International Society for Military Law and the Law of War (ISMLLW) Irish Branch - Conference on International Humanitarian Law, Athlone 2026

The inaugural meeting of the Irish Branch of the International Society for Military Law and the Law of War (ISMLLW) took place on the 23rd of September 2026 in Custume Barracks, Athlone and was chaired by Colonel Richard Brennan, Director of the Defence Forces Legal Service Corps. Colonel William Nott (Retd), who was nominated as President of the Irish Branch, highlighted the contributions made to the society and its associated fields by Defence Forces Legal Officers. Colonel Nott highlighted the importance of the continuation of such contributions and the maintenance of Irish collaboration and input on the international stage.

The ISMLLW (Irish Branch) conference took place on the 24th of September 2026 at the Sheraton Hotel in Athlone, Co. Westmeath, supported by the ISMLLW and the Irish Defence Forces. Throughout the conference, the spectrum of topics addressed contemporary challenges in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and cyber domains, and IHL considerations and maritime operations. The aim for such conferences is to bring together military legal advisors, human rights practitioners, and academics with an interest in IHL to share knowledge and discuss the increasingly complex issues faced by military legal advisors and practitioners.

The conference encompassed topic-specific presentations and panel-led general discussion sessions. Guests were initially welcomed by Colonel William Nott (Retd.), President of the Irish Branch of the ISMLLW and former DJAG and Colonel Richard Brennan, Director of the Defence Forces Legal Service Corps and ISMLLW (Irish Branch) conference director. The conference began with an address delivered by Colonel Brennan to introduce the scope, structure and approach of the conference.

The first session addressed the topic of contemporary challenges in IHL and cyber domains. The panel was chaired by Brigadier General Stephen Ryan, GOC 2 Bde. Presentations were delivered by Dr. Jenny Maddocks, Lecturer in International Law and Operational Law at the University of Reading, Dr. David Turns, Lecturer in International Law and Operational Law at the Swedish Defence University, and Colonel Richard Brennan, Director of Defence Forces Legal Service Corps.

Following a mid-day interval, a second session convened, focusing on IHL considerations and maritime operations. The panel for this session was chaired by Commodore Darragh Kirwan,

FOCNS. Panel members for this session were Prof. Wolff Heintschell von Heinegg, Chair of Public Law and Public International Law at Viadrina University, Germany, Captain (NS) Patrick Burke, Director of Military Prosecutions, Lt Cmdr (Retd.) Sean Hensler, Vice President, Strategy and Education at the Fozzie Miller Group, and Lt Cdr Shane Mulcahy, Legal Officer, Naval Service.

The conference concluded with a closing address and wrap-up delivered by Prof. Wolff Heintschell von Heinegg and Colonel Richard Brennan. Through topic-specific presentations and panel-led general discussions, the event successfully fostered knowledge sharing, raising and maintaining clarity and awareness of matters pertaining to IHL. It addressed the increasingly complex issues faced by legal practitioners in the military domain in a collaborative environment as each panel engaged in discussion involving audience participation from attendees.