

Award ceremony of the Henry DUNANT Field Prize 2025

20 November 2025 (Alabama Room, Geneva City Hall)

Theme: "Geneva's strengths and weaknesses
in the implementation and development of IHL"

Dr. Zakaria Daboné (winner)

Dear authorities,

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to thank those who have preceded me in this speech. Thank you for agreeing to be here this evening and to make the remarks you have made, in this mythical Alabama room at the Geneva City Hall.

Listening to the *laudatio* specifically, I sometimes found myself wondering if it was me, as some lines evoke facts from 20 years ago or more or episodes that could not belong to a *curriculum vitae*. Thank you to those who have picked up all these stitched shreds of life of the one who stands before you.

It is pointless to be satisfied with what we have already done in the sense that many things have been missed, done in an unsatisfactory way. However, the real constant is that the little that would have been done well would not have been possible without the others.

Allow me to thank those who have contributed to this journey and to the realization of this day.

Ladies and gentlemen

I have been a student, a doctoral student, a teaching and research assistant and even a voter in local votes in this Canton of Geneva. I know this city and this canton as well as I know five classes of law students and two or three classes of students in the Baccalaureate in International Relations.

The anecdotes with the students are numerous but they are all happy and symbolize the good relationship with the learners. This happened under the thumb of great Professors. I am referring to Prof. Nicolas Michel, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Prof. Julia Xoudis, Prof. Robert Kolb. I am obviously talking about Prof. Marco Sassòli with whom it all started and it is still ongoing. I am also talking about Prof. Laurence Boisson de Chazournes who, through her observation and other talents of her own, has been able to make up for various situations, let's say, in danger. Thank you all.

Ladies and gentlemen

I did not choose Geneva for the studies by default. At the time, I made this choice because I wanted to continue my studies in IHL and Geneva seemed to me to be the best place.

What Geneva offered was already the name it had given to the Central Conventions of IHL. It offered a first-rate academic and institutional framework. And the University Centre for IHL (CUDIH) had just been created. The CUDIH was a springboard, a remarkable opportunity with on the backs of new students the responsibilities that fall to the pioneers in a nascent University Centre. Geneva was where to be for those who came from far away, with the only link with Geneva being the language, French.

This seems to have changed. This is perhaps one of the things that Geneva no longer seems to offer.

What Geneva has perhaps never offered and does not offer is the maintenance of the relations that can be had with it. Geneva has an honest, respectful relationship with the student who comes here for studies. Geneva trains superbly and at very little cost for graduates. This is a huge merit. However, Geneva trains to offer the world. The ties of the people trained with Geneva remain purely interpersonal. It may be the result of a federal policy, but it has more negative than positive aspects.

Ladies and gentlemen

Let us return to IHL. Let me say what I perceive from my vantage point. IHL, to my great regret, seems to be running out of steam. I will cite only two reasons for this.

The first is linked to the fact that the great people of this world are in armed conflict. Those who were called upon to catalyze respect for IHL by others were those who were involved in armed conflict or who had protégés involved in it.

The second reason is that it is still said that a non-international armed conflict is a non-international armed conflict; that a non-state armed group is a non-state armed group. For the first point, however, conventional IHL originally showed all its modesty on non-international armed conflicts. Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 refers to armed conflict not of an international character. This has shown and shows that non-international armed conflict is multifaceted and must be addressed by IHL. As for armed groups, the second point is that IHL does not have a definition for them either. We should not continue to say that IHL is adapted to everything, whether we are faced with an armed group aiming for gain without seeking any political management, one

without attachment to the preservation of the lives of its own members, one aiming to build a new state or replace the government in place in continuity... We must accept that IHL is not considered a holy book. Conventionally, it is done by humans representing mainly states, in the confrontation of their arguments and interests for a compromise. It must be accepted that a supervised adaptation is necessary beyond the commentaries of the Conventions produced twice already.

Ladies and gentlemen

Let me now take great strides to mention my thanks to:

- the State and Canton of Geneva, the city of Henry Dunant;
- Madam President of the ceremony, the State Councillor, Mrs. Nathalie Fontanet;
- all the Swiss authorities present;
- Ambassador Sabine Bakyono/Kanzié;
- representatives of the family of Henry Dunant;
- representatives of Gustave Moynier' s family;
- representatives of the family of Théodore Maunoir;
- my family and loved ones here or elsewhere;
- my colleagues and classmates;
- Prof. Gloria Gaggioli who opened her course this afternoon to our presence;
- all the people present in this room;

I close this list by reiterating my gratitude to the Henry Dunant Prize Foundation and to the members of its Committee who are at the basis of everything that takes place in this room today and the activities leading up to this room.

Ladies and gentlemen

The *laudatio* ends with the hope that the Prize will help to keep me committed to IHL. I accept this wish. But I rephrase it by saying that despite the Prize, my wish is to talk less and less about IHL. Because this would be a sign that the war would be less present. I humbly think that IHL does not like war. He is not made to prevent it, but does not like it. I don't like war. Neither did Henry Dunant.

Thank you.