

Belltes Academy

Ten Most Important International Laws
and Their Legal Classifications

Written by Belltes Khoza

SECTION A: Detailed Explanations and Examples

1. The Prohibition of Genocide

Detailed Explanation: Genocide requires two distinct elements: the physical act (*actus reus*) and a specific mental intent (*mens rea*) known as *dolus specialis*. To be sentenced for genocide, a prosecutor must prove that the individual acted with the explicit intent to physically or biologically destroy a specific group. Cultural destruction (e.g., banning a language) does not qualify under current ICC definitions; it must be the physical elimination of the people themselves. Notably, 'political groups' and 'social classes' are excluded from the official protected categories (national, ethnical, racial, or religious).

Example: The 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Local officials, military leaders, and media executives were prosecuted by international tribunals (which paved the way for the ICC structure) for distributing weapons, broadcasting hate speech that referred to Tutsis as 'cockroaches' to be cleared out, and organizing systematic roadblocks to slaughter them.

2. The Prohibition of Torture (as a Crime Against Humanity)

Detailed Explanation: While domestic torture is a local crime, it becomes a crime under the Rome Statute when it is committed as part of a 'widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population.' The perpetrator must be aware that their actions are part of this broader state or organizational policy. Unlike the standalone UN Convention Against Torture, the ICC definition does not strictly require the perpetrator to be an official state actor; leaders of rebel groups or cartel-like networks can also be sentenced.

Example: A regime's intelligence chief sets up a network of secret detention centers during a political crackdown. Over several months, hundreds of anti-government protesters are systematically rounded up and subjected to severe psychological terror, waterboarding, or electric shocks to extract confessions. Even if the chief did not personally administer the shocks, they can be sentenced by the ICC for command responsibility.

3. The Prohibition of Murder and Extermination

Detailed Explanation: While murder refers to the unlawful killing of individuals, extermination is a distinct element that includes the intentional infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population. This means a leader does not need to deploy death squads to be guilty; they can achieve extermination by intentionally withholding the biological necessities of survival on a massive scale.

Example: A military commander blockades a rebellious province. They deliberately cut off all water pipelines, ban international humanitarian aid trucks from entering, and shut down electricity to hospitals. As a result, thousands of civilians die of starvation, dehydration, and preventable diseases. The commander can be prosecuted for extermination as a crime against humanity.

4. The Prohibition of Enslavement and Human Trafficking

Detailed Explanation: Under international law, enslavement is defined as exercising any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person. This includes forcing people to work without pay under the threat of violence, buying or selling human beings, and reducing them to mere commodities. Human trafficking becomes an ICC-level crime when it is used systematically by an organization or government to control a population.

Example: During a civil war, an insurgent group captures several villages. They separate the women and young girls, transport them to a central base, and distribute them among fighters as forced 'wives' or domestic slaves. The commanders who organized the transport, capturing, and forced labor system are liable for enslavement under the Rome Statute.

5. The Prohibition of Deportation or Forcible Transfer

Detailed Explanation: 'Deportation' refers to forcing people across international borders, while 'forcible transfer' refers to forcing them to relocate within national borders. For this to be a crime, the displacement must be done by force, threat of force, or coercion, and without legally justifiable grounds (such as a temporary, urgent evacuation to protect civilian lives during an active battle).

Example: An authoritarian government wants to exploit an oil-rich region inhabited by an ethnic minority. The military enters the towns, burns down residential homes, and forces 50,000 residents onto trains to drop them in a barren desert province miles away. Because there was no valid military necessity to protect these civilians, this constitutes illegal forcible transfer.

6. The Prohibition of Apartheid and Persecution

Detailed Explanation: Persecution is the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of a group. Apartheid is a specific, institutionalized form of persecution. It involves inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over another, with the intention of maintaining that regime.

Example: A ruling regime passes laws that strip a specific racial minority of their citizenship, bars them from voting, denies them access to public healthcare, and forces them to live in walled-off segregation zones while subjecting them to random police violence. The politicians who drafted the laws and the generals who enforce the segregation can be tried for the crime of apartheid.

7. The Prohibition of Intentional Attacks Against Civilians

Detailed Explanation: This is a foundation of international humanitarian law (the laws of war). It relies on the principle of distinction—combatants must always distinguish between military targets and civilians. If a military target is struck and civilians die as collateral damage, it may not be a crime (depending on proportionality). However, if civilians are the intended target of the attack, it is an automatic war crime.

Example: Frustrated by a prolonged siege, a general orders his artillery units to fire unguided missiles directly into a crowded city market, far away from any enemy barracks or military infrastructure, purely to terrorize the population into surrendering. The general who gave the order, and the officers who knowingly executed it, are guilty of a war crime.

8. The Prohibition of Attacks Against Humanitarian or Peacekeeping Missions

Detailed Explanation: International law grants special protected status to humanitarian workers and UN peacekeepers, provided they are not taking a direct part in hostilities. Because these personnel are deployed to protect civilians and deliver life-saving aid, attacking them strips vulnerable populations of their survival network. Killing or injuring them is treated with the same severity as attacking civilians.

Example: A rebel faction intercepts a clearly marked World Food Programme convoy carrying grain to a famine-struck zone. Despite seeing the UN flags and humanitarian insignias, the rebels open fire on the trucks, killing three aid workers and stealing the food supplies. The rebel leaders who ordered the ambush face international prosecution.

9. The Prohibition of Using Child Soldiers

Detailed Explanation: The Rome Statute strictly prohibits conscripting (forcing), enlisting (allowing to volunteer), or using children under the age of 15 years into national armed forces or armed rebel groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities. 'Active participation' is interpreted broadly by the ICC; it does not just mean giving a child a rifle. It also includes using children as scouts, spies, messengers, guards, or lookouts in a conflict zone.

Example: In the ICC's landmark case against warlord Thomas Lubanga, his militia abducted young boys and girls under 15 from their homes. They were taken to military training camps, forced to wear uniforms, and deployed to the front lines of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Lubanga was convicted and sentenced specifically for this crime.

10. The Prohibition of the Crime of Aggression

Detailed Explanation: Known historically as a 'crime against peace,' this law does not target ordinary soldiers. It applies strictly to political or military leaders who have the power to direct a state's policy. Aggression occurs when a leader uses armed force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of another state in a way that clearly violates the United Nations Charter.

Example: The leader of Country A orders a massive, unprovoked invasion of neighboring Country B to annex its land and overthrow its elected government, without any claim of self-defense or authorization from the UN Security Council. The head of state, prime minister, and top defense chiefs who planned this invasion are liable for the crime of aggression.

SECTION B: Systemic Analyses (100 Key Dimensions)

LAW 1: The Prohibition of Genocide

- 1. Legal Definition:** The explicit act of killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting destructive life conditions, preventing births, or forcibly transferring children, committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.
- 2. Mental Element (Mens Rea):** Requires *dolus specialis* (special intent). The perpetrator must not just intend to kill people; they must explicitly intend to make the targeted group cease to exist.
- 3. Physical Element (Actus Reus):** The tangible commission of one of the five prohibited acts (e.g., mass killing or mass sterilization).
- 4. Targeted Protected Groups:** Limited strictly to national, ethnical, racial, or religious identities. Political groups, economic classes, and social movements are excluded.
- 5. Historical Application:** Used as the structural blueprint for the trials following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.
- 6. Command Responsibility:** A leader can be sentenced even if they never pulled a trigger, provided they ordered the destruction or knowingly failed to stop their troops from executing it.
- 7. The Red Line:** The moment a state policy shifts from discrimination or forced relocation to the active, physical, or biological elimination of a protected population.
- 8. Real-World Example:** An authoritarian military regime declares an indigenous religious minority to be 'cancerous' (cockroaches), blocks them from leaving the country, and systematically executes every man, woman, and child in their villages to permanently wipe out their presence.
- 9. Conceptual Analogy:** A gardener who does not merely want to prune a plant or move it to a different pot, but decides to mix a highly toxic chemical to permanently kill off every single specimen of that specific plant species from the face of the earth so it can never grow again.
- 10. Core Legal Standard Met:** The intent to erase an entire human lineage based purely on its collective identity.

LAW 2: The Prohibition of Torture

- 11. Legal Definition:** The intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused, as part of a widespread or systematic

attack directed against a civilian population.

12. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The perpetrator must intentionally inflict the pain and must have knowledge that their actions are part of a broader, organized campaign against civilians.

13. Physical Element (Actus Reus): Severe physical abuse (e.g., beatings, electrocution) or severe psychological abuse (e.g., mock executions, prolonged sensory deprivation).

14. Contextual Requirement: Unlike domestic crimes, it must be 'widespread' (affecting many people over a large area) or 'systematic' (carried out according to a deliberate, organized plan).

15. Jurisdictional Threshold: The victim must be defenceless, meaning they are completely under the physical custody, detention, or control of the perpetrator.

16. Perpetrator Identity: The ICC can prosecute state officials, military officers, rebel leaders, or cartel commanders alike; official state status is not required.

17. The Red Line: The transition from aggressive, local police misconduct to an organized, policy-driven system of inflicting severe pain to crush civilian resistance.

18. Real-World Example: During a massive political crackdown, a state's intelligence chief designs a network of secret interrogation centers where thousands of captured peaceful protesters are systematically waterboarded to force confessions.

19. Conceptual Analogy: A school principal who does not just discipline individual students, but sets up an official, school-wide system ordering teachers to lock any student who asks a question into a dark, freezing box for days to systematically break their spirit.

20. Core Legal Standard Met: The organized use of severe, inescapable human suffering as an institutional tool of terror.

LAW 3: The Prohibition of Extermination

21. Legal Definition: The mass-scale killing of a civilian population, including the deliberate infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population, such as depriving them of access to food, clean water, or life-saving medicine.

22. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The intent to cause mass death, or acting with the knowledge that the conditions being created will inevitably lead to mass death.

23. Physical Element (Actus Reus): The act of killing on a massive scale, whether through direct violence or structural deprivation.

24. Scale Distinction: While murder deals with individual victims, extermination focuses on the interconnected mass nature of the killings and the logistical methods used.

25. Structural Violence: Recognises that weaponising basic biological needs (starvation, disease) is just as lethal as using bullets and explosives.

26. Command Accountability: Targets top-tier logistics officers, politicians, and generals who control infrastructure, trade, and aid access.

27. The Red Line: The moment a siege or blockade shifts from targeting an enemy military force to intentionally starving out the entire civilian population living alongside them.

28. Real-World Example: A military commander completely surrounds a rebellious city, blocks all international humanitarian food convoys, cuts off the fresh water pipelines, and destroys the electricity grid, causing thousands of citizens to slowly die of starvation.

29. Conceptual Analogy: A landlord who wants to get rid of a family inside an apartment, but instead of walking in and shooting them, they lock the doors from the outside, board up the windows, shut off the water, and cut the power in the middle of summer, knowing they cannot survive inside.

30. Core Legal Standard Met: The deliberate weaponisation of deprivation to eliminate a large human population.

LAW 4: The Prohibition of Enslavement

31. Legal Definition: The exercise of any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person, including the purchasing, selling, lending, or bartering of human beings, or reducing them to a commodity forced into labor or sexual servitude.

32. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The intent to exercise ownership, control, and total dominance over another human being as property.

33. Physical Element (Actus Reus): Capturing, trafficking, holding, or trading individuals, and stripping them of their autonomy and right to freedom.

34. Scope of the Law: Covers modern forms of human trafficking, forced labor camps, and institutionalized sexual slavery carried out during conflicts.

35. Civilian Context: Must be part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population to trigger the ICC's crime against humanity jurisdiction.

36. Economic Exploitation: Focuses heavily on the financial or operational benefit the perpetrator extracts by treating humans as disposable property.

37. The Red Line: The moment a person's legal identity and physical freedom are entirely erased, reducing them to an item on an organizational balance sheet.

38. Real-World Example: An armed rebel group invades a series of farming villages, captures the inhabitants, forces the men to mine diamonds at gunpoint for no pay, and distributes the women among the commanders as personal domestic property.

39. Conceptual Analogy: A company boss who steals your passport, locks you inside a secure warehouse, forces you to work 18 hours a day for zero pay, and tells you that you are now their personal property to be traded or sold to another warehouse whenever they see fit.

40. Core Legal Standard Met: The total reduction of a human being to an owned, traded commodity.

LAW 5: The Prohibition of Forcible Transfer

41. Legal Definition: The forced displacement of persons from the area in which they are lawfully present by expulsion or other coercive acts, without grounds permitted under international law.

42. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The intent to remove a population from their lawful territory, knowing they have no legal justification or valid choice to stay.

43. Physical Element (Actus Reus): The physical removal, deportation across borders, or internal relocation of people through military force, threats, or coercion.

44. Lawful Exceptions: Temporary evacuations are permitted only if the absolute security of the civilians or imperative military necessity requires it during active combat.

45. Geographical Distinction: 'Deportation' involves pushing people across an international border; 'forcible transfer' happens within the borders of the same country.

46. Coercive Environment: Physical force is not strictly required; creating unlivable conditions (burning crops, constant terror) that force people to flee also violates this law.

47. The Red Line: Using military power to permanently alter the demographics of a region by driving out an unwanted civilian population.

48. Real-World Example: A government wants to clear an oil-rich region inhabited by an ethnic minority. The military rolls in with tanks, gives residents 30 minutes to pack one bag, and forces 50,000 people onto trains to drop them in a barren desert province miles away.

49. Conceptual Analogy: A powerful landlord who wants to build luxury apartments, so they bring armed guards to throw all the current tenants out onto the street, burn their furniture, and tell them they are legally banned from ever setting foot on the property again.

50. Core Legal Standard Met: The illegal, forced uprooting of a civilian population from their ancestral or lawful homes.

LAW 6: The Prohibition of Apartheid

51. Legal Definition: Inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group, committed with the specific intention of maintaining that regime.

- 52. Mental Element (Mens Rea):** The explicit intent to preserve and enforce a system of racial hierarchy and total domination through institutional means.
- 53. Physical Element (Actus Reus):** Codifying discriminatory laws, denying fundamental human rights, segregating populations, and using state violence to enforce the divide.
- 54. Systemic Nature:** Requires a top-down, state-sponsored or highly organized legal framework; it cannot be committed by a random individual acting alone without a regime backing them.
- 55. Persecution Link:** Apartheid is recognized as an extreme, highly structured variant of the broader crime against humanity known as persecution.
- 56. Political Accountability:** Directly targets lawmakers, judicial figures, presidents, and military generals who design and maintain the oppressive legal ecosystem.
- 57. The Red Line:** Constructing a dual-track legal system where one race holds absolute power and rights while another race is stripped of legal personhood.
- 58. Real-World Example:** A ruling political elite passes a new constitution that strips a specific minority group of citizenship, denies them the right to vote, bans them from public healthcare, and walls them off into heavily policed segregation zones.
- 59. Conceptual Analogy:** A town council passing an official law stating that anyone born with blue eyes is legally banned from using public roads, going to schools, or entering hospitals, forcing them to live in separate zones while being policed by aggressive guards.
- 60. Core Legal Standard Met:** The institutionalization of systematic racial oppression as the supreme law of the land.

LAW 7: The Prohibition of Intentional Attacks Against Civilians

- 61. Legal Definition:** Intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities. This is a foundational war crime.
- 62. Mental Element (Mens Rea):** The military commander must consciously choose a civilian target, knowing that the target has no military value and is not participating in the fighting.
- 63. Physical Element (Actus Reus):** Launching missiles, deploying artillery, or ordering soldiers to fire weapons directly at civilian hubs like homes, schools, or markets.
- 64. Principle of Distinction:** The absolute legal obligation under international humanitarian law to always differentiate between active combatants and peaceful civilians.
- 65. Proportionality vs. Intent:** Collateral damage (civilians dying accidentally near a valid military target) requires a complex legal balancing test; aiming directly at civilians bypasses that test and is an automatic crime.

66. Combatant Status: If a civilian picks up a rifle and joins the fight, they lose protection. The moment they stop fighting or are captured, their civilian protection returns.

67. The Red Line: Treating the civilian population not as an unfortunate casualty of war, but as the primary target to be destroyed to win the conflict.

68. Real-World Example: Frustrated by an enemy army dug into a nearby mountain, a general orders his missile units to fire unguided rockets directly into a crowded downtown shopping district during rush hour to terrorize the population into surrendering.

69. Conceptual Analogy: Two rival street gangs are having a shootout. Instead of aiming at each other, one gang leader deliberately turns their automatic weapon toward a nearby playground full of children, firing into the crowd just to terrify the neighborhood.

70. Core Legal Standard Met: The deliberate targeting of non-combatants as an act of warfare.

LAW 8: The Prohibition of Attacks Against Humanitarian Missions

71. Legal Definition: Intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units, or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the UN Charter, as long as they maintain their civilian protection.

72. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The perpetrator must know that the target is a protected humanitarian or peacekeeping mission and still choose to attack it.

73. Physical Element (Actus Reus): Bombing aid warehouses, shooting at UN vehicles, kidnapping doctors, or mining roads used by humanitarian convoys.

74. Protected Status: Humanitarian workers and peacekeepers are legally classified as civilians. They lose this protection only if they abandon their neutral role and take a direct part in the fighting.

75. Impact on Civilians: Stripping aid from a conflict zone directly accelerates starvation and medical collapse, meaning this crime often acts as a gateway to war crimes or extermination.

76. Universal Emblems: Protects globally recognized symbols of neutrality, such as the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and the UN blue helmets.

77. The Red Line: Attacking the neutral actors who have entered a war zone specifically to save lives, treat the wounded, and uphold basic human dignity.

78. Real-World Example: A militia group sets up an ambush on a highway and opens fire on a convoy of clearly marked Red Cross ambulances and UN food trucks, killing the medics and stealing the medical supplies meant for a nearby refugee camp.

79. Conceptual Analogy: Two individuals are engaged in a violent, chaotic fistfight. Suddenly, one of the fighters turns around and brutally assaults the neutral referee and the medical team who rushed into the ring to treat an injury.

80. Core Legal Standard Met: The intentional destruction of the neutral safety nets designed to preserve human life during wartime.

LAW 9: The Prohibition of Using Child Soldiers

81. Legal Definition: Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into national armed forces or armed groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities.

82. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The commander must know, or should have known through basic due diligence, that the recruited individuals are under the age of 15.

83. Physical Element (Actus Reus): Abducting, recruiting, training, or deploying children into any operational role within an armed force or militia.

84. Active Participation Scope: The ICC interprets this broadly. A child does not need to carry a rifle to be a child soldier; acting as a military scout, spy, messenger, lookout, or forced military companion all qualify.

85. Consent Irrelevant: Under international law, a child under 15 cannot legally 'volunteer' for war. Even if a child begs to join the militia, the commander who accepts them is guilty of a war crime.

86. Strict Liability Standard: The ICC enforces a zero-tolerance policy on this age limit to protect the psychological and physical development of children.

87. The Red Line: Bringing children out of classrooms and playgrounds and embedding them into the machinery of organized military violence.

88. Real-World Example: A warlord raids an elementary school, kidnaps 12-year-old boys and girls, forces them into military uniforms, gives them automatic rifles, and deploys them to the front lines to act as the first wave of an assault.

89. Conceptual Analogy: A construction company owner refuses to hire adults because they demand fair wages. Instead, they kidnap middle school students, force them to operate heavy, dangerous demolition machinery without safety gear, and threaten them with violence if they try to escape.

90. Core Legal Standard Met: The weaponisation and systematic exploitation of children within an armed conflict.

LAW 10: The Prohibition of the Crime of Aggression

91. Legal Definition: The planning, preparation, initiation, or execution, by a person in a position effectively to exercise control over the political or military action of a State, of an act of aggression which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter.

92. Mental Element (Mens Rea): The political or military leader must deliberately plan and execute an unprovoked attack against another sovereign nation, fully aware that it violates international law.

93. Physical Element (Actus Reus): Launching an invasion, military occupation, bombardment, or blockade against the territory of another state without legal justification.

94. Leadership Crime: Ordinary soldiers, captains, or even colonels cannot be prosecuted for this. It applies strictly to the top-tier executives (presidents, prime ministers, defense chiefs) who shape a nation's grand strategy.

95. UN Charter Framework: The fundamental rule of the international order is that states cannot use force against each other. The only two legal exceptions are explicit UN Security Council authorization or genuine, immediate self-defense.

96. Historical Roots: Evolved directly from the 'crimes against peace' charges used during the Nuremberg Trials to sentence top Nazi leaders.

97. The Red Line: Shattering global peace by unilaterally invading a sovereign nation simply to redraw borders or overthrow its government by force.

98. Real-World Example: The president of a powerful nation orders a massive, unprovoked surprise invasion of a peaceful neighboring country to annex its land and overthrow its democratically elected government, without any claim of self-defense.

99. Conceptual Analogy: A massive bodybuilder walks down the street, spots a smaller neighbor sitting quietly on their own front porch, and beats them up to take over their house, having absolutely no prior argument, legal dispute, or right to be there.

100. Core Legal Standard Met: The illegal use of state military power to destroy the sovereignty and peace of another independent nation.