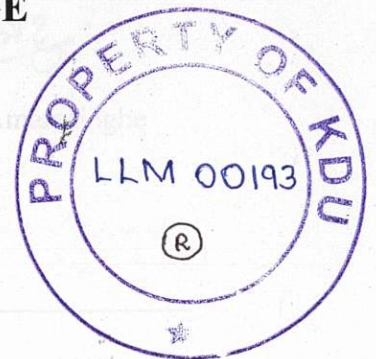


**REDUCING SUFFERING IN WAR:  
A DISCOURSE BETWEEN THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND  
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

by

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## ABSTRACT

International Humanitarian Law and Theravada Buddhism are two different disciplines. While International Humanitarian Law tends to protect humanity during an armed conflict, Theravada Buddhism seeks to attain the supreme bliss of *Nirvana* in order to make an end to the suffering throughout the long way of *Samsara*. As a religious philosophy, Buddhism acknowledges that unskillfulness (*akusala*) based on greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) is the cause of human suffering. Accordingly, Buddhism focuses on eliminating the attachments (*upadana*) and conflicts (*dosa*) that cause suffering of human life. On the other hand, International Humanitarian Law advocates belligerents to strike a balance between military necessity and humanity by adhering to the principle of Distinction, the principle of Proportionality and the principle of Precaution in order to reduce the suffering of mankind on the battlefield. Theravada Buddhist philosophy always emphasizes that the elimination of suffering is not a collective effort but an individual effort. Therefore, each individual is responsible for their own self-spiritual liberation. However, International Humanitarian Law addresses the elimination of suffering in an armed conflict as a collective effort. These efforts focus on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law, strengthening accountability mechanisms, advocating for the protection of civilians and non-combatants, and facilitating humanitarian assistance during armed conflict. Hence, this study focuses on the possible discourse between the fundamental teachings of Theravada Buddhist Philosophy and key principles of International Humanitarian Law to reduce the suffering of mankind. Despite the inherent philosophical disparities, it can be identified possible alignments between Theravada Buddhist philosophy and International Humanitarian Law to reduce the suffering of mankind. Accordingly, the fundamental principles of Theravada Buddhist philosophy such as *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), and *ahimsa* (non-violence) make an alignment with the Principle of Distinction, Principle of Proportionality, and the Principle of Precaution in International Humanitarian Law. Also, Buddhist principles such as *sila* (discipline) and the doctrine of *karma* remind warring parties to minimize the destructiveness of waging of war. Although, there are objective differences between Theravada Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law, both disciplines interpret the elimination of human suffering as the aim of their objective scope. While exploring the main research objective, this research provides several recommendations on how Theravada Buddhist philosophy can be inspired for the development of International Humanitarian Law to eliminate unnecessary suffering of mankind.

Keywords: International Humanitarian Law, Theravada Buddhism, Reducing Suffering