

ESSAY WRITING COMPETITION

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“Serious violations of International Humanitarian Law are war crimes.” Discuss ways in which violation of the International Humanitarian Law can be curbed within the African subcontinent.

The term “war crimes” refers to serious breaches of a set of rules which seek for humanitarian reasons to limit the effects of armed conflict. Such crimes are derived primarily from the Geneva conventions of 12 August 1949 and their additional protocols I and II of 1977. There are more and more serious violations of the International Humanitarian Law. The following paragraph will show ways in which violation of the International Law can be caused within the African subcontinent.

Most of the unlawful conduct in recent armed conflicts in Africa include intentionally directing attacks at civilians and civilian objects, use of rape as a weapon of war, recruitment and use of child as soldiers, forced marriages and wanton destruction of cultural property. In 2017, Africa saw 50 non-state conflicts compared to 24 in 2011 making Africa by far the continent with the highest number of non-state conflicts which increases the risk of war crimes. During wars, a person cannot kill a civilian without defense or only for his own pleasure. This goes against all International Laws concerning human rights. It is unacceptable to kill a defenseless person, an elderly or a child. The need to act is not in one day, one week, one month or one year, the need to act is right now!”, said Victor E. Frankl. There are different ways to reduce these war crimes in the African subcontinents. This can be achieved by ensuring accountability for serious human rights crimes. Even if there is a large number of civilians who suffer from war crimes, only a few responsible are brought to justice. Impunity for atrocities committed in the pasts sends the message that such crimes may be tolerated in the future.

Despite the difficulties, positive changes have taken place. A number of measures to better protect civilians are now common in peacekeeping and relief operations. In many regions, there is a greater use of international civilian police to help local forces keep peace. In the last five years, there are more experts to monitor humanitarian norms, human rights and criminal law by combatants. There were at least 15 countries with active armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2019 including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Sudan and Somalia. In the latest update of the Human Freedom Index, three African island nations topped the continent namely Mauritius,

Seychelles and Cape Verde. They set a proper example for others to follow. Through diplomatic discussions, United Nation (UN) could deploy more troops in regions which are more at risk to allow peacekeepers to stop attack on civilians. The presence of peacekeepers has already proven its effectiveness to reduce war crimes. For example, in Rwanda, the UN mission permitted to shoot only in self-defense.

Moreover, there should be placement of refugee camps far from borders and war zones to better protect the refugees. Most importantly during wars, both parties should agree for humanitarian corridors to guarantee that civilians are evacuated safely and to provide food and medical supplies to those who remain. Additionally, through good governance there will be no armed conflicts in a country. Politicians should not deliver dangerous speech that will lead its population to war. Preventing atrocious crime should be a priority for everyone. Prevention is the only way to avoid loss of human life, trauma and physical injury. The reduction of atrocities during wars is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts over time, it cannot be achieved over days. It is a continuous process.

However, the International Humanitarian Laws are not always followed. For example, the Ethiopian troops used dum-dum bullets which goes against the Hague conventions and killed civilian workmen. During wars, it is very difficult to distinguish between an enemy and a resident because the combatant has only a fraction of second to think and humans do make mistake. It is without doubt that during conflicts many innocents are going to die, raped, tortured, taking of hostages and directly attack buildings dedicated to religion and education. There is an increase in the number of serious violation of International Humanitarian Law in Africa. During these wars, children often suffer from malnutrition and eventually die from starvation. The government has not enough power to stop armed conflicts.

In addition, war crimes will continue to increase because in many countries in Africa there is corruption. For example, corruption within both the public and private sectors in Sierra Leone remains endemic and a source of serious human rights abuses. Many countries in Africa have a low revenue, with the majority of its population suffering from extreme poverty and it will indeed cause conflicts in the society. Violation of the International Humanitarian Law cannot always be curbed.

“The only evil is ignorance and the only good is knowledge”, said Socrates. After this deep analysis we know that there are serious violations of International Humanitarian Law in Africa but through these solutions, we can minimize the impact of wars and reduce war crimes. Nations should join hands and help to create a better future.

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