

IHL Watch

WHERE THERE IS WAR - THERE IS WAR CRIMES

Weekly Report – April 15, 2019 – April 22, 2019

The week's most important IHL-related news and reports

Afghanistan

The Taliban [announced](#) its Spring fighting season has begun, despite on-going peace talks.

Seven children killed in [blast](#) in Laghman.

A gunman [opened fire](#) at a wedding ceremony in eastern Khost province, killing at least three people before he fled the scene.

International criminal court judges [rejected](#) attempt to investigate US for Afghan war crimes.

A total of 3,804 civilians were killed last year, the highest number recorded, according to United Nations figures. Afghan security forces have suffered the brunt of losses, with more than 45,000 killed since 2014.

[War Crimes in Afghanistan & ICC: Daily Brief](#) – Human Rights Watch

A new United Nations report has [documented](#) a modest decline in torture allegations in Afghan prisons, but noted its ongoing concern at the “disturbingly” high number of conflict-related detainees still alleging serious abuses.

DRC

Iraq

A [mass grave](#) of Kurds killed by Iraq's former leader's forces three decades ago was unearthed. It was discovered in the desert about 170 kilometers west of the city of Samawa. Iraq has [begun trial proceedings](#) for nearly 900 Iraqi suspected members of the Islamic State group caught fleeing jihadist territory in neighboring Syria. Syrian Kurds [repatriated](#) 25 women and children from Iraq's Yezidi minority after freeing them during the final push against the Islamic State group, a local official said.

[Supporting Recovery and Stability in Iraq through Local Development \[EN/AR/KU\]](#) – ReliefWeb

[Torture Persists in Mosul Jail](#) - ReliefWeb

Kashmir

Indian troops have launched cordon and search [operations](#) in Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian districts of Kashmir in the wake of ongoing general elections. The troops sealed all exit and entry points of the area while the search operations continued for the sixth consecutive day in several parts of Kishtwar district.

Pakistani troops Monday [fired mortars](#) and opened fire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, drawing retaliation from Indian troops.

"At about 0815 hours, Pakistani Army initiated unprovoked ceasefire violation by shelling with mortars and firing of small arms along the LoC in Nowshera sector of Rajouri district" PRO defence, said.

Expressing serious concern over the [escalating tension](#) between the troops of India and Pakistan, especially in Poonch and Rajouri sectors resulting in immense damage, the moderate Hurriyat Conference (HC) on Monday said that every time there is exchange of fire on the Line of Control (LoC), people on the both sides of fence become the primary target and bear the brunt.

Owais Ahmad Mir, a seventh-grade student [was shot](#) by security forces in Kupwara district. Last week, Indian authorities had partially banned civilian movement on the crucial National Highway which connects Kashmir to the rest of India.

[Indian military officers conversing IHL with ICRC experts](#) - Reliefweb

Libya

More than 120 people [have been killed](#) since a Libyan military commander launched an assault on the capital 10 days ago, igniting clashes with rival militias, the U.N. health agency said Sunday.

US National Public Radio's Sacha Pfeiffer speaks with Ghassan Salamé, U.N. envoy to Libya about what the international community is doing to [negotiate a ceasefire](#).

Eastern Libyan forces will [pursue their advance](#) on the capital Tripoli, the head of the eastern parliament in the divided country said on Saturday, despite international calls for a halt in an offensive that risks causing many civilian casualties.

Sky's special correspondent Alex Crawford gives her [first-hand account](#) as she joined forces frantically trying to stop Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army.

[Heavy fighting](#) for 11 days in the residential outskirts of Tripoli has caused over 750 casualties (including 9 civilians killed and 22 wounded) and forcibly displaced around 18 500. 5 400 civilians remain trapped in the battle zone including over 1 000 migrants and asylum-seekers detained in the vicinity of the clashes. Indiscriminate shelling, airstrikes and snipers have already hit eight ambulances since the beginning of the conflict, killing three medical relief workers. Targeting of medical personnel hampers the rescue of civilians and wounded.

A report by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that the past 24 hours saw another [surge in civilians fleeing hostilities](#) in and around Tripoli – 2,000 in the past 24 hours alone – with the number of people displaced now approaching 16,000. It adds that so far, some 4,000 people have been reached with some form of humanitarian assistance.

Libya's UN-backed government said its forces [shot down](#) a fighter jet belonging to forces of strongman Khalifa Haftar south of the capital Tripoli.

"The forces of the Libyan army shot down an enemy plane that was preparing to conduct air raids in the Wadi al-Rabie area," Government of National Accord spokesman Mohamed Gnounou told AFP today.

More than 3 million books were [destroyed](#) when rockets hit ministry of education buildings during fighting between rival government forces over the Libyan capital Tripoli, officials and the United Nations said on Monday.

Eastern Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar [tried to stage a coup](#) by issuing an arrest warrant for Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj, U.N. envoy Ghassan Salame said on Monday with Libya's top rivals locked in military confrontation over the capital Tripoli.

The United Nations has [announced](#) the increase of the number of displaced people fleeing the battles in the Libyan capital Tripoli and its surroundings to 18 thousand people.

Tripoli was [targeted by grad rockets](#), while shells fell on residential neighbourhoods of the Abu Salim municipality. The head of the country's emergency committee in the Ministry of Health confirmed the number of deceased from the bombing. Fears of renewed violence surged in the region after the leader of the Libyan militia General Khalifa Haftar instigated what the UN termed a military coup with an advance on Tripoli.

A total of 7,300 children have [been displaced](#) in Libya due to clashes currently underway, according to data updated through April 15, UNICEF told ANSA on Tuesday. It said about 4,500 people, including 1,800 children, are still in the areas of conflict and have asked to be evacuated.

[Libya: Tripoli Clashes Situational Report No. 9 \(As of 15 April 2019\)](#) – Relief Web

[DTM Libya - Tripoli Flash Update #6 \(14 April 2019\) \[EN/AR\]](#) – Relief Web

[Libya: Tripoli Clashes Situational Report No. 10 \(As of 16 April 2019\)](#) – Relief Web

[Tripoli: April Clashes, Humanitarian Update – Facts and Figures #7 \(16 April 2019\)](#) – Relief Web

[Heavy shelling and civilian deaths 'blatant violation' of international law](#) - UN envoy

The International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, [called on all](#) taking part in the fighting in Tripoli to respect the rule of International Humanitarian Law (IHR).

The [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) is concerned by increasing fighting around Tripoli, Libya, which last night claimed the lives of 11 civilians and injured 22, including an IRC staff member. Global leaders have been unable to present a united front in the face of the violence. The IRC is calling on European leaders to come up with a unified response to the crisis and insist on an immediate ceasefire, and for the US to re-energize its diplomatic muscle and steer the country away from civil war and further humanitarian crisis.

[Libya: Tripoli Clashes Situational Report No. 12 \(As of 18 April 2019\)](#) – ReliefWeb

[Protection Sector: Tripoli clashes protection update \(18 April 2019\)](#) – ReliefWeb

The Tripoli war [expanded to the south](#) of Libya today as the Pro Faiez Serraj forces attack and possibly take temporary control of Tamenhint airbase near Sebha. They subsequently made a strategic retreat or lost the base again to the pro-Haftar forces.

[Fighting for Control of Tripoli \(DG ECHO, UNOCHA, UNHCR, WHO media\)](#) – Reliefweb

Thousands of Libyan families are fleeing and over 3,000 refugees and migrants are [stuck in detention centers](#) near the conflict. They "remain at imminent risk of being caught in the crossfire", Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said in a statement, and "the provision of basic services including food and water remains extremely limited - with reports of many not eating for several days at a time".

"An increasing number of children are at [imminent risk](#) of injury or death because of the escalation in fighting – the worst in years – in and around Tripoli." – Children and Armed Conflict

Myanmar

[Myanmar's 2020 Elections and Conflict Dynamics](#) – Reliefweb

[UN Condemns Rakhine Attacks](#): An Internal Burmese Conflict Rises

Mali

In the first statement of its kind, the Islamic State has [claimed](#) the assassination of a commander within the Tuareg militia, the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) in northern Mali on Friday.

Palestine

Israeli soldiers [closed with sand hills](#), Monday, a road linking between several villages east of the Yatta town, south of southern West Bank city of Hebron.

An Israeli court [upheld the deportation](#) of Human Rights Watch's local director on Tuesday and ordered him to leave the country within two weeks.

Dozens of Israeli soldiers invaded, Wednesday, Shoshahla area in the al-Khader town, south of the West Bank city of Bethlehem, and [demolished three agricultural rooms](#).

Demolition of the [family home of Palestinians](#) involved in attacks against Israelis is not a mean for deterrence, as claimed by Israel, rather it is considered a collective punishment, argued attorney for the Jerusalem Legal Aid Center (JLAC) in a petition submitted to the Israeli High Court on 15 April.

Sudan

A coup d'état in Sudan as toppled the government of Omar al-Bashir. Al-Bashir has been indicted by the International Criminal Court but has thus far avoided being sent to the Hague. Sudan's military council spokesman Maj. Gen. Shams Ad-din Shanto [told the opposition](#) and protesters that the council was "ready to implement whatever civilian government the opposition parties agreed. "We won't appoint a PM. They'll choose one," he said as a sit-in continued in Khartoum. He also promised not to disperse protesters by force but called on them "to let normal life resume" and stop unauthorized roadblocks. "Taking up arms will not be tolerated," he added.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Friday [reminded the authorities in Sudan](#) of their overarching duty to ensure the protection of the human rights of all people and to refrain from the use of violence.

On Friday General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan was [sworn in](#) to lead the transitional military council. He succeeded General Awad Ibn Auf, who quit just a day after taking over from Omar al Bashir on Thursday. Organizers of the protests in Sudan that forced long-ruling President Omar al-Bashir from office are calling on the military to "[immediately and unconditionally](#)" hand power to a transitional civilian government that would rule for four years.

Sudan's military council on Monday said it was [restructuring the military command council](#) and appointed Colonel General Hashem Abdel Muttalib Ahmed Babakr as army chief of staff.

Fourteen people were [killed in clashes](#) in a displacement camp in Sudan's Darfur on Saturday, Sudan news agency (SUNA) reported on Monday. Conflict in Darfur erupted in 2003 when mainly non-Arab tribes took up arms against Sudan's Arab-led government.

Deposed ex-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has [been moved to](#) Khartoum's grim high-security Kobar prison from the presidential residence, family sources said on Wednesday, and transitional military rulers announced steps to crack down on corruption.

The U.N. secretary-general has appointed [special adviser](#) Nicholas Haysom to support the African Union's mediation efforts in Sudan, where the military ousted longtime President Omar al-Bashir last week.

Omar Al-Bashir stands accused of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide, and must be [immediately handed over to the International Criminal Court](#) (ICC) for due process to be followed. -Amnesty International

Sudan's ruling Transitional Military Council [ordered](#) the central bank to review financial transfers since April 1 and to seize "suspect" funds, state news agency SUNA reported on Wednesday.

[Why former Sudan president Omar al-Bashir must not escape justice](#) – Amnesty International

Syria

New Zealand's foreign minister confirmed Monday that a New Zealand nurse has been [held captive by the Islamic State](#) group in Syria for almost six years, information long kept secret for fear her life might be at risk.

The U.N. envoy for Syria held ["substantial" talks](#) Sunday in Damascus with Foreign Minister Walid Muallem on efforts to find a political settlement to the country's eight-year-long war.

The death toll from [rockets fired](#) in the government-held northern city of Aleppo in Syria has risen to at least 11 people, state-run news agency Sana reported on Monday. According to an unnamed police source quoted by Sana, "terrorist groups", the term used for armed groups in the nearby rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, launched the attack on Sunday night.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has [appealed](#) for information on the fate of three employees abducted in Syria more than five years ago and last known to have been held by Islamic State.

More than 1,300 [refugees have left](#) the Syrian refugee camp Rukban, located within the US-controlled area, via the safe exit, Major General Viktor Kupchishin, chief of the Russian Center for Reconciliation of the Opposing Parties in Syria, said. "During the day, as many as 1,358 refugees managed to leave the Rukban camp via the humanitarian corridor. In all, a total of 3,642 people

have left the Rukban camp for the territory controlled by the Syrian authorities since February 19, 2019," he said.

[Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, 15 April 2019 - Syria](#)

The United States is [pressing its Kurdish allies](#) in Syria to ease their resistance to allowing Turkish forces to deploy on their side of the Turkish-Syrian border, well-informed sources told Al-Monitor. The Turkish forces would be a part of the proposed safe zone in northeastern Syria.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights [reveals in its report](#) released today that it has documented nearly 457 attacks in Syria by the Syrian and Russian regimes using cluster munitions, 24 of which occurred following the Sochi Agreement in September 2018. The report confirms that the Syrian regime is the world's worst offender in terms of using cluster munitions

For the first time, Israel fired advanced [Rampage](#) stand-off air-to-surface missiles against Syria in order to overcome the advanced Russian-made S-300 interceptor, foreign media reported on Wednesday.

The number of suspected [foreign ISIS fighters](#) being detained by US-backed forces in Syria has now surpassed 2,000, with a small number claiming to be US citizens, three US officials told CNN.

New satellite photos published by ImageSat International (ISI) revealed that the Russian military has been [deploying ballistic missile systems](#) in Syria, according to the photographs, which are surface-to-surface missile systems capable of reaching 500 kilometers (310 miles).

At least 10 Syrian civilians, including four women and three children, were [killed by](#) government shelling in the opposition-held Idlib region on Thursday, a war monitor said, in the latest round of violence threatening a seven-month-old truce. Rocket fire targeted a village and an adjacent camp for the internally displaced in Idlib's southeastern countryside, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), which predicted an increase in the death toll.

A senior United Nations relief official [called on governments](#) on Thursday to help resolve the fate of 2,500 foreign children being held among 75,000 people at al-Hol camp in northeastern Syria after fleeing Islamic State's last stronghold.

Ukraine

Ukraine's Special Representative for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, Ambassador Viktor Kryzhanivsky considers that the Russian Federation [is interested in maintaining the status quo](#) of the Transnistrian conflict. He stated this at the Kyiv Security Forum, Ukrinform's correspondent in the Republic of Moldova reported. "There is no progress in the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. For Russia, it is important to maintain a focus of tension in the region," the diplomat said.

April 14, the Russian-backed militants fired at Ukraine defenders' positions in [Donbas conflict zone](#) four times and did not use weapons of forbidden calibers. This is reported by the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) headquarters.

The occupants fired at positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine near Avdiivka using machine-guns, anti-tank grenade launchers; and they fired from large-caliber machine guns and small arms in the area of Vodiane.

The occupiers twice-fired at the Ukrainian positions in Donetsk sector.

Militants attacked our strongholds near Novotoshkiyske from automatic grenade launchers, large-caliber machine guns, and small arms; and near Novoluhanske - from automatic machine guns and grenade launchers.

Earlier, The International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) has sent 14 trucks with [humanitarian aid](#) to the uncontrolled territory of Donbas.

"14 trucks from ICRC were sent through Novotroitske checkpoint to the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine. The residents of Donbas will receive 231,4 tons of humanitarian aid, in particular, food, agricultural materials, building materials, medicine, and medical supplies," the message reads.

[Belarus](#) is ready to increase its role in resolving the conflict in Ukraine if corresponding agreements are reached between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine, Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko said in an interview with Turkey's news agency Anadolu, BelTA informs.

Moscow court [extends](#) arrest of all captured Ukrainian sailors for three months.

[Nikolai Polozov: why Ukrainian personnel held in Russia should be considered prisoners of war](#)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) [sent 16 trucks](#) carrying humanitarian aid to the temporarily occupied territories of Donbas, according to the press service of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine.

[Russian-Ukrainian war can turn into full-scale conflict](#) - Muzhenko

Representatives of the Russian Federation have [refused to support](#) Ukraine's initiative to declare a ceasefire in Donbas, eastern Ukraine, on the occasion of Easter holidays. "Talks have just ended. Without results. The Russian Federation has refused to back the initiative of Ukraine to declare a truce for the holiday, refused to shoulder the responsibility for a ceasefire in Donbas," First Deputy Chairwoman of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's envoy to the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group's humanitarian subgroup on Donbas Iryna Gerashchenko said on Facebook on Thursday evening after a TCG video conference had ended.

Yemen

Saudi Arabia is looking to find [a way out](#) of its devastating war in Yemen and the United States, the kingdom's stalwart ally, can play a critical role, the International Crisis Group said Sunday (Apr 14). The group, which researches ways to end conflicts, said the United States should appoint a special envoy and suspend most arms shipments to the Saudis with a promise to resume them once the kingdom ends its four-year offensive against Huthi rebels who control much of their southern neighbor.

[Yemen: 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan \(January - December 2019\)](#) – Relief Web

The Islamic State and al-Qaida are [waging a deadly contest](#) for territory, recruits and influence in Yemen that is dividing tribes and deepening instability in the Middle East's poorest nation, according to tribal leaders, security officials and analysts.

The U.N. envoy for Yemen [announced](#) Monday that the government and Houthi rebels have reached agreement on the military plan for the initial redeployment of forces from the key port of Hodeida.

French arms [including tanks and laser-guided missile systems](#) sold to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are being used in the Yemeni war against civilians, leaked intelligence published by investigative website Disclose showed.

Focusing on [children's safety](#) and a need for enhanced political process in Yemen – Relief Web

President Trump [vetoed](#) a bipartisan resolution on Tuesday that would have forced an end to American military involvement in Saudi Arabia's civil war in Yemen, rejecting an appeal by lawmakers to his own deeply rooted instincts to withdraw the United States from bloody foreign conflicts.

[Briefing of Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy for Yemen to the Security Council](#)

[Yemen: More bombs and weapons will only mean more suffering and death](#) - Norwegian Refugee Council

Years of indiscriminate conflict in Yemen have shattered the country's health system and fueled a humanitarian crisis. As the war approaches its fourth year, [Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières \(MSF\)](#) repeats its call to all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians, including medical facilities and staff, and to allow the sick and wounded unhindered access to humanitarian aid and health care.

[2018 Yemen Multi-Cluster Location Assessment](#) – Relief web

The U.N. Security Council [expressed "grave concern"](#) Wednesday that agreements reached four months ago by the warring parties in Yemen have not been carried out and called for their implementation "without delay."

Other

Volunteers from the Australian Red Cross spent six weeks watching the franchise and have [compiled a list](#) of the characters who could be prosecuted for war crimes – and Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow make a surprise appearance high up the list.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has [tripled its budget](#) for operations in Venezuela from about \$9 million to about \$24.6 million, the organization announced following a five-day visit to the country by its president.

The ICRC operates in 17 states of the federation but is [handicapped](#) in most parts of Borno state, Nigeria where the humanitarian crisis is heightened.

The United Nations Security Council called on Colombia's Government and Congress to [ratify the powers of the country's war crimes tribunal](#) on Friday. The call to ratify the statutory law of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) "as soon as possible" came weeks after President Ivan Duque's controversial decision to return the bill to Congress. The UN's chief observer of the peace process, Carlos Ruiz, invited Rosa Emilia Salamanca, a renowned peace advocate who spoke on behalf of civil society.

On [March 23](#), while members of the United Nations Security Council were on an official visit to Mali, more than [160 civilians](#) were killed in the village of Ogossagou in the central region in one of the deadliest massacres in the country's recent history. The attack targeted the Fulani community, and victims, including about 50 children, were either shot or burned in their houses.

[Guantanamo's Darkest Secret](#) – New Yorker

[War Crimes and National Security](#) | Robert C. Koehler

A Kosovo court has [ordered](#) a Serb man to be detained while he awaits trial on charges of genocide and war and humanitarian crimes during Kosovo's 1998-99 war for independence.

[Azerbaijan: ICRC Activities Highlights for January-December, 2018](#) – Reliefweb

[ICRC helps 12000 displaced persons in North Ethiopia access water, sanitation services](#) - ReliefWeb

Humanitarian [aid](#) provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) began arriving in Venezuela on Tuesday, the Venezuelan Red Cross said.

[Q&A: ICRC chief on why **international** NGOs 'are at extreme risk'](#) - Devex

[Second annual retreat on international humanitarian law: protection of civilian critical infrastructure in conflict - Chair's Summary \(A/73/822-S/2019/285\)](#) – Relief Web

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is [keen to participate](#) in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for partnership on humanitarian assistance, a senior ICRC official has said.