

Ceremony for the award of the Henry Dunant Prize Terrain to Mr. Zakaria Daboné
Thursday, November 20, 2025, at the Salle de l'Alabama, Geneva City Hall
Opening speech and laudatio of the winner

Mrs. Nathalie Fontanet, State Councillor,
Mrs. Sabine Bakyono Kanzié, Ambassador of Burkina Faso,
Mr. Gilles Carbonnier, Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Dear Zakaria Daboné, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I open this award ceremony, I am pleased to welcome you and thank you for your participation. On behalf of the Henry Dunant Prize Foundation¹, I would like to express our gratitude to the State Council for giving us access to the Alabama Hall; as you well know, this place is doubly historic. Here, on 22 August 1864, the first *Geneva Convention* was signed, which marks the beginning of contemporary international humanitarian law. Here, on September 14, 1872, the Court of Arbitration handed down its award, known as the Alabama Award, a peaceful solution to the dispute between two world powers, the United States and Great Britain. This event is all the more notorious as it is the first time that two world powers have agreed to submit to an arbitral tribunal.

We are pleased to welcome the presence of personalities whom we name in alphabetical order:

- Mr. Mohamed Abdelmajid Ben Ahmed,
winner of the 2017 Henry Dunant Terrain Prize, from Tunis
- Mr. François Berger, writer and columnist, from Saint-Blaise
- Mrs. Morgane Desboeuf, descendant of Henry Dunant
- Mrs. Cécile Dunant Martinez, descendant of Henry Dunant
- Ms. Gloria Gaggioli, Professor of IHL, University of Geneva

¹ Founded in 1984 by Mrs. Pierrette Mourgue d'Algue, great-grandniece of Henry Dunant, and by the Henry Dunant Society, the Henry Dunant Prize Foundation "aims to reward any person, both natural and legal, who has worked in a remarkable way to deepen, promote and renew Henry Dunant's philanthropic ideas." Its Board is composed of the following people: Caty Clément, Morgane Desboeufs, Cécile Dunant Martinez, Roger Durand, Etienne Kuster, Antoine Mourgue d'Algue, Marco Sassoli and Claudia Seymour.

- Mr. Jean Lanoy, parish priest of the Saint-Germain Church which will host the buffet dinner
- Messrs. Antoine and Raphaël Mourgue d'Algue, descendants of Henry Dunant
- Mrs. Elizabeth Moynier, descendant of Gustave Moynier
- Mrs. Claire-Lise Sheeler, descendant of Théodore Maunoir.

We are pleased to award the Henry Dunant Terrain Prize 2025 to Zakaria Daboné. He is a real man of the field, based in Burkina Faso, where he teaches, among other things, international humanitarian law at the N. Boni University in Bobo-Dioulasso. In Burkina Faso, he worked for the all-important implementation of international humanitarian law as Permanent Secretary of the National Commission on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. As a member of the African Union Mission for the Central African Republic and Central Africa, he participated, in the Central African Republic in particular, in the negotiations that led to the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic of February 6, 2019. To achieve this result, he contributed – a crucial idea – to raising the awareness of the fourteen armed groups with a view to these negotiations, including in international humanitarian law. In Burkina Faso and in various African states, he has also trained soldiers, lawyers and magistrates, diplomats, human rights officials, parliamentarians, civil society organizations and academics. He has occasionally lectured to the general public in the region and in Europe. He has been an expert consultant, in particular, for the judges of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in exchange sessions with the judges of the International Court of Justice on the joint application of human rights and international humanitarian law.

However, while being a man of the field, Zakaria Daboné is also an academician. As a teacher and researcher, he regularly publishes the results of his research in several areas of law. Specifically on international humanitarian law, he recently embarked on a two-part research project. The first part consists of an already produced article, realistic and dispelling so many misunderstandings, on the theory of the asymmetrical application by the State of international humanitarian law in non-international armed conflicts, combining a sophisticated theoretical framework with unfortunately very practical and concrete problems. The other side of the problem and of the research, which is still in production, naturally concerns armed groups and concerns the theory of the application of international humanitarian law to non-international armed conflicts by non-state armed groups

with variable symmetry. We can assume that it is in recognition of these academic activities that, on the occasion of the celebration of the 65th anniversary of the independence of Burkina Faso, the Burkinabe State has just decorated him and elevated him to the rank of Knight of the Order of Academic Palms of Burkina Faso.

In this mythical hall in Alabama, I must mention that Zakaria Daboné has a special relationship with Geneva. He worked there between 2002 and 2011. He was first a student of what is now the MAS in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights (which became the Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in Geneva); The names have changed, but the substance remains the same. There he obtained the highest mark among the students of his class in the specialized subject that Professor Marco Sassòli taught there at the time. It was therefore normal that this professor accepted him as a doctoral student and hired him, as soon as possible, as a research and teaching assistant. An admirably precise and reliable assistant, he accompanied in particular for five years the major course in public international law given by Professor Sassòli at the Bachelor's level, for about 300 students. He trained these future lawyers, the vast majority of whom were Swiss, in precision and clarity of reasoning, as well as in perfection in French-language writing, as he had learned it in Burkina Faso. In view of this ability, Professor Julia Xoudis, a specialist in Swiss private law, also hired him as an assistant to supervise her legal drafting exercises.

His doctoral thesis was on "Public international law relating to non-state armed groups". This theme remains highly topical and of undisputed interest. Just as Henry Dunant was not in favour of war, so Zakaria Daboné is not in favour of armed groups. However, both understood that if the humanitarian consequences of these phenomena were to be mitigated, legal rules were needed that applied to them and that were realistic for the actors concerned. The scientific result of Dr. Dabone's research was excellent. Defended in January 2011 at the University of Geneva, her thesis obtained the mention "very good", which corresponded at the time to the highest mention of this University. The overall plan was clear and presented impeccable logic. The content offers, among other things, an overview of current public international law, its challenges and contradictions in relation to armed groups. In accordance with the decision of the defense jury, the thesis was published as the first issue of the "Geneva Collection" devoted to theses in international law. Following this PhD, Zakaria Daboné continued on the

traditional path of an academic career in the West, as a visiting researcher as part of a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan, USA.

After all these academic exploits, Zakaria Daboné chose to return to his country and work there. He is involved in various activities of several institutions in his country; for example, he is a member of the National Drafting Committee of the Practical Guide to the Conclusion of International Treaties and Agreements by Burkina Faso.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in addition to his commitment to international humanitarian law in the field and in reflection and teaching, Zakaria Daboné is a founder and member of associations with a social and humanitarian purpose. He also has a completely different field of predilection: he writes touching short stories and poems that describe with empathy and clairvoyance the human being, daily life, destiny, including the relativity of perceptions between Geneva and Ouagadougou. In this creative activity too, his mastery of the French language grips the readers. In 2004 and 2010, he won prizes for his literary works at the Grands prix nationaux des arts et des lettres in Burkina Faso.

Zakaria Daboné's career is not only about promoting and implementing the ideals of Henry Dunant, where it counts and when it is most difficult. But he also followed, through this mixture of action and reflection, the example of Henry Dunant. Certainly, he deserves our Prize and we wish him that he will be able to continue to carry out his action in a global and national context that has been difficult until now.

Roger Durand, Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

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