

Promoting respect for IHL by NGOs: The case of ALMA – Association for the Promotion of IHL

Ido Rosenzweig*

Ido Rosenzweig is Chairman and Co-Founder of ALMA – Association for the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law, Director of Research on Terrorism, Belligerencies and Cyber at the Minerva Center for the Rule of Law under Extreme Conditions at the University of Haifa, and a PhD candidate at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Abstract

ALMA – Association for the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law is an Israeli-originated non-governmental organization. ALMA was established with the prime objective of promoting knowledge, understanding and discussion of IHL. For that purpose, it has established several projects aimed at different audiences and with different goals. Since its establishment in March 2010, ALMA has managed to make its way to the front line through cooperation and dedication. This article provides an overview of ALMA's goals and projects, as well as its challenges and future aspirations in the quest to generate respect for international humanitarian law.

Keywords: civil society, NGOs, workshops, IHL forum, association, education, IHL dissemination.

: : : : : :

This author has had the honour and pleasure to be among the founders of ALMA – Association for the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law,¹ together with

* I would like to thank those who read earlier versions of this paper and offered valuable suggestions, and especially the editing team at the *Review*.

eight friends. Today ALMA has ten registered members, between twenty and thirty volunteers, and many projects, all tasked with one main objective: to promote international humanitarian law (IHL). This is the story of what a short conversation between two IHL-enthusiast friends can lead to.

ALMA is an apolitical non-profit association established on 24 March 2010 with the prime objective of promoting knowledge of IHL, mainly in Israeli society. ALMA members believe that knowledge of IHL should be accessible to the general public, and that the promotion of IHL will encourage fruitful discussions on its impact and application within Israeli society, as well as generate respect for IHL.

It all started with a Google Chat in December 2009 between Tom Gal² and myself. What began as a regular IHL discussion turned into a conversation on the need to establish a non-profit association for the promotion of IHL. This conversation, which continued in a meeting at a coffee house, was aimed at drafting the initial vision of ALMA in order to present that vision to potential co-founders. We then started seeking out our co-founders. We were looking for young scholars and practitioners from Israel with whom we could establish ALMA, and have fun doing so.

ALMA members include researchers at leading think tanks, legal advisers to ministries, current and past counsellors to international tribunals, PhD candidates, and scholars in leading academic institutions. All members of ALMA are involved in and contribute to the association's activities on a volunteer basis.³

The background to the establishment of ALMA lies in the situation in Israel in 2009, following Operation Cast Lead, the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas that took place between December 2008 and January 2009, and the publication of the Goldstone Report.⁴ IHL issues were at the heart of the public discussion. Although there were some actors that took action mainly by writing reports about IHL topics, such actors were usually considered to be biased or driven by a political agenda. There was no organization with the sole purpose of promoting discussion and knowledge of IHL.

ALMA was established on the premise that any discussion or decision on IHL, its implications and consequences ought to be based on at least some basic IHL knowledge, especially with regard to the applicable legal framework. The acquisition of such knowledge allows for substantive positions and informed discussion rather than arguments based on empty and shallow rhetoric. Such uninformed arguments are often held on social media such as Facebook and

1 The name ALMA is a Hebrew acronym for Association for the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law.

2 Ms Tom Gal is a PhD candidate at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, and Geneva UN Representative for the World Jewish Congress.

3 The other founding members of ALMA are Ms Hila Adler, Ms Yfat Barak-Chaney, Ms Yael Rimer-Cohen, Ms Carmel Shenkar, Ms Yael Vias-Grisman, Ms Sigall Horovitz and Mr Ady Niv. Information about ALMA members is available at: www.alma-ihl.org/who-we-are (all internet references were accessed in December 2014).

4 Report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, UN Doc. A/HRC/12/48, 25 September 2009 (Goldstone Report), available at: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf.

Twitter, in blogs, in news media, and so on; empty slogans are also heard from politicians, diplomats and commentators. This is true in Israeli society as well as in other countries.

Armed conflicts tend to bring out strong emotions. Almost everyone has an opinion on the situation. Such opinions can be based on information found in traditional and non-traditional media, moral values and a personal evaluation of the situation. However, individuals usually lack the knowledge of IHL that would allow them to understand what is legally permissible during armed conflicts and what is prohibited.

It is with these goals and purposes that ALMA was established – to provide knowledge about IHL and enhance its discussion among the general public, scholars, practitioners (legal advisers, field delegates, etc.), politicians and diplomats, so as to clarify and inform public dialogue. While the main focus of ALMA is the Israeli context, it also has an interest in worldwide IHL developments and discussions.

ALMA's projects – activities generating and enhancing respect for IHL

In order to fulfil ALMA's goals and vision, several projects have been established. Some of these projects are conducted in collaboration with like-minded partners, and others are managed solely by ALMA. One of the main concepts behind the projects is that there is no one way to promote knowledge and discussion of IHL. In order to be able to fulfil that mission and reach as many people as possible, ALMA has developed a spectrum of projects aimed at different audiences, each project having different goals. In order to evaluate ALMA's contribution to respect for IHL, therefore, one should examine the projects individually, but also consider the overall added value of the entire range of projects. In this section we will provide an overview of some of ALMA's main projects.⁵

Joint IHL Forum

One of the very first projects established by ALMA was the Joint IHL Forum in collaboration with Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Radzyner Law School.⁶ The meetings of the Joint IHL Forum are open to the general public. The regular audience is diverse and includes undergraduate and graduate students, PhD candidates, scholars, and practitioners working at non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think-tanks and other organizations, as well as legal advisers from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and governmental offices. Speakers likewise come from the same professional circles as the audience.⁷

5 Information on other projects such as the ALMA newsletter and a national competition on international criminal law can be found on the ALMA website, available at: www.alma-ihl.org.

6 For more information, see the Joint IHL Forum website, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/IHL-Forum.

7 The list of past speakers who have appeared at the forum and the relevant topics can be found on the Joint IHL Forum website, *ibid*.

The Joint IHL Forum, also known as the ALMA Forum, conducts monthly meetings during the academic year (October–June). The forum provides a platform for roundtable discussions on issues related to IHL: current events in Israel and abroad, recent developments, new publications or draft articles and so on.⁸ Most of the meetings have the same format – one or two presentations followed by a roundtable discussion. The discussions are held in an informal atmosphere, and the only rule is that everything said at the table is in a private capacity and nothing is to be inferred as an official position, in a modified version of the Chatham House rule or “ALMA rule”. Experience shows that these rules enable the discussion to be kept open and unrestrained among all of the participants. The lectures and discussions are not recorded, but various options for this, including live streaming of certain sessions and some forms of cooperation with the press, are being considered for the future.

The most considerable contribution of the Joint IHL Forum so far has been the establishment of a unique and dedicated platform for discussion in Israel, where students, scholars, practitioners and the general public can come to listen to expert IHL discussions on academic writing and recent developments.

Young Researchers Project

In order to provide a platform and promote the academic writing of young researchers in Hebrew, ALMA has established the Young Researchers Project (YRP), aimed at undergraduate and graduate students and young IHL practitioners.⁹

The YRP is meant to provide an opportunity for young students to experience the process of academic writing and to present and discuss their research before the Joint IHL Forum. Following an open call for applications, a few students are selected to work on an IHL topic of their choice. The topic must be current and relevant. Each student is assigned an ALMA member for guidance in the process of research and writing. Once the draft papers are prepared, the students present their research in a special session of the Joint IHL Forum. Following each presentation, the speakers have their work commented on by an experienced local scholar or a researcher invited specifically for that purpose, and by the roundtable participants. The first YRP

8 For example, in the opening session of the 2014–2015 academic year, the forum hosted the distinguished Professor Malcolm Shaw, who discussed the topic of “Combatant Immunity for State Forces in Non-International Armed Conflicts”; see Shani Dann and Ido Rosenzweig, “Joint IHL Forum”, October 2014, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/IHL-Forum/october2014. In the May 2014 session, Professor Robbie Sabel and Advocate Keren Michaeli addressed “The Palestinian Accession to IHL Treaties”; see Ido Rosenzweig, “Joint IHL Forum”, May 2014, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/IHL-Forum/ihlforum-may2014. In April 2014, Professor Eugene Kontorovich, Dr Daphne Richmond-Barak and Dr Ziv Bohrer presented their views on “The Crimean Peninsula and IHL”; see Ido Rosenzweig, “Joint IHL Forum”, April 2014, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/IHL-Forum/ihlforum-april2014.

9 The Young Researchers Project is headed by Ms Yfat Barak-Chaney. For more information, see Yfat Barak-Chaney and Ido Rosenzweig, “The Young Researchers Forum”, March 2014, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/IHL-Forum/ihlforum-march2014.

presentations session took place in March 2014 and included the work of four young researchers.¹⁰

Lectures and workshops

ALMA believes that IHL is not just a theoretical set of rules, but also a set of practical and moral standards aimed at guiding those who are involved in armed conflicts and those who are protected during such conflicts. In order to implement this vision, ALMA has developed two methods of relaying both the theory and practice of IHL and related issues: IHL lectures and IHL workshops.

IHL lectures and workshops are open to groups and are adapted to the level of knowledge and expertise of the group. Prior knowledge of IHL or public international law is not a prerequisite. ALMA provides a large and diverse selection of IHL lectures, starting with basic introductory lectures for people without any legal background, up to lectures that focus on a specific topic, region or development in the context of IHL and related fields, such as child soldiers, universal jurisdiction and contemporary challenges in the Israeli context (for example, targeted killings, occupation law and self-defence). The simulation-based workshops provided by ALMA give participants a chance to face “real-life challenges” related to the application of IHL and related norms in a virtual armed conflict.

The workshop begins by dividing the participants into small groups of about ten, each having a facilitator. Each group is given a scenario describing a part of the conflict that focuses on a certain legal and practical dilemma, such as self-defence, belligerent occupation or military targets. All the groups are required to identify the main issue at hand, with the help and guidance of the facilitator, and then either provide a decisive answer or understand why they have failed to provide such an answer. At the end of the workshop, the groups convene and representatives from each group present their part of the conflict scenario, explain the main issue and describe the solution they have reached (or explain why they did not manage to find a solution). The presentation of the various scenarios is followed by a concluding discussion about the workshop experience.

Lectures and workshops are ALMA’s “shelf products” that can be used at conferences or seminars for large or small groups. The workshops can be tailored to the unique needs of a specific group according to its size, knowledge, time

10 See *ibid.* The four papers presented were: Noa Bornstein-Ziv, “Extradition Laws in the Face of the Expanding World Terrorism” (respondent: Advocate Vadim Shuv, Deputy Public Defender in Jerusalem); Adi Swisa, “Disclosure in the Rome Statute and in Practice” (respondent: Advocate Yael Vias Gvirsman, ALMA member and International Criminal Court Defence Counsel); Advocate Adam Wolfson, “The Prohibition on the Exportation of Indiscriminate Weapons to Terrorist Organizations in International Law” (respondent: Advocate Liron Libman, former head of the IDF International Law Department); and Ilia Binyaminov, “Obama’s Drone Doctrine: International Lawyer or Legislator?” (respondent: Advocate Tal Mimran, a researcher from the Israel Democracy Institute). The forum session was successful and the comments that the researchers received from the respondents provided valuable input. Each completed article was submitted to a peer-reviewed Shaarei Mishpat College of Law journal. Currently, the YRP is being assessed following its first year in order to analyze the added value of the project and decide when the second YRP will take place.

constraints or any other factor. Most scenarios have been written in such a manner that almost no modifications are required to customize a workshop to a specific group, and it is the facilitator's role to ensure that the level of the discussion fits the level of the group. When a specific group has extensive knowledge, the details become more significant and the level of discussion goes to higher legal resolutions in comparison to a more "basic" group. One of the main challenges when guiding such a group is not necessarily to adjust the simulation to the level of the group, but rather to ensure that the group members understand the complexity of the topic and the legitimacy of different points of view on the one hand, and to lead the group members to a genuine and interesting discussion over that topic on the other hand. In cases where the group is very homogenous and it seems that the members tend to reach a consensus quickly, it is the role of the facilitator to "make some noise" and use his or her knowledge of the material to throw the participants off their basic or initial understanding of the situation.

ALMA has organized workshops under different variations such as for LLM students and PhD candidates from all over the world at an annual Student Conference on International Law held in Jerusalem, for various European students (most with no legal education) at the Geneva Seminar of the European Union of Jewish Students, for Israeli students participating in the Israel Model UN Club, and for students enlisted in a "Law and Terrorism" course at the IDC Herzliya, as well as for legal advisers at the Office of the Prime Minister.

ALMA workshops provide participants with a unique opportunity to get a better understanding of the principles of IHL and, more importantly, to understand the practical difficulties of their implementation in actual scenarios and situations. The main purpose of these simulations is to make participants experience the difficulties of taking decisions on the ground. The move from theory to practical application is extremely important. ALMA has so far conducted more than a dozen workshops, which have received enthusiastic responses and feedback from the participants.

Op-eds and teaching articles

ALMA's website provides a platform for everyone interested in publishing articles on topics related to IHL. The articles can be published in Hebrew or in English. There are two types of articles that can be published on ALMA's website: "op-eds" and "teaching articles".

The articles published on the website are written for the general public. Most articles are written in a language suited for anyone, regardless of their background. Some of the op-eds are more complicated and are addressed to the professional IHL community. Over the years, several op-eds and articles have been published on different IHL-related topics such as the classification of the Syrian conflict,¹¹ urban

11 Noam Zamir, "Classification of the Syrian Conflict: A Question of Organization?", 27 September 2012, available at: www.alma-ihl.org.il/opeds/zamir-syriaclassification092012 (Hebrew).

warfare,¹² Operation Pillar of Defence¹³ and the location of military bases within major cities.¹⁴ Authors include law students, IHL scholars and practitioners.¹⁵ Some of the articles originally written in Hebrew have been translated to English as well. The purpose of the “Teaching Articles” section of the website is to provide a general explanation of current events, using them as case studies. These articles are published under the general authorship of ALMA, without any specific author being mentioned, and are currently published only in Hebrew. While the option of conducting the same project in English and perhaps translating some of these articles to English is always on the table, so far, due to other priorities and lack of relevant manpower, it has not yet been further developed.

All articles on the ALMA website are reviewed by the ALMA chairman, who also serves as the main editor of the website. After a first review, the work is reviewed by another ALMA member with relevant expertise in the field of the article.¹⁶

National IHL Competition for Students

In 2007, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Delegation in Israel and the occupied territories started an annual National IHL Competition for Students. The target audience of the competition is students from Israeli academic institutions. The basic requirement for participation in the competition is to have completed a course in IHL or public international law. The competition itself is a four-day-long, Jean Pictet-style simulation, based on role-play.¹⁷ The competition awards two prizes – the winning team receives full funding for the international Jean-Pictet Competition (to which it must apply and gain admission separately), and the best speaker receives the Uriel Masad Award.¹⁸

The level of IHL knowledge in the national competition has been extremely high so far, and the proficiency of the coaches and judges has led to very well-respected performances by Israeli teams in the international Jean-Pictet Competition since the first team participated in 2008. In fact, in almost every year since 2008, there has been at least one Israeli team in the Jean-Pictet semi-finals, and in 2010 and 2011 the IDC Herzliya teams won the Jean-Pictet Competition.¹⁹

12 Eitan Diamond, “Lawful Conduct in Urban Warfare”, *Jerusalem Post*, 1 March 2012, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/opeds/lawful-conduct-in-urban-warfare.

13 Ido Rosenzweig, “Pillar of Defense and IHL: Targeted Killings, Military Objectives, Proportionality etc.”, 10 February 2013, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/opeds/jan2013forum-Rosenzweig.

14 Shavit Rissin, “HaKiria as a Ticking Bomb: Legal and Functional Aspects”, available at: www.alma-ihl.org.il/opeds/rissin-proportionality-and-the-kiryas0712 (Hebrew).

15 English op-eds available at: www.alma-ihl.org/opeds; Hebrew op-eds available at: www.alma-ihl.org.il/opeds.

16 Teaching articles available at: www.alma-ihl.org.il/edu-eds.

17 The 2014 National IHL Competition for Students project was headed by Ms Katja Knochelmann. For more information, see “National IHL Competition for Students”, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/ihl-competition.

18 Named after the first head of communications of the ICRC in Israel, who contributed greatly to the promotion of IHL in Israel, particularly among the media and the military.

19 The IDC Herzliya teams were trained and coached by the author of this paper.

Since the fourth session of the National IHL Competition for Students in 2010, ALMA has joined the ICRC in the organization of the competition. The first added value of ALMA to the competition was the organization of an IHL summer course for the participants. This took the form of a series of sessions in which the participating teams received basic information about the competition and expert lectures about the core issues of IHL (such as the classification of conflicts, the conduct of hostilities and the relationship between IHL and other bodies of law, such as human rights law or international criminal law). The idea for the summer course emerged from the realization that there was a difference in the training that each team received in different institutions (*inter alia* due to time allocated to training and the different levels of experience of the coaches). Thus, it was important to ensure that all teams were provided with a solid and adequate starting point. A secondary but also important goal was to provide an opportunity for the teams to meet each other, which makes the competition more enjoyable and less stressful.

Another dimension ALMA added to the training for the competition was to introduce the option of “friendly matches” before the actual event. In the friendly matches, ALMA provides the opportunity for teams from different institutions to meet for a simulation. The purpose of these preparatory exercises is to practice the experience of going through a few full-length simulations against teams from other institutions. The teams are provided with (a) simulations written solely for the purpose of the friendly matches by ALMA, and (b) judges having the same level of IHL mastery as the judges in the competition to run the simulations and give the teams feedback. Since the option of ALMA-run friendly matches has been introduced, most teams have embraced it. It seems that going through such a “dress rehearsal” reduces the level of stress among students and improves their performance in the actual competition.

In contrast to the Jean-Pictet Competition, in the National IHL Competition, coaches are allowed to attend and are also allowed to provide substantial feedback to the teams.²⁰ The rationale behind this is twofold: firstly, coaches from within Israel can travel easily to attend the competition, unlike other events such as the Jean-Pictet and Clara Barton competitions; and secondly, enabling the coaches to provide substantial feedback allows the students to learn from their mistakes and improve in the next simulation. Due to the intensity of the competition, coaches are unable to give full-length explanations, and their feedback is therefore aimed merely at shifting the teams back on the right track. Throughout the years, it has become clear that teams whose coaches are unable to attend the competition or specific simulations do not receive such important feedback. Therefore, ALMA decided to provide teams whose coaches were unable to attend with experienced tutors who can replace the coaches and, with the approval of the team and the coaches, provide the necessary feedback.

20 In the Jean-Pictet Competition, coaches are not allowed to attend and the tutors provided on behalf of the competition are only allowed to comment on the performance of the teams, not on “substantive issues relating to the case study or on issues pertaining to law in general” (see the competition regulations, available at: www.concourspictet.org/document/Regulations%202015%20EN.pdf). On several previous occasions, the Israel National IHL Competition has also been conducted under similar limitations.

In the margins of the competition, there are different types of “side events” taking place. Such events include IHL lectures in the evenings by the judges or guests, and screenings of IHL-related movies and documentaries.²¹ With the constant desire to take the experience of the competition one step further, for the 2014 competition ALMA has planned another side event, entitled the IHL Scavenger Hunt.²²

Engagement over social media: Facebook and Twitter

One of the most efficient ways of relaying information today is by using social media tools. ALMA uses its Facebook page²³ and Twitter account²⁴ for delivering information about IHL-related topics, updates, events and so on. The information published in ALMA’s social media tools is aimed both at the general public and at the professional IHL community. The Facebook page is also used to trigger discussions on different related topics and to explain certain norms and rules of IHL.

In order to make IHL more accessible to the general public, ALMA provides the opportunity to ask IHL and international law questions on its Facebook page and Twitter account. During periods of high-intensity warfare between the IDF and Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip, such as Operation Pillar of Defence (November 2011) and Operation Protective Edge (July–August 2014), the amount of questions increases. The questions are usually received directly by ALMA via email, Facebook messages and so on, and published on ALMA’s Facebook page without the details of the person asking the question, allowing some anonymity in the process.

The questions received are diverse and relate to IHL issues such as combatant status, proportionality, legality of attacks against hospitals, and human shields. Due to the importance that ALMA places on conducting an open discussion, anyone can answer the questions. Moreover, since there is no such thing as an “official” ALMA opinion, ALMA members identify themselves as such and provide their own views and understanding of the question at hand and clarify the applicable legal rules and framework. The discussions are managed and moderated by a designated member. The main challenge is to enable an open and respectful discussion with different views, and at the same time ensure that no dramatically incorrect information on IHL is being conveyed by providing an

21 The 8th National IHL Competition took place on 17–20 November 2014. For more information, see “8th National Competition on IHL (November 2014)”, available at: www.alma-ihl.org/ihl-competition/ihl-competition2014.

22 The IHL Scavenger Hunt was composed of three daily riddles, an activity and a final riddle. During the first three days of the competition, the participants received a daily riddle (a word search, a maze and a crossword puzzle) related to IHL. The solution of each daily riddle led to a location and a code. With the right code at the right location, each team that had solved the daily riddle received a clue for the final riddle. On the fourth day, after the announcement of the finalists’ teams and the end of the preliminary rounds of the competition, the teams received their task sheets. Any team completing the relevant tasks received the fourth clue for the final riddle and was able to solve it and win the game.

23 Available at: www.facebook.com/alma.ihl.

24 Available at: www.twitter.com/alma_ihl.

explanation of the relevant norms. The main discussions and questions are also distributed via Twitter under the hashtag #AskIHL.

The ability to ask simple and complex questions about IHL and international law on social media enables the general public an opportunity to get a better understanding of existing rules. Due to the fact that many questions are related to high-profile incidents, the wording of the questions has great importance in ensuring that the discussion remains within the legal framework rather than a rhetorical or political framework.

IHL events list

One of ALMA's contributions to the IHL community, not just in Israel but around the world, is the establishment of the "Upcoming IHL Events List" on ALMA's website.²⁵ This list provides detailed information about upcoming IHL events all over the world. It includes dozens of events organized by geographical region: Europe, North America, South America, Asia, Australia, Africa and the Middle East.

The list was created in November 2013 with the aim of providing a valuable service that did not exist at the time. It is kept up to date by a multilingual coordinating team. In order to keep the list updated with the most current information about IHL events, the coordinators conduct research about relevant events, proactively contacting organizers, universities and NGOs in order to update them about added events and to request to be notified about new events as well. In order to complete the service, added events and upcoming events are also published on ALMA's Twitter account and Facebook page. IHL events are tagged under the hashtag #IHLevent. The upcoming IHL events list is meant to serve members of the IHL community from all over the world.

Translation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provided an undeniable contribution to international criminal law and IHL. However, since Israel has not yet ratified the Rome Statute, it has not been officially translated into Hebrew. Recognizing the instrument's educational value, ALMA decided to take it upon itself to translate the Rome Statute into Hebrew.²⁶

In order to ensure that every term is being translated carefully, specific research is being conducted, including an analysis of key terms, the *travaux préparatoires* and the commentaries to the Rome Statute. A translation team works under the guidance of the head of the project in order to ensure that the translation is consistent throughout.

25 See Anne Sapir and Moien Odeh, "Upcoming IHL Events", available at: www.alma-ihl.org/upcoming-ihl-events.

26 The project is headed by Mr Ady Niv. For more information, see "Rome Statute Translation Project", available at: www.alma-ihl.org/rome-statute-project.

Once the translation process is completed, ALMA intends to publish the translation both in print, distributing copies to key individuals and entities in Israeli society (courts, scholars, legal advisers, NGOs, etc.), and in electronic form, freely available to download at ALMA's website. This translation project has two key target audiences. The first is the students and young practitioners working on the translation, while the second is the Israeli public: journalists, politicians, the judiciary, scholars, students, teachers and the general public. Although the translation is still under way, the expected value of the project is to make the Rome Statute more accessible to the Israeli population – the general public, professionals and the political, judicial and executive branches.

IHL lexicon

The use of correct terminology in one's own language is very important for the proper understanding and implementation of IHL. Therefore, ALMA has established an IHL lexicon in Hebrew.²⁷ The lexicon is an ongoing project to explain IHL basic terms in two or three paragraphs. The project was established by ALMA members who contributed the first round of terms. Later the work took its intended form: research conducted by students and young practitioners who wish to volunteer their time, learn about IHL and help to promote knowledge of IHL.

Results

ALMA's projects are meant to fulfil its agenda – promoting knowledge, understanding and discussion of IHL. Taking into account both the individual and overall contribution of its projects, and the highly positive response to them, it seems that ALMA's main goal is being achieved. One of the most important aspects of these projects is the way that each aims at a different target audience – the general public, scholars, students and so on.

For example, ALMA's involvement in the regular running of the National IHL Competition has been increased throughout the years, and today ALMA works in full collaboration with the local delegation of the ICRC; this also includes writing new and unique simulations for the competitions. Over the years, more than 200 students from nine major Israeli academic institutions have participated in this competition. Although it is very difficult to analyze the direct and indirect impact of this initiative over the years, and to keep track of the careers of all of the alumni, when looking at past participants it is clear that a significant number of them have maintained their interest in IHL and continued to pursue work in this field. In a recent non-official check with our alumni, we've found that among the ones who have already graduated from the degree taken during the time of the competition, at least five work for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs either as lawyers or diplomats, six are involved with IHL and human rights NGOs

27 Lexicon in Hebrew available at: www.alma-ihl.org.il/ihlexicon.

(not including four ALMA members), four have started law school, three are currently pursuing LLM degrees and three are PhD candidates in high-ranked universities. Several alumni can be found serving as officers in the IDF Military Advocate-General's Corps or working in think tanks. Many others who have decided to follow other paths continue to acknowledge the competition as a milestone in their academic and professional journey.

Challenges

Operating an NGO with a very specific agenda such as ALMA raises numerous challenges relative to income, cooperation, fundraising, staffing, and promoting discussion. These are the day-to-day challenges of running the NGO, ensuring the continuation of its existing projects and developing new ones.

Since its establishment, ALMA has been operating on a very modest budget. During the first years of the association, ALMA was funded entirely by its founders; all activity was solely conducted on a voluntary basis and no fee was charged for ALMA's services, such as lectures and workshops. However, due to financial realities, since 2013 ALMA has begun to charge a symbolic fee for its lectures and workshops, thus reaching financial independence and enabling the basic operations of the association.

The main tool for limiting expenses is relying on cooperation with different institutions. This enables the existence of such projects as the Joint IHL Forum and ALMA's participation in others such as the annual IHL competition. ALMA is always looking for new partnerships in Israel and abroad, with the purpose of expanding its current projects and engaging in new ones. Among ALMA's supporters and collaborators are the ICRC, the Swiss Embassy in Israel, IDC Herzliya and the Institute for National Security Studies.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for ALMA is improving its ability to reach out and find alternative sources of income. So far it has been unsuccessful in this due to a lack of budget and dedicated manpower. For the future of the association, this route must be further explored in order to enable the creation of new projects and expand the reach of the existing ones to broader and even more diverse audiences.

ALMA relies entirely on the work of its volunteers. ALMA members and activists contribute to the best of their ability and availability, but unfortunately the work of volunteers is always limited and due to its voluntary nature depends on their other commitments—naturally their primary consideration is their paying job or university obligations, thus making their highly appreciated ALMA activity secondary in nature.

Apart from spreading knowledge about IHL, the biggest challenge is to promote actual discussion on IHL-related topics. The understanding that certain aspects of IHL do not have an absolute and concrete nature and sometimes are also open to interpretation allows people to radicalize their points while referring to IHL norms. While ALMA aims to promote discussion among people with

different views, such behaviour (radicalization of points) undermines that purpose and may increase areas of divergence such as the question of proportionate collateral damage within the context of the recent military operations (Cast Lead, Pillar of Defence, and Protective Edge), the status of human shields, and when exactly individuals are taking direct part in hostilities in the context of these operations. In the Israeli political atmosphere, the opinions presented with regard to these notions are often agenda-based rather than knowledge-based. Therefore, it is important not only to provide IHL knowledge, but also to make the effort to lay the groundwork for a fertile and proactive discussion. ALMA's agenda is aimed at the promotion of the discussion of IHL, and since a real discussion is conducted between those with different opinions and not only between liked-minded individuals, it is important to enable such discussions and to ensure that all positions are welcomed and that the discussion is based on knowledge and understanding of the law and the arguments. ALMA is an independent non-political NGO with no affiliation and a very diverse membership base. ALMA members can rarely agree on one single interpretation of specific norms and rules, which leads to a twofold outcome: firstly, there is no such thing as "an ALMA position", and secondly, ALMA is accepted as a professional, impartial and independent organization. Therefore ALMA can implement its goal to promote discussion and understanding of IHL among the public, mainly in Israel.

Going forward

Over the years, ALMA has been able to reach out to varied audiences including students, academics, legal practitioners in government, the armed forces and think tanks. This is not enough, however. More must be done to promote knowledge and discussion of IHL, in particular with key audiences such as politicians, diplomats and journalists, and to encourage international cooperation.

Although IHL is directly relevant primarily to military commanders and international lawyers, in many cases the important decisions that affect how it is applied in practice are taken by the legislative branch and the government. However, it is common to see decisions and statements being made without ensuring that the relevant persons understand the topics to which they refer. It is therefore important to strive for more IHL knowledge to be imparted to decision-makers, and to ensure that IHL considerations are also being taken into account among others. This is equally true with regard to diplomats, who must have sufficient understanding in order to convey their message using the right tools and without making crucial or sometimes embarrassing mistakes. Journalists serve as the main source of information to the general public during high-intensity conflicts. Since journalists are the ones who report about the different events and even provide interpretation and analysis, it is very important that they are provided with knowledge of IHL in order to convey more accurate information to the public on the one hand, and ensure more significant criticism on the other.

ALMA's activities are conducted mainly within Israel, but the importance of IHL dissemination is not limited to that country. Similar independent, local associations should be established in other States as well. Such associations should cooperate and collaborate with each other in order to provide better tools and develop joint projects and activities. According to the statistics provided with regard to visits to ALMA's website, it seems that about 50% of visits are from within Israel and the other 50% are from all over the world. This could serve as an indicator for ALMA's extended potential. ALMA will continue to run the existing projects and establish new ones in order to ensure that its main objectives are being achieved. It still has a lot of challenges ahead of it in order to reach a larger audience and promote knowledge, understanding and discussion of IHL. ALMA will continue to look for new partnerships in order to expand its audience and establish new projects. Such partnerships can enable the association to reach some of the potential groups with which it has not yet managed to successfully engage, such as politicians, diplomats and journalists.

The dedication of ALMA members and volunteers is inspiring and will enable the association to reach its goals and expand the circles of groups reached by its projects. It is important to note that this help is not overlooked and is highly appreciated.

Universities, NGOs, scholars, students, teachers, journalists, politicians, diplomats and others who wish to contribute to ALMA, take part in one or more of its projects, invite a lecture or a workshop or just support the association are welcome to do so, knowing that such activity can have a direct and real impact on the way people from different affiliations and backgrounds perceive IHL and gain respect for IHL.