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*Translated from Russian*

Information on measures taken in the Republic of Belarus to implement the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and to disseminate information about international humanitarian law

In order to comply with the obligations of the Republic of Belarus under the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, regulations on the procedure for the production, issuance and use of international distinctive signs of civil defence and identity cards certifying the status of civil defence personnel were approved by decree No. 1427 of the Council of Ministers of 31 October 2007.

The Ministry of Defence has drawn up draft instructions on the procedure for the application of international humanitarian law in the armed forces. The draft instructions set out in a concise manner:

- Prohibited ways (methods) and means of conducting military operations;
- General obligations of commanders (heads) in the observance of the norms of international humanitarian law;
- Obligations of the head of the legal service of the armed forces in ensuring the observance of the norms of international humanitarian law;
- Obligations of army medical personnel in observance of the norms of international humanitarian law;
- Responsibility for violations of the norms of international humanitarian law;
- Procedure for studying the norms of international humanitarian law;
- Rules for the application of the norms of international humanitarian law relating to identification;
- Details on taking into account the norms of international humanitarian law in the organization, supply, conduct and termination of military operations, the treatment of victims of armed conflicts and of enemy medical and religious personnel, the establishment of a truce, actions of troops in occupied territory and so forth.

The instructions are intended to confirm the code of conduct for personnel of the armed forces of the Republic of Belarus participating in military operations, which in an abbreviated and concise manner sets forth the rules of international humanitarian law, which every soldier must be aware of and put into practice.

Currently the Republic of Belarus is formalizing its participation in the following international instruments in the area of international humanitarian law:

- Amendment to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (adopted by presidential decree No. 132 of 28 February 2008; will enter into force for the Republic of Belarus on 27 September 2008);
- Protocol on explosive remnants of war to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (Protocol V) (20 April 2008, adopted by act of accession No. 332-3);
- Third Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem.

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On the basis of the Agreement on cooperation in the area of international humanitarian law between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of 19 December 1996 (hereinafter - the Agreement), since 1997 ICRC has been providing the texts of international treaties in the area of international humanitarian law to the armed forces of the Republic of Belarus.

In accordance with the Agreement and the annual plans of cooperation in the study and dissemination of international humanitarian law within the armed forces, the following activities have been carried out between the Ministry of Defence and ICRC with the direct participation of representatives of the Kiev regional delegation of ICRC with a view to the study and dissemination of international humanitarian law in the armed forces:

- In the cities of Baranavichy, Brest, Vitebsk, Hrodna and Minsk and in the Pechi township, meetings and seminars on international humanitarian law have been organized for various categories of military personnel;
- Students at the military academy of the Republic of Belarus and at the Suvorov training school of Minsk have on several occasions taken part in regional competitions on international humanitarian law: *Yaroslav Mudry, General Skobelev, Al-Farabim, Polkovodets Suvorov, Senezh, Bogdan Khmelnytsky;*
- Five officers of the armed forces received training at international courses on the law of armed conflict in the International Institute of Humanitarian Law at San Remo;
- Six officers of the armed forces received training at *Senezh* military courses on international humanitarian law in the training centre for refresher training and upgrading of skills of the *Vystrel* officer corps (Solnechnogorsk, Russian Federation);
- Officers of the Ministry of Defence took part on several occasions in international conferences and round tables organized by ICRC in Minsk, Moscow and Saint Petersburg in order to enhance their knowledge in the area of international humanitarian law and exchange views and experience in this area.

Since 1998, an international educational project on the study of humanitarian law which, in nearly 100 countries, is serving to educate young people in the principles of international humanitarian law, has been conducted in Belarus.

The syllabus of the course on the study of humanitarian law for schools, vocational/technical and secondary specialized institutions was approved by the presidium of the scientific and methodological council attached to the Ministry of Education for pre-school, secondary and specialized education (protocol of 29 January 2008).

Over 12,000 schoolchildren and students in 530 educational institutions are taking this course.

Educational institutions now have the task of ensuring high quality teaching of the course and disseminating best practices among other institutions. The syllabus of the course on the study of humanitarian law is designed not only to impart to students specific knowledge of international humanitarian law but also to instill a willingness to adhere strictly to its norms and to the principles of respect for life and human dignity and to protect and develop them in their future occupational activity.

The goal of the course is to form a world view among the students and an understanding of the importance of international humanitarian norms. The objectives of the course have been defined as: dissemination of knowledge in the area of international humanitarian law; achievement of an understanding by students of the significance of international humanitarian law, its role for humanity and the world community in issues of the protection of the rights and legitimate interests of civilians drawn into military conflicts and wars; creation of personal awareness of the significant components of international humanitarian law and the meaning of high moral values and the development of an attitude of non-violence,

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responsiveness to distress, capacity for compassion and an ability to resolve conflicts peacefully; and involvement in public life in the protection and support of humanitarian relations.

A teachers' manual on teaching the course on the study of humanitarian law in the Republic of Belarus (based on actual experience) edited by A.G. Shinkarenko and prepared by S.A. Deiko, V.F. Romanov and L.G. Shinkarenko was published by the B.D. Grinchenko teacher training college in 2006.

On 6-7 September 2007 an international conference on international humanitarian law: new challenges, new tests, coinciding with the centenary of the Second Peace Conference at The Hague, was held in Minsk under the auspices of the commission on the implementation of humanitarian law attached to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus.

At the conference, topical problems of the protection of victims of armed conflicts and issues relating to the implementation of the norms of international humanitarian law on the protection of distinctive emblems, protection of cultural values during armed conflict and the international campaign against terrorism were considered.

Representatives of governmental bodies and of the scientific communities of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Moscow and Kiev regional delegations of ICRC took part in the conference.

At the end of the conference, the participants adopted a declaration.

On 4 December 2007, within the framework of international technical assistance, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus together with the Kiev regional delegation of ICRC held a seminar (round table) on the customary norms of international humanitarian law.

Within the context of the seminar there was a discussion of topical issues relating to the customary norms of international humanitarian law including an exchange of views between representatives of scientific communities and governmental bodies of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine on issues of the identification and application of customary norms of international humanitarian law. In addition there was an evaluation of the current state of customary international humanitarian law and also a presentation of a study on customary international humanitarian law prepared by ICRC.

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