Preface

This book has two main aims. The first is to provide a clear and concise explanation of some of the central principles of international humanitarian law (also known as the law of armed conflict). The second is to bring additional clarity to the understanding of those principles by situating them in a broader philosophical, ethical and legal context. We consider a range of wider issues relevant to international humanitarian law, such as its relationship to theories of humanitarianism, the extent to which it reflects the ethical duties of participants in armed conflict and its connection to other bodies of law, such as international human rights law. We also take up positions on some contested questions concerning the interpretation of specific norms. The book should therefore prove useful for students encountering international humanitarian law for the first time, but we hope it will also hold interest for practitioners and scholars with existing knowledge of the field.

The book has had a long gestation. The idea for the work was first conceived some ten years ago as a collaboration with two other authors, Kate Parlett and Andrew Stumer. Those authors later withdrew to pursue other projects and the work has gone through many phases of development since then. However, we would like to express our sincere thanks for their contributions. Their enthusiasm in the earlier stages of the process played a large role in bringing the book to where it is today.

There are several other people whose contributions to the book we would like to acknowledge. Both authors have benefited greatly over the years from the teaching, mentoring and collegiality of Anthony Cassimatis. We would also like to mention the role of Peter Alcorn, who sadly passed away in 2009, in fuelling our enthusiasm for the study of international humanitarian law. Jonathan Crowe would like to thank the students in his courses on international humanitarian law at the University of Queensland over the last several years for their enthusiasm and probing questions. He also thanks Eve Massingham for her helpful comments on earlier drafts of some of the chapters. Both authors are grateful to Youngwon Lee for her excellent research assistance and proof editing. Finally, we would like to thank our respective partners, Cicely Bonnin and Kerry O'Brien, for their support and encouragement throughout all stages of the project.

There is no more pressing and important area of international jurisprudence than international humanitarian law. It protects people's lives and well-being on a daily basis. War is destructive by its very nature, but the law of armed conflict plays a crucial role in moderating its harmful impact on the lives of people around the globe. In many ways, it is the last-ditch hold-out position of humanity against arbitrary violence. We hope this book can make a modest contribution to the dissemination, understanding and universal acceptance of humanitarian norms. We can think of no better objective.

Jonathan Crowe
Kylie Weston-Scheuber
November 2012