of the Red Cross* published its editions on “Understanding armed groups and the applicable law” and on “Engaging armed groups”,¹ the purpose of the present bundle of articles and an interview is to take stock of some recent developments, including the humanitarian impact and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not widely known, for example, that many NSAGs not only engage in military operations against the State or other NSAGs they are fighting, but that also many provide a range of services – from basic needs to security and justice – to sometimes millions of people – at times requesting taxation in return to fund those services. Articles in this edition flesh out the implications of such governance, both from the legal angle and (as also illustrated through the interview in this edition) from the operational angle of how to engage such groups. Finally, two fascinating articles analyse the topic of reparations by NSAGs for violations of international law committed by them.

The second part of this edition features nine “selected articles”, i.e. articles which fall within the *Review*’s “editorial triangle” of international humanitarian law, policy and action, yet which are not necessarily connected to the theme one sees on the cover page of a particular edition. As part of its culture of openness and desire to feature a diversity of voices, indeed, anyone may approach the *Review* on his/her own initiative via email² to submit an abstract with an idea for publication. Such abstracts and, eventually, articles, get assessed according to the *Review*’s regular standards of quality, including through “double-blind” peer review. Combined in this edition is a remarkable collection of articles meeting those criteria – each of

which deals with a fascinating topic that, generally, has failed to attract sufficient attention in the literature so far. It is hoped that, by virtue of publishing articles on these sometimes less-known subjects, further interest will be generated in studying them.

Finally, in order to ensure that readers of the *International Review of the Red Cross* remain up to date about noteworthy recent institutional documents from, or initiatives by, the ICRC in the realm of international humanitarian law, policy and action, the final part of this edition (“Reports and documents”) bundles a series of such documents, either in “executive summary” format or in their entirety.

1 *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 93, No. 882, June 2011; and *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 93, No. 883, September 2011.

2 Email: review@icrc.org.