



**Osservatorio Permanente sulle Armi Leggere  
e Politiche di Sicurezza e Difesa – Onlus**  
**(Permanent Observatory on Small Arms, Security and Defence Policies)**

Viale Venezia 112 – 25123 Brescia C.F.98114040177  
Website: [www.opalbrescia.org](http://www.opalbrescia.org) - Email: [info@opalbrescia.org](mailto:info@opalbrescia.org)

**Press Release**

**“Play virtual war as much as you like, but don’t shoot at the Red Cross!”**

Brescia, 22nd October 2013

**The Permanent Observatory on Small Arms, Security and Defence Policies of Brescia (Italy)** considers “inappropriate and counterproductive” the initiative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to cooperate with companies that develop and produce video games reproducing real-war situations to introduce into such video games the rules of war and international humanitarian law.

A recent statement released by the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that “The ICRC has started working with video game developers, so that video game players face the same dilemmas as real soldier”.<sup>1</sup>

«Not only does this legitimise the use and dissemination of these video games but, paradoxically, it contributes to making them even more realistic, thus creating a dangerous affinity between the game and reality» - says the Permanent Observatory on Small Arms (OPAL) based in Brescia.

«We acknowledge – continues the statement of OPAL – that today these video games have a global circulation and we understand the need to find ways of avoiding that they may further promote a notion of war as an indiscriminate reality. But we believe that the effort to include the rules of war so as to make these video games “closer to reality”<sup>2</sup> is artificial and, above all, counterproductive».

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), after releasing last year a paper<sup>3</sup> on the relationship between “video games and humanitarian norms”, has decided to collaborate with developers of video games that simulate real situations of war. “The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – reports the statement released by the ICRC – has publicly stated its interest in the implications of video games that simulate real-war situations and the opportunities such games present for spreading knowledge of the law of armed conflict”. “However – the statements notes – the ICRC is not involved in the debate about the level of violence in video games”.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the press release published on 27th September on the website of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): “Video games and law of war”. The summary reports: “The ICRC has started working with video game developers, so that video game players face the same dilemmas as real soldiers”. The press release furthermore states: “We would like to see the law of armed conflict integrated into the games so that players have a realistic experience and deal first hand with the dilemmas facing real combatants on real battlefields”. The press release is available on ICRC website: [www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/film/2013/09-28-ihl-video-games.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/film/2013/09-28-ihl-video-games.htm).

<sup>2</sup> In an interview to the BBC News, Red Cross spokesperson, François Sénéchaud, says: “Video games that are representing battlefields... are very close to reality and actually it's very difficult to [tell] the difference between real footage and the footage you can get from video games. We are arguing that we have to get even closer to reality and we also have to include the rules of conflict [as well]”. The original interview “Should the rules of war be included in computer games?” is available in: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-24318061](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-24318061). The transcript of the Red Cross spokesperson statement is available in: “Games should honour the “rules of conflict - says Red Cross” in: [www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-10-02-games-should-honour-the-rules-of-conflict-says-red-cross](http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-10-02-games-should-honour-the-rules-of-conflict-says-red-cross)

<sup>3</sup> See: “Beyond the Call of Duty: why shouldn't videogame players face the same dilemmas as real soldiers?”, in International Review of the Red Cross, Vol 94, Number 886, available at: [www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/review-2012/irrc-886-clarke-rouffaer-senechaud.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/article/review-2012/irrc-886-clarke-rouffaer-senechaud.htm).

«We are astounded – says **Piergiulio Biatta**, President of OPAL – that in order to try to avoid giving the players the impression that everything is allowed in war, the International Red Cross has ended up underestimating the harmful impact of these video games, especially on young people and on their perception of reality. Rather than trying to introduce the rules of war in video games we would have expected from the Red Cross an international campaign for strict regulation of the use of these wargames outside the military or, at least, a call for very rigorous controls on access to such video games, especially by minors».

The results of a research published in July 2012 in the "*Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*" reveals that "people who use violent video games for three consecutive days show aggressive behaviour and hostile expectations that increases every day"<sup>4</sup>. Even the paper released by the ICRC admits that "while researchers have not established a causal link between violent games and violent behaviour, they have not excluded such a link"<sup>5</sup>.

The concern that drove the Geneva-based Committee to intervene in the world of video games is that some virtual scenarios, especially the more realistic ones, "could lead to a trivialization of serious violations of the law of armed conflict". Among the main violations the ICRC includes "the use of torture, particularly in interrogation, deliberate attacks on civilians, the killing of prisoners or the wounded, attacks on medical personnel, facilities, and transport such as ambulances, or that anyone on the battlefield can be killed".

«If we think – notes **Piero P. Giorgi**, former Professor of Neuroscience at the School of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Queensland (Australia) and member of the Scientific Committees of OPAL – of the addiction and behavioural problems related to video games, or even only of the efforts that millions of parents around the world make daily to drag their children away from video games and especially from the more realistic and violent ones, we can get an idea of how irrelevant parents will find the knowledge that their kids are following the real rules of international humanitarian law while playing at war».

One of the video games in which the ICRC was able to introduce the "rules of war" is classified by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) of the United States as "suitable to people aged 17 years or over" because it contains "scenes of blood, strong language and intense violence".

OPAL, while recognizing that education for peace and nonviolence is not among the statutory objectives of the International Red Cross, points out that an international humanitarian organization should not ignore the widespread efforts to prevent the development of instruments such as video games, which foster and promote – albeit in virtual form – the use of violence, the trivialization of suffering and the neglect of humanitarian principles and values.<sup>6</sup>

As ICRC explains in its statement, "some of these games are being designed and produced by the same companies developing simulated battlefields for the training of armed forces where the laws of armed conflict are a necessary ingredient".

«Those of us – adds **Rosalba Panaro**, a former teacher and member of the Executive Board of OPAL – who are actively engaged in promoting peace education in schools, and with youth in general, know that the greatest effort today is to get young people to overcome that kind of virtual and aseptic perception of war that video games induce. Day after day it becomes more difficult to make young people understand that for millions of people war is a dreadful reality of death and suffering, and not a video game that one can start over just by pressing the restart button».

---

<sup>4</sup> Ben Clarke *et al.*, "Viewing the world through "blood-red tinted glasses. The hostile expectation bias mediates the link between violent video game exposure and aggression" in *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 48, Issue 4, July 2012, pp. 953–956 in: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103112000029](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103112000029). A presentation in Italian of the research can be found in: M. Morgese, "Gli effetti a lungo termine dei videogames violenti", in "State of Mind. Il Giornale delle Scienze Psicologiche": [www.stateofmind.it/2013/01/effetti-videogames-violenti](http://www.stateofmind.it/2013/01/effetti-videogames-violenti).

<sup>5</sup> See the conclusion of the section dedicated to "Video games and violent behaviour", p. 717, quoted at footnote 3.

<sup>6</sup> The ICRC's "Mission Statement" states that: "The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles". See: "The ICRC's Mission Statement" in: [www.icrc.org/eng/who-we-are/mandate/overview-icrc-mandate-mission.htm](http://www.icrc.org/eng/who-we-are/mandate/overview-icrc-mandate-mission.htm).

Even more incomprehensible – adds the note by OPAL – is the ICRC concern for the potential impact on sales, actually for the “commercial success” of video games that have introduced the rules of war. «A concern – comments **Carlo Tombola**, Scientific Coordinator of OPAL – which we do not understand at all. It would instead be relevant to hear the views of the thousands of volunteers of the Red Cross on the entire operation that is already in place, even though it was not approved any resolution on the subject during the last International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent».

«It would be especially important to know from ICRC – concludes **Mimmo Cortese**, a member of the Scientific Committees of OPAL – when was the last time that military forces, including those of the United Nations, fully observed the Geneva Conventions and the International Humanitarian Law in an armed conflict, those laws that the Red Cross seems eager now to introduce into video games. It would perhaps be more significant for the International Committee of the Red Cross to concentrate on addressing the reality of conflicts once again, since, as everybody unfortunately can see, wars today not only do not seem to be decreasing, but are instead becoming increasingly barbaric».

OPAL will send its comments to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva and to the Rome headquarters of the Italian Red Cross. OPAL is of course available to engage further in debate on such a sensitive issue, one of great social relevance. OPAL will devote a chapter of its next Yearbook to the theme of war video games.

#### **Press Contacts:**

- Piergiulio Biatta (President of OPAL): Email: [info@opalbrescia.org](mailto:info@opalbrescia.org)

## **The Permanent Observatory on Small Arms, Security and Defence Policies (OPAL)**

The Permanent Observatory on Small Arms, Security and Defence Policies (OPAL) is a non-profit organization based in Brescia (Italy) founded in 2004 by various national and local associations (College of African Missions of the Comboni Missionaries, Association Brescia Solidarity, Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Brescia, Diocesan Mission Office of the Diocese of Brescia, Association for the Embassy of Local Democracy Zavidovici, the Territorial Chamber of Labour in Brescia, Pax Christi, Xaverian Centre of Missionary Animation of Xaverian Missionaries, International Voluntary Service -SVI) and by private individuals to promote peace culture and to provide civil society with scientific information about the production and trade of “small arms” and about the legislative activity in the sector.

OPAL is a place of independent scientific research, monitoring, analysis and information to the public, at national and international level, on the production and export of “small arms and light weapons” made in Lombardy, but with attention also to the national territory and Europe. Member of the Italian Disarmament Network (Rete Italiana per il Disarmo), in recent years the Centre has promoted several film festivals in Brescia on the issues of arms trafficking, international migrations, peace and nonviolence and it has supported playwright and theatre plays against the “gun culture” and war and courses and lessons in schools on peace education.

OPAL has issued various press release and it has published five Yearbooks:

- Il peso delle armi leggere. Analisi scientifica della realtà italiana (*The weight of small arms. Scientific analysis of the Italian situation*), EMI, 2007
- Armi, un'occasione da perdere. Le armi leggere e il mercato italiano (*Arms, a chance to lose. Small arms and the Italian market*), EMI, 2009
- Difendiamoci dalle armi. Finanza, immaginario collettivo e nonviolenza (*Defend ourselves from weapons. Finance, collective imagery and nonviolence*), EMI, 2010
- La pace oltre le armi. Produzione ed esportazione di armi, riconversione, educazione alla pace (*Peace beyond weapons. Production and export of arms, industrial conversion, peace education*), EMI, 2011
- Affari di armi, percorsi di pace. Attualità, ricerca e memoria per la pratica della nonviolenza (*Affairs of arms, paths of peace. Current events, research and memory for the practice of nonviolence*), EMI, 2012