



Permanent Mission of Norway
to the United Nations



MISSION PERMANENTE
DE LA FRANCE AUPRÈS
DES NATIONS UNIES
À NEW YORK



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION
OF BELGIUM TO THE UN



Protection of Civilians Week – Side Event

Scaling impact: How Protection Efforts at the Local Level are driving Humanitarian Access

Date: May 24, 15h00 – 16h30 EDT

Venue: Conference room 6, UNHQ

In the last 10 years, the level of conflict has increased around the globe: approximately 2 billion people live in areas affected by conflict, 84 million people have been displaced by violence and the ICRC estimates that between 60 to 80 million people live under the direct State-like governance of armed groups.¹

Through the same period, humanitarian access has become further constrained in many conflict contexts, with principled humanitarian action under direct threat. Affected communities' inability to access assistance and services continues to drive levels of suffering, violations and abuses in both the immediate and longer term.

While access impediments continue to hamper the delivery of humanitarian assistance as a whole, protection actors and services are often disproportionately affected. Further, communities or groups experiencing severe protection risks are often those with the least amount of access to life-saving support and some of the hardest to reach. In some contexts, this is by design, with access-related restrictions part of the strategies used by parties to a conflict to inflict harm on civilians. At times, restrictions of humanitarian access itself can be a violation of International Humanitarian Law.

Protection-related actions can also be perceived as particularly sensitive or threatening by relevant authorities or parties to conflict, which can result in further limitations imposed on such efforts. At the same time, protection-related activities require rapid, safe and unimpeded access for proximity, ongoing trust-building, engagement, and the delivery of specialized services. It is a constant struggle to ensure that much needed protection is accessible in contexts where often protection itself is not allowed or not feasible.

¹ Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index 2022, June 2022, available [here](#); ICRC, Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups, March 2021, available [here](#).

Amidst the overwhelming challenges, there are a range of important approaches that are being implemented by protection actors to ground and strengthen protection outcomes for civilians impacted by armed conflict.

Negotiations, engagement, and advocacy are critical elements to ensuring that not only do humanitarian protection partners have access and can undertake principled humanitarian action, but also, importantly, that communities themselves can access humanitarian, including protection, services. These initiatives were also highlighted by the Global Protection Cluster in its '[Access that Protects: An Agenda for Change](#)' as critical aspects of the unique value add that protection actors can bring to access-related efforts. Importantly, local protection actors, including community-based groups and women's rights organizations, are leading the way, in many contexts. These protection actors, from Afghanistan to Burkina Faso to Myanmar, can leverage trusting relationships, including with community leaders and members of armed groups, to negotiate for specific people or community groups who are being blocked from services. They are often able to access those labelled as 'hard to reach' in a given community and engage in local-level negotiations with armed groups to ensure safe passage for humanitarian staff and community members as well as their own safety from violence.

Together with international protection actors, local partners are keen to further invest in these areas of action that are supporting access and protection, with the aim of building enhanced capacity and strengthened protection outcomes. Importantly, such approaches must also be reflected in national and international policy and action, including with enhanced political acceptance of humanitarian negotiations and the importance of access for national and international humanitarian actors, including in areas outside of Government control.

The objectives of the event will be to mobilize states and organizations to:

- Highlight the urgency of humanitarian access and principled action in supporting the protection of civilians impacted by armed conflict.
- Further unpack the roles played by different protection actors, particularly at local levels and by local organizations, in advancing access and principled action.
- Share best practices and opportunities with regards to practical measures to enhance access, including how local-level access negotiations can include aims of increasing protection, and principled humanitarian action.
- Identify steps that may be taken by States and other actors to support strengthened access and principled humanitarian action as a core aspect of Protection of Civilians' related efforts, including in relation to further operationalizing localization and Grand Bargain-related commitments.

Program:

Opening statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway, Ambassador Mona Juul

Key-note speech by the UN Resident Coordinator for Niger, Louise Aubin

Remarks by:

AFAQ Academy in Syria, Mr. Oussama Chourbagi, General Manager (by video-link)

Protection Sector Lead in Haiti, Mr. Arnaud Royer, Representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and co-chair of the Protection Sector in Haiti

OCHA, Mr. Aurelien Buffler, Chief, Policy Advice and Planning Section, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) United Nations)

Center of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation, Mr. Rehan Zahid, CCHN acting Director

Statements from States and Civil Society

Concluding remarks by Mr. Samuel Cheung, Coordinator of the Global Protection Cluster

The event will be moderated by Ms. Ségolène Adam, UNICEF Global Humanitarian Policy Chief

Guiding questions for participants:

1. How can the international community better support humanitarian access and action, including community-led negotiations, in accordance with humanitarian principles, to increase protection of civilians?
2. For donors supporting local level access and protection efforts, how do they contribute to higher-level humanitarian strategies and aims? What is needed to further increase investments, visibility, and impact?
3. We are increasingly recognising that local actors are directly negotiating with armed actors – and achieving important protection outcomes. How can these efforts be further enabled and integrated into humanitarian response plans?
4. What are some further best practices and concrete examples of how protection actors and allies are strengthening the protection of civilians at local levels?