International Review of the Red Cross (2026), 1–2.
doi:10.1017/S1816383126101660

IRRC

REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

ICRC report on *Non-State Armed Groups and the Separated, Missing and Dead*

Today, around 130 non-State armed groups (NSAGs) are parties to armed conflicts, and as a result of the unprecedentedly high number of armed conflicts around the world, hundreds of thousands of families are separated. In many cases, communication lines are completely cut, leading to a total breakdown in family contact. At the same time, the number of missing people continues to grow: in 2024 alone, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) registered more than 56,000 new missing persons cases across the world, the highest yearly increase in at least two decades, resulting in a current total of nearly 255,000 cases that the ICRC is actively following up on. Detainees are often held without their personal details being registered or their detention being communicated to their families. Moreover, the dead are not always treated with respect and at times become "bargaining chips" between warring parties, impeding identification efforts and the return of the deceased to their families. As a result, families suffer great anguish not knowing where family members are or whether they are alive or dead. Not knowing the fate

The advice, opinions and statements contained in this article are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ICRC. The ICRC does not necessarily represent or endorse the accuracy or reliability of any advice, opinion, statement or other information provided in this article.

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of International Committee of the Red Cross. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 02:13:19, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383126101660

or whereabouts of a loved one and not being able to mourn the dead are some of the deepest unseen wounds of armed conflict.

Clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing people is a humanitarian imperative and a legal obligation. In its operations in over ninety countries globally, the ICRC witnesses the pain and suffering experienced by the families of the missing. At the same time, however, it has also documented countless daily efforts by parties to armed conflict to prevent family separation and to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing people. It has observed efforts to treat the dead with dignity, search for and identify them, and return them to their families.

This new ICRC report, entitled *Non-State Armed Groups and the Separated, Missing and Dead: Obligations under IHL and Examples of How to Implement Them*,[1] presents the IHL obligations of NSAGs with respect to the separated, missing and dead, together with a selection of examples that show how armed groups have implemented these obligations in practice. The report is the result of in-depth research conducted by the ICRC, revealing unique insights into operational realities through an analysis of documents found in the ICRC Archives, interviews with NSAGs, NSAG doctrine (such as codes of conduct and policy documents), and public reports. The report complements a recent publication by the ICRC on NSAGs and the treatment of detainees[2] and an ICRC handbook for armed groups on reducing civilian harm in urban warfare.[3]

1 ICRC, *Non-State Armed Groups and the Separated, Missing and Dead: Obligations under IHL and Examples of How to Implement Them*, Geneva, 2025, available at: www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/ICRC-Report_NSAGs_and_the_Separated_Missing_Dead.pdf (all internet references were accessed in September 2026).

2 ICRC, *Detention by Non-State Armed Groups: Obligations under International Humanitarian Law and Examples of How to Implement Them*, Geneva, 2023, available at: www.icrc.org/en/document/detention-non-state-armed-groups.

3 ICRC, *Reducing Civilian Harm in Urban Warfare: A Handbook for Armed Groups*, Geneva, 2023, available at: www.icrc.org/en/document/reducing-civilian-harm-urban-warfare-handbook-armed-groups.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 16 Nov 2026 at 02:13:19, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383126101660