The end of the 20th century was marked by a series of celebrations pertaining to human rights and humanitarian law: bicentennial of the American Declaration of Independence (1776), bicentennial of the French Revolution (1789), fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Charter (1945), of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), and of the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 on the protection of war victims. The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, in Rome in July 1998, was also part of this series of events, which, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, led us to believe that humankind was entering a new era of international cooperation.

The beginning of the 21st century brought more realism: the United Nations Millennium listed what still needs to be done. And the 11 September shifted priorities of many countries from freedom to security.

Implementation is only one of the seven following stages in the struggle for the respect of legal norms protecting human life and dignity. We should include all of them in considering how to improve the implementation of international humanitarian law:

a) codification
b) ratification
c) application
d) implementation
e) sanction of violations
f) reparation
g) reconciliation.

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2 See the UN Millenium Development Goals (MDG) online: www.un.org/millenium-goals/
Each stage of the codification of international humanitarian law was the result of a post-war shock wave in public opinion and governments, a collective painful process of learning. These codifications occurred as follows:

- The battle of Solferino (1859) between Austrian and French armies was the impetus for the First Geneva Convention, in 1864, protecting military wounded on land;
- The naval battle of Tsushima (1905) between Japanese and Russian fleets prompted adjustment of the Convention on war at sea, in 1907, extending protection to military shipwrecked;
- World War I brought about the two 1929 Conventions, including a much broader protection for prisoners of war;
- World War II led to the four 1949 Conventions, an extensive regulation of the treatment of civilians in occupied territories and internment. The 1949 Geneva Conventions—with the UN Charter in 1945, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948—are the result of the tragedies of millions of civilians and prisoners victims of total war and genocide in Europe and in Asia. The survivors pushed for the adoption of international instruments in order to avoid the repetition of such tragedies;
- The decolonization of African colonies and the Vietnam War preceded the two 1977 Additional Protocols, which brought written rules for the protection of civilian persons and objects against hostilities;
- A worldwide campaign by Governments, United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in a full partnership, which stressed the human suffering and socio-economic costs caused by anti-personnel mines resulted in the total ban on anti-personnel landmines signed in Ottawa on 4 December 1997;
- A similar worldwide coalition provoked the adoption of the International Criminal Court Statute in Rome in 1998.

3 See: Henry DUNANT: A Memory of Solferino, Geneva: ICRC.
5 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I); Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II).
7 The Coalition for the International Criminal Court. See http://www.iccnow.org/