

Laudatio for Mr. Lisang Nyathi, Laureate of the 2025 Henry Dunant Research Prize¹

It is an honour to celebrate **Mr. Lisang Nyathi**, recipient of the **2025 Henry Dunant Research Prize**, for his dissertation *“When Bullets Threaten the Pursuit of Knowledge: Reclaiming Children’s Right to Education in Armed Conflict through a Human Dignity-Centred Approach under IHRL and IHL.”*

Supervised by **Professor Clara Sandoval** at the **Geneva Academy**, this outstanding work embodies the very ideals that inspired Henry Dunant: humanity, courage, and faith in law as a force for compassion.

Renewing Dunant’s vision

The Henry Dunant Research Prize rewards academic work that deepens and renews Dunant’s ideals. Mr. Nyathi’s study does precisely that. By focusing on the **right of children to education in armed conflict**, he joins Dunant’s lifelong struggle to protect civilians and give voice to those silenced by violence. Dunant once dreamt of a “Green Cross” to protect women and children as the Red Cross protects the wounded; this dissertation gives that dream legal substance.

For Mr. Nyathi, the destruction or occupation of schools is not a mere collateral tragedy but a **direct assault on human dignity**. He argues that the denial of education must be seen not only as a legal violation but as an encroachment on the child’s intrinsic worth—“the human dignity of the child,” in his own words. Through this lens, he transforms education from an ancillary social right into a core humanitarian concern, central to dignity and peace.

A rigorous and practical legal argument

The dissertation unites **international humanitarian law (IHL)** and **international human rights law (IHRL)** within a coherent dignity-centred framework. It demonstrates how dignity, long recognized in IHRL, can also guide the interpretation of IHL—enhancing protections for children and schools without inventing new norms.

As noted in the thesis supervisor’s evaluation, the work is “spotless in presentation, rigorously researched, and elegantly argued.” Beyond doctrinal precision, its originality lies in the **operational dimension**: Mr. Nyathi shows how a dignity-based approach can reshape practice. He proposes three complementary strategies—**mainstreaming education as a humanitarian priority**, **ensuring safety in and around learning spaces**, and **treating education as reparation and recovery** in post-conflict justice. Each reflects a rare capacity to bridge theory and action, law and humanity.

Timeliness and moral clarity

In a world where wars in **Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, and the DRC** have left millions of children out of school, this study is of burning relevance. It documents with precision the scale of attacks on education—6,000 incidents in two years—but its message transcends numbers: **to deny education is to deny dignity and future.**

¹ The following document was drafted with the support of AI-driven technologies in conformity with the [Guidelines on the use of the Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) in ICRC](#) and the [ICRC’s Policy On Artificial Intelligence](#). Its content was carefully reviewed and edited by the user to confirm accuracy in the assessment it provides.

Like Dunant, Mr. Nyathi refuses resignation before suffering. He insists that humanitarian law, properly interpreted, must preserve not only life but the possibility of a **dignified life**, even in war.

His reasoning remains realistic. While advocating a total ban on the military use of schools, he does not claim an absolute prohibition of attacks if a school becomes a lawful military objective. Rather, he argues that dignity must weigh decisively in proportionality assessments—an elegant synthesis of moral conviction and legal restraint.

Conclusion

Through meticulous research and profound humanism, **Lisang Nyathi** renews Henry Dunant's message for our time: that **law must serve the human person**, and that even amid conflict, the pursuit of knowledge must endure. His work reminds us that protecting a school means protecting the dignity, hope, and humanity of the child.

Protecting education, he writes, is protecting humanity itself. In those words, the voice of Henry Dunant still resonates—urging us to believe that compassion, expressed through law, can change the world.

For his intellectual excellence, moral clarity, and unwavering compassion, the **Henry Dunant Foundation** thus proudly confers upon **Mr. Lisang Nyathi** the **2025 Henry Dunant Research Prize**, with our warm congratulations.