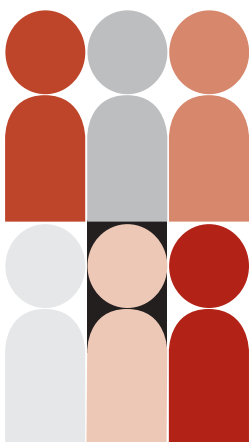


# PROACTIVE PRESENCE

## Field strategies for civilian protection



The plight of civilians trapped in war is one of the greatest challenges of our times. All agree that providing relief alone is insufficient. The international response must equally focus on measures to provide greater protection to civilians.

But what measures? Short of armed peacekeeping, one option is to deploy unarmed international staff - human rights monitors, ceasefire observers, protection staff with humanitarian agencies - who through their presence will deter abuses.

To be effective, however, those deployed must pursue proactive strategies to deter abuse, encourage local actors and support reform efforts.

This manual describes these strategies. It is the first comprehensive study of these issues, based on hundreds of interviews and an analysis of 9 separate missions, covering a range of institutional mandates.

# PROACTIVE PRESENCE

## Field strategies for civilian protection

### Summary





# PROACTIVE PRESENCE

Field strategies for civilian protection

Summary

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an independent and impartial organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to the promotion of humanitarian principles, the prevention of conflict and the alleviation of its effects through dialogue.

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### **Acknowledgements**

**Liam Mahony** was lead researcher and writer on the project. Liam is a pioneer in the theory and practise of international protection, and has worked for many organisations, in the UN and outside, on issues related to the protection of human rights. He was assisted by Deborah Mancini-Griffoli and Hugo Slim, HD Centre staff who lead its civilian protection work. David Petrasek, Policy Director at HD Centre, co-ordinated the project.

We are grateful to all those who co-operated with us in the research, particularly during field visits to Colombia, Sudan (Darfur) and Sri Lanka. In all some 250 people were interviewed in the course of the research.

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Centre for  
Humanitarian  
Dialogue

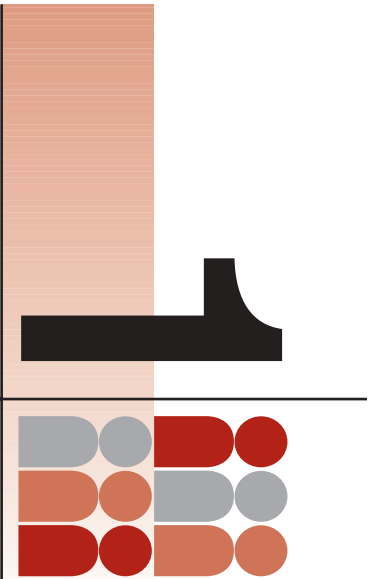
**Working to improve the global response to  
armed conflict**

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue is an independent, Geneva-based foundation whose purpose is to prevent human suffering in war. Our humanitarian approach starts from the premise that preventing and resolving armed conflict is the surest means of doing so, and to this end we promote and facilitate dialogue between belligerents.

We are neutral and impartial, supporting only those solutions that offer the best prospect for a just and lasting peace, in line with international law.

Through our work, we aim to contribute to efforts to improve the global response to armed conflict. We believe that dialogue based on humanitarian principles can assist in achieving political settlements, and that the informal initiatives of a private foundation can usefully complement formal diplomacy.

We pursue our objectives with a commitment to new approaches, to learning, and to collaboration, working with others across borders, beliefs and professions.



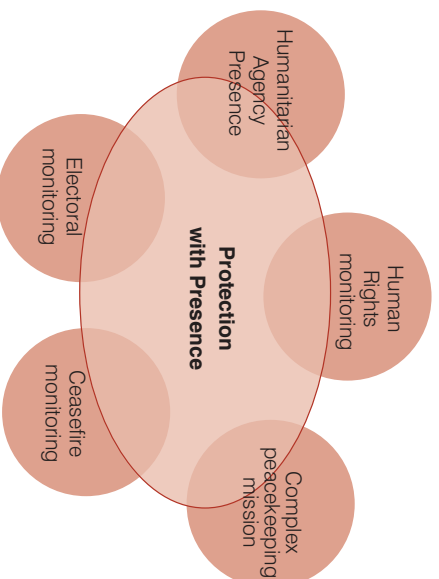
## INTRODUCTION

The plight of civilians trapped in war and misery stands as one of the greatest challenges of our times. Increasingly, all those engaged in efforts to address this situation recognise that providing material assistance alone is insufficient and that, even as wars continue, measures to provide greater protection to civilians are required. But what measures? Faced with ongoing abuses of human rights and looming or actual humanitarian crises, advocates and the media demand that something must be done. Short of armed peacekeeping or intervention, never an easy and not necessarily a wise choice, one option is to deploy unarmed international staff, under a variety of institutional mandates, in the belief that their presence will offer some protection against abuse. Several such deployments have occurred in the past two decades, though with mixed results, and too little effort to study the techniques that would make them most effective.

Based on detailed field research analysing the strengths and weaknesses of past field missions, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue has now published a manual suggesting several ways in which unarmed international field missions can use their presence to ensure more effective protection to civilians whose rights and livelihoods are threatened.

This summary outlines the main conclusions of the 168 page manual, the full version of which is available at <http://www.hdcentre.org>.

**Figure 1 : Target audience**



**Target audience:** This manual is intended for all the diverse institutions that share the objective of protecting civilians through field presence in conflict zones. These include missions focused on monitoring security, ceasefire agreements, human rights or elections, as well as humanitarian missions and complex UN peacekeeping presences. Each will need to adapt the lessons to its own institutional environment and mission. The strategies described here are relevant to diverse protection efforts for all vulnerable groups in conflict.

**Structure:** The manual outlines effective protection strategies and tactics, addresses significant challenges, and lays out the institutional and organizational requirements for implementing protective missions.

Part I (Chapters 2 and 3) consists of an analysis of why field presence protects, and explains the need to build protection strategies on thorough information gathering and analysis. Part II (Chapters 4 to 8) presents five strategies for field protection: sustained multi-level diplomacy, visibility, encouragement and empowerment

**International missions studied and visited during research for this manual**

Country	Institution(s) / mission	Dates studied
El Salvador	UN/ ONUSAL (UN Mission to El Salvador)	1991 pre-ceasefire
Guatemala	UN/ MINUGUA (UN Mission to Guatemala)	1994–97 pre-ceasefire
Haiti	UN and OAS/ MICIVIH (International Civilian Mission in Haiti)	1993–94
Rwanda	OHCHR/ HRFOR (Human Rights Mission for Rwanda)	1994–97
Former Republic of Yugoslavia/ Province of Kosovo	OSCE/ KVM (Kosovo Verification Mission)	October 1998 – March 1999 pre-bombing
East Timor	UN/ UNAMET (UN Assistance Mission to East Timor)	May–September 1999
<b>Field visits</b>		
Colombia (February, 2005)	Primary focus: OHCHR. Secondary focus: ICGR; UNHCR PBI (Peace Brigades International)	1995–2005
Darfur, Sudan (October, 2005)	United Nations Humanitarian Agencies and Peacekeeping Mission/ UNMIS (UN Mission in Sudan)	2003–05
Sri Lanka (December, 2005)	Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland/ SLMM (Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission)	2002–06

of civilians, bridging and convening mechanisms bringing parties together, and public advocacy. Finally, Part III (Chapters 9 to 11) turns to the challenges of avoiding negative impacts and maintaining mission security, then details the steps required for institutions to implement protection through proactive field presence.





## WHEN FIELD PRESENCE PROTECTS

How do we stop abuses against civilians? This manual focuses on proactive presence, which consists of actions and strategies to deter or dissuade abusers from attacking civilians, persuade abusers to behave differently, and strengthen or expand civilian capacity for self-protection. Proactive protection also aims to foster institutional reform, and in some cases even to influence the dynamics of conflict or other structures that promote abuse of civilians, thus protecting or preventing against future victimisation.

### Three key functions of field presence: deterrence, encouragement and influence

**Deterrence: Constraining abusers.** No matter what the context, the decision to harm civilians never occurs in a vacuum: choices are always being made. Every decision is affected by a series of calculations and perceptions, whether made by a single individual or by many actors in a complicated chain of command. And every interaction between field officers and potential abusers is an opportunity to change the calculation. Decision makers in governments, militaries and armed groups all have motivations for being sensitive to the role of international presence. Such a presence essentially constrains the political space

<p>Among the interests contributing to the deterrent impact of international presence on potential abusers are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ concern for the personal or political reputation of leaders, institutions and states, as perceived by both the international community and the civilian population</li> <li>➤ desire to sustain access to important political and economic benefits requiring international collaboration – goods, money, political support,</li> </ul>	<p>weapons or other key resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ concern about the risk of international prosecution for serious crimes, avoiding blame in a post-conflict transition and sustaining options for a future political career.</li> <li>➤ concern about 'comparative image' relative to political opponents (the worse you behave, the easier to justify support international support for your enemy.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ ideological commitments or alliances incompatible with civilian abuse</li> <li>➤ sustaining benefits earned through negotiation processes</li> <li>➤ orders from superior officers about behaviour in the presence of foreigners</li> <li>➤ individual moral concerns accentuated by the presence of a witness.</li> </ul>
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available to perpetrators, creating greater costs of abusive actions, and limiting their choices.

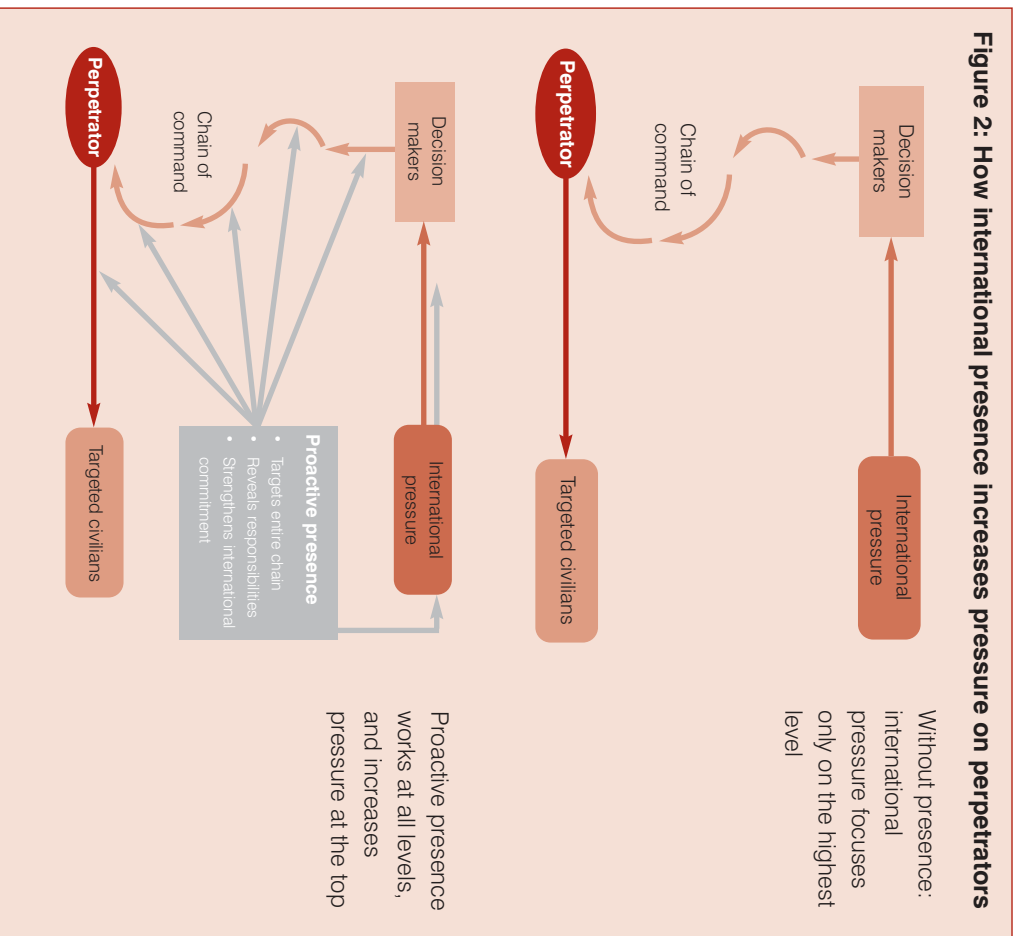
**Encouragement: Supporting civil society self-protection.** Protection is also about encouraging and empowering people to organise to protect themselves.

In most situations, people seek peaceful solutions to the challenge of self-preservation, but the pressures of violence and repression limit their spaces for exploring those solutions. An international field presence can protect and strengthen local strategies. It empowers civilians to overcome inhibitions imposed by violence, thus expanding their political space and range of choices.



**Influence: Changing societal attitudes and supporting reformers.** The presence of an international mission calls into question societal assumptions that allow abuse. It confronts stigmas and stereotypes, and publicly promotes a message of respect for human rights and civilian safety. States and armed groups are neither monolithic nor static, and a field mission can develop relationships with decision makers of all ranks, across the geographic territory and in a variety of professional functions.

Intergovernmental missions can develop influential relationships with state institutions through memoranda of understanding, technical-support partnerships or negotiation processes. A mission can use these relationships to augment protection, taking care to sustain independence and avoid being co-opted. Institutional allies not only promote change internally, they also bring moral and political pressure to bear on their colleagues. These allies not only help general protection efforts. They may *need* protection themselves. Strengthening these voices and reforms can slowly shift collective attitudes, making civilian abuse less acceptable.



### Why is proactive field presence necessary?

People have many mechanisms for self-protection, and the state itself has a fundamental legal responsibility to respect and protect human rights and humanitarian norms. When these efforts are insufficient, however, the international community can and must help. International response strategies have generally involved incentives or threats from outside the conflict aimed

only at the top leadership, seeking to deter abuses. However, over time, abusive institutions develop effective counter-measures to this pressure. They develop subtle buffer mechanisms, deflect pressure and evade accountability, for instance by using paramilitary militias or 'bandits' for political purposes. They also stigmatise and isolate their domestic critics. A field presence can bring international pressure right to the perpetrators at all levels in the chain of command.

### **Does it work?**

All nine field missions studied for this book had evidence of positive outcomes resulting from unarmed protection efforts. Civilians interviewed were nearly unanimous in asserting that international presence encouraged their capacity to function in a conflict zone. State officials described how field missions had influenced government behaviour and even helped them to promote reforms or legislation.

The sensitivity of each state and armed group to the deterrent impact of international presence is variable, but was evident even in situations in which warring parties did not appear to have an incentive to make peace, and where security situations were deteriorating. This sensitivity can change over time in a conflict, indicating the need for strategies to develop correspondingly – both to increase influence over time and also to defend a mission against counter-strategies that aim to weaken its impact.

Measuring the net effect of a field mission is difficult. But the evidence from the nine conflicts studied suggests that there is usually a good deal more sensitivity than is initially assumed, or than is assumed by those unfamiliar with the conflict or the complex workings of the parties involved. The question is not if these abusers are sensitive to pressure, but rather how sensitive they are and to what kinds of pressure – so that channels and strategies can be identified to bring that pressure to bear.

# 3



## INFORMATION, ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY BUILDING

An effective protection mission is involved in a constant process of information gathering, analysis and strategy building.

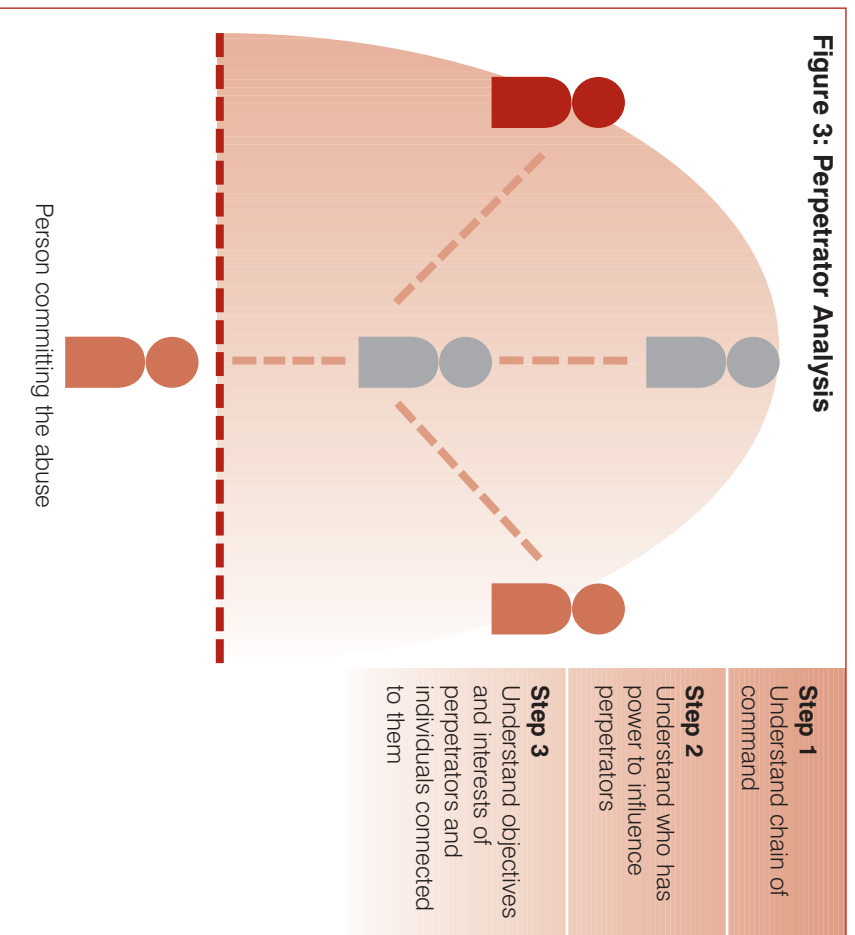
### Information gathering

Information gathering in protection work has tended to focus mostly on victims, their vulnerabilities and the abuses carried out against them. But a good protection analysis also needs information on abusers. It needs to be perpetrator-focused, analysing the institutions and people committing abuses, dissecting their chains of command, motivations, objectives and all the interests driving their decisions, be they political, economic, criminal, personal, familial or ethnic.

Factual information is necessary, but the opinions, perceptions and subjective analyses of other parties must also be figured in, with each source being judged for its validity and wisdom. This demands a complex network of sources, some public and some confidential, with every input being assessed for its accuracy or bias. Mission personnel must protect confidentiality, avoid giving rise to accusations of spying and watch out for attempts by others to manipulate a mission by skewing its access to information.

## Analysis

Missions must analyse sources of power and influence, identify responsibility for civilian abuses and map out channels for applying sanctions or offering incentives to change behaviour. This analysis should follow the steps in the table below:



## Strategy building

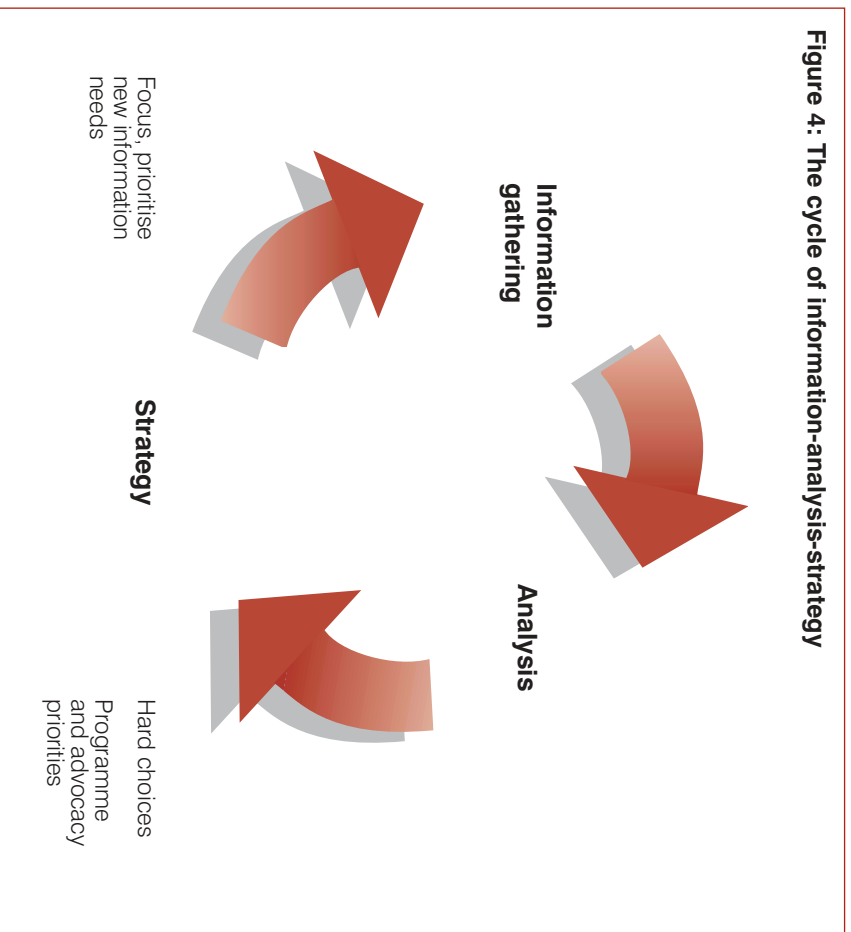
The mission must then design a realistic plan to influence each target, in the context of its capacities and resources. The target strategy has to be not only national, but also regional and local – with sub-strategies going right down the chain of command.

“The civilian population responded so positively to our presence that we were getting mountains of good and reliable information. Often I had better information, and quicker, than my government security counterparts. This was very valuable on an operational level.”  
*UNAMET political officer*

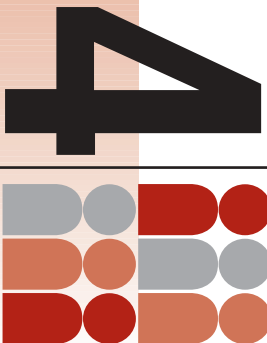
It needs to seek allies and partners whose work will multiply the influence of these strategies.

The power of a widely deployed mission lies in part in its capacity to adjust and nuance its strategies to take account of local circumstances. The mission’s leadership and staff therefore require strategic planning skills, and the process should discreetly involve outside experts, local contacts and national staff. Effective strategy building requires a conscious commitment of institutional resources and time to ensure that appropriate strategies reflect good analysis and adequate information.

**Figure 4: The cycle of information-analysis-strategy**







“Once ‘at the scene’ –  
How to deal? Cracking  
jokes. Killing time.

Being polite. Having a  
good command of the  
local language was  
indispensable. Ask for  
coffee. ‘What a  
beautiful evening!’  
Small talk and small  
talk and small talk until  
the tension ebbed away.  
You had to adopt a style  
of subordination and  
subservience. Long-  
winded praise. I would  
just try to wear them  
down, stressing our  
‘mutual objectives...’  
They would get so  
bored with me! But I  
was never disrespectful.  
Just always looking to  
decrease tension.  
*UNAMET political officer*

## SUSTAINED MULTI-LEVEL DIPLOMACY

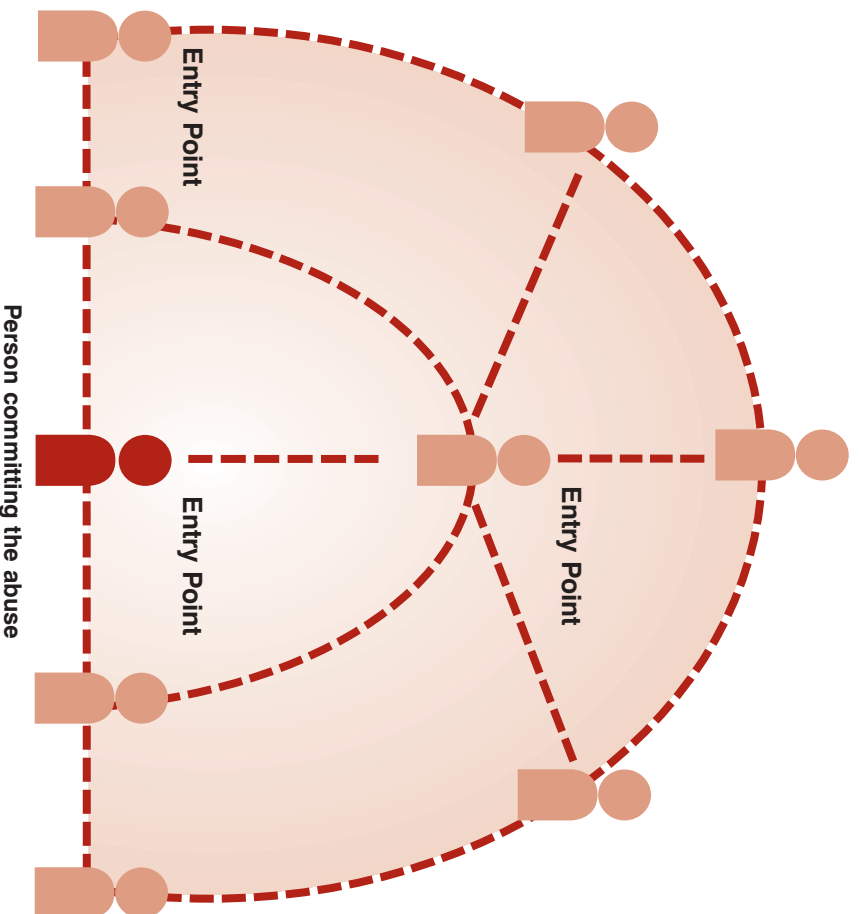
Diplomatic intervention in daily situations, and constant discourse with key political actors nationally and locally can reduce abuses and conflicts. The impact of these interactions is cumulative, affecting both local and national decision making. A diplomatic strategy to confront a local commander’s attacks on civilians, for instance, involves communication not only with the military structure, and the government that is supposed to control the military, but also with local community leaders, business leaders, local government authorities and others. When mission personnel are communicating, everyone is paying attention and calculating the consequences. And that changes behaviour.

Every interaction is an important event requiring a strategy and a high level of communication skills. One field officer described this communication with authorities and perpetrators as theatre: a performance of politely nuanced threats aimed at instilling concern in abusers about the future consequences of their actions. It demands improvisation and an ability to decrease tension in a variety of creative ways. These could include a formal courtesy visit, mentioning the mission objectives, or expressing concern about a certain situation. Or it might be appropriate to make an explicit request for better co-operation, possibly with

direct or veiled references to incentives and sanctions or to international reputation. In rare cases it might be effective to directly criticize and demand action.

**Figure 5:** Entry points for influencing perpetrators include the perpetrators themselves, their local contacts, their superiors, and those who can influence their superiors.

**Government:** Close relations with government are vital: they allow a mission to pressure friendly officials regarding particular cases, situations or political trends. By supporting allies inside the government, the mission can promote future reforms to a state structure that is abusing civilians. Knowing who is who, it can direct pressure to the right targets. These contacts must be treated with respect and transparency.



**Armed Groups:** A field mission must also transmit messages to armed groups, through direct or indirect means, depending on the context. These messages should clarify the role of the mission, augment the security of its own staff, and influence the behaviour of these groups towards civilians.

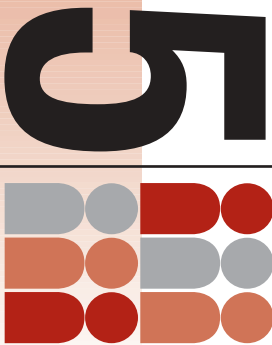
### Protection diplomacy skills

These communication strategies require analytical, political and diplomatic skills. Specifically, mission personnel must be able to:

- develop and adopt clear organisation-wide messages for each actor, that individual staff members can adapt to their own experiences and apply consistently
- create a culture of respect, transparency, mutual consultation and open handling of accusations
- open as many channels of communication as possible – this is especially important for armed groups because contact with them is often sporadic
- master different communication techniques, such as direct pressure, indirect pressure (or hinting), humour, politeness, subordination or humility, praise and stressing mutual objectives.

“You need fluid channels of communication with your state counterparts. You have to know who to talk to. Maybe you can't resolve everything, but you should at least go to the right place, know who will pay attention and who is going to waste your time... With a good relationship, you can call directly, “What's up with this case?” Without a relationship, you can't. *OHCHR Colombia, Head of sub-office*”

This is a tall order, and every field officer cannot be a masterful diplomat – such a constraint would paralyze the necessary recruitment for large missions. But it is exactly because these skills are complex and difficult that the institution needs to emphasize them in training and in ongoing practice in the field.



## CONSCIOUS VISIBILITY

“Serbian military tanks were terrorising an Albanian Kosovar village with regular tank bombardments. The Kosovo Verification Mission placed a bright orange vehicle and personnel visibly in the town square, 24 hours a day. The bombardments stopped. The tanks pulled away.”

*Kosovo Verification Mission, Verifier*

Part of the protection message is simply visual – mission cars driving around the country, an impressive helicopter now and then, prominent regional and local offices. Without a word, every noticeable mission presence reminds abusers that international concern has to be considered in their political calculations, and at the same time builds civilian confidence. A mission should not limit its visibility to certain safer areas, but should also be present in or near to the zones of conflict. It should be alert to urgent local situations as they arise – its willingness and speed of response to a crisis affect not only its protective impact but also local trust and credibility in the mission.

Three distinct techniques can significantly enhance visibility:

**Deployment of sub-offices throughout the territory:** Mission personnel should be installed in the

various zones of conflict. This makes them more accessible to the population and to all levels of authority, and enables quicker access to local areas. A mission sub-office is a microcosm of the national presence, and can carry out locally nuanced analysis, having direct and often daily contact with regional or local authorities.

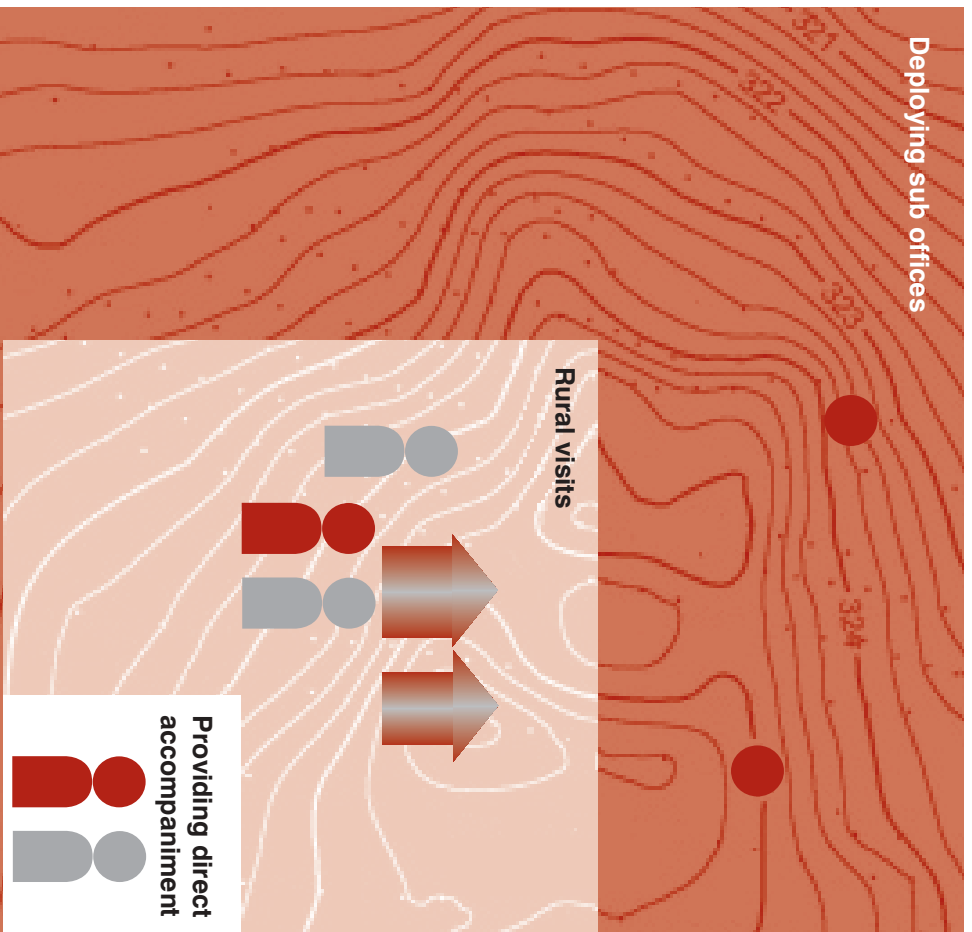
“Our biggest mistake was showing up after the massacre instead of before it.”

*UN official*

“What [this visibility] says is, “These communities are not alone. These communities have friends in high places.””  
*Human-rights lawyer, Colombia*

**Rural visits:** Short visits from an international mission can send a protective message to abuser groups. In an area in a conflict, or an isolated region where abuse happens, or where the population faces stigmatisation, such visits open spaces and encourage local action, as long as the commitment to follow up adequately reduces the risk of reprisals against those visited. Whether involving only the mission or carried out on a multi-partite basis, evidence shows that local visits can

**Figure 6: Three techniques to enhance visibility**



“ Because the simple fact that they see a UN vehicle traveling the roads, through the villages, through highly conflictive zones—the simple fact that one of these blue vests is going to go ask after the local troop commander, ask who is responsible for the zone, this alone in itself generates a level of protection because what it says is, “These communities are not alone. These communities have friends in high places.”

*Colombian human rights lawyer.*

“ Visits to the countryside have more impact. For victims to denounce – it is a delicate risk, and to go all the way to Bogotá to do it is nearly impossible.

*Civil-society lawyer, Colombia*

positively alter local choices, sometimes even affecting decisions about displacement or resettlement.

**Direct accompaniment:** This is a method of protecting particularly threatened individuals, organisations or activities. It involves mission personnel literally walking or travelling with a threatened individual, living in threatened communities or being stationed at a threatened activity or organisational office. It is a highly targeted method of protection, which exclusively identifies and profiles the protected person or group. It says loudly, in effect, “Don’t touch this one!” Heavily resource-intensive, accompaniment is usually reserved for cases of very high risk, or people whose survival is perceived as critical to broader strategies – such as high-profile civil-society leaders, exemplary community efforts or key witnesses in a delicate legal case.



© SLMM photo archive

SLMM monitors with Sri Lankan Army officers

## Prepare mission

- Good leadership
  - Sufficient size
  - Selection
  - Training
  - Overall message
- Manual Chapter 11*

## Information gathering

- Focus on perpetrators
  - Critically draw on variety of sources
- Manual Chapter 3*

## Employ protection strategies

### Diplomacy

- Identify perpetrator targets to influence
  - Identify channels of leverage
  - Set objectives and messages
  - Establish and sustain constant contact
- Manual Chapter 4*

### Encouragement

- Identify civil-society targets to protect and support
  - Develop regular communication and joint activity via presences, contacts and messages
- Manual Chapter 6*

### Visibility

- Perform regional and sub-regional analysis
  - Establish sub-offices
  - Establish routines of presence/visits
  - Visible reaction to emergencies
  - Accompaniment of those at highest risk
- Manual Chapter 5*

## Identify crisis

- Initial conflict analysis/protection-needs analysis
- Entry negotiation
- Resource mobilisation
  - Political support
  - Economic resources
  - Human resources

### Analysis

- > Identify targets
  - > Identify allies
  - > Identify security risks
- Manual Chapters 3 and 10*

### Convening & bridging

- > Identify promising actors to open dialogue
  - > Create, encourage, sustain bridging mechanism such as:
    - shuttle diplomacy,
    - multi-partite delegations
    - Ongoing joint mechanisms (e.g humanitarian accords, early-warning systems)
- Manual Chapter 7*

### Public Advocacy

- > Choose formats to promote protection strategies in place
- For example:
- regular publications
  - special reports, investigations
  - media work
  - events, VIP visits
  - building external political support
- Manual Chapter 8*

### Build strategy

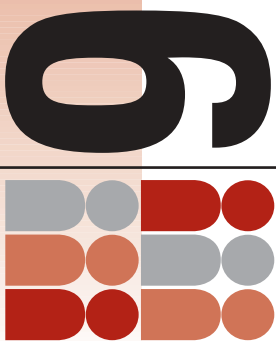
- > Approach allies
  - > Prepare message
- Manual Chapter 3*

### Evaluate

- Results of strategies
- Lessons learned
- Changing conditions
- Increased clout/opportunities
- Developing relationships

### Exit strategy





## ACTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

A field mission's efforts should complement and strengthen civil society's capacity to develop its own strategies for addressing abuses. This will include using protective presence to help people overcome their inhibitions and fears about civic activism, as well as actively supporting and protecting communities or organisations whose non-violent mobilisation will further promote protection objectives.

When fears of retribution stifle dialogue, international presence is often the only factor enabling a community to feel secure enough to start talking about local problems and seeking solutions.

By making high-profile contact with marginalised or stigmatised communities, an international mission can help to break down crippling stereotypes and restore the public legitimacy of oppressed groups.

An international unarmed mission can take many approaches to the objectives of encouragement and empowerment.

“ Many groups would disappear from fear without this monitoring,  
*NGO lawyer,  
 Colombian*

“ We should be thinking more about joint missions, where the stronger organisations bring a presence that carries protection to local and national groups, but at the same time these national groups bring their experience and knowledge and capacity – which in itself really protects the internationalists!  
*International monitors,  
 Colombia*

- Include civil-society sources in information-gathering, and local advisers in analysis, where appropriate.
- Develop an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of local civil society, identify key organisations with potential for a multiplier effect, and work for relationship building and support.
- Never settle for the simplistic analysis that there is no organised civil society to relate to: keep looking.
- Provide protective presence as needed for vulnerable or stigmatised communities and groups.
- Develop mechanisms or platforms to involve civil society directly in the mission's work.
- Develop mechanisms for regular dialogue with key civil-society groups.
- Pay attention to how mission behaviour can strengthen or damage civilian trust.
- Control expectations through transparent dialogue with civilian groups, in order to avoid excessive risk-taking.
- Consider organising joint missions with local and national groups.
- Support civil-society efforts, both financially and politically, that contribute to human rights and protection.
- Offer skills-building support on security and protection, international law, human-rights monitoring or other key topics to interested civil-society groups.



## 66

Dialogue with local authorities is extremely

important. Local authorities need to assume the responsibilities that correspond to them, and international

presence can encourage this... The international role can improve citizen participation and relationship with their own authorities.

The international community can help to develop closer relationships between the community, the NGOs and local authorities – building bridges of confidence.

This is very important.

*Human rights desk of the Colombian National Police*

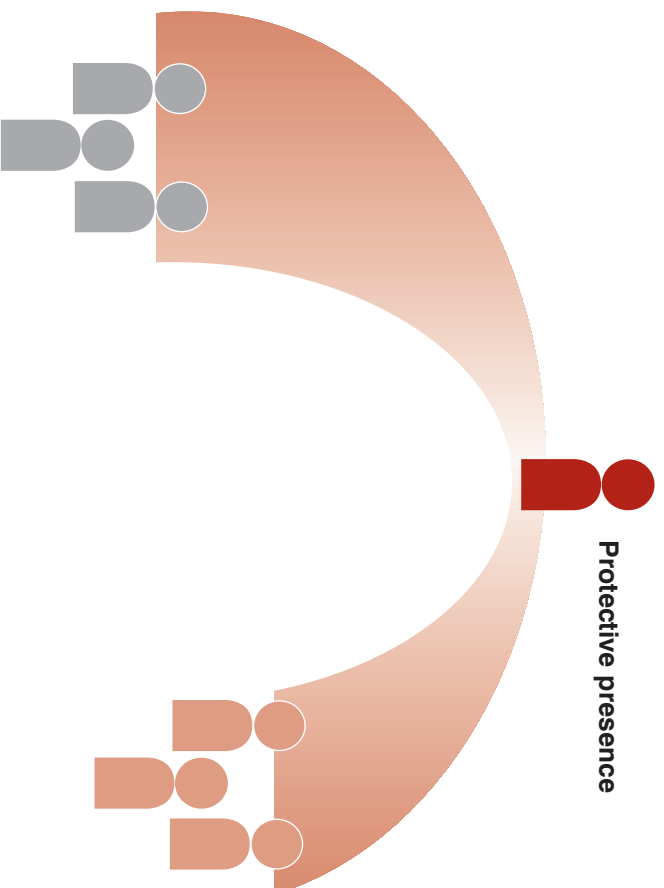
## CONVENING AND BRIDGING

An international field presence is a potential bridge across divides created by conflict. Civil- society groups, field officers and state representatives all acknowledged the particular capacity of international missions to convene parties who could not otherwise communicate. There are many forms of convening and bridging.

A mission must not raise naïve hopes in ineffective or co-opted state mechanisms, because disillusionment can counteract the positive benefit of cooperation. But when these efforts are even partially successful, they place protection and prevention concerns squarely on the table in front of the state bodies responsible for civilian security, and they bring together civil society, religious, government and international actors who share an obligation or concern over civilian protection.

- Shuttle diplomacy: the mission transmits concerns and proposals between polarised groups or between civil society and state representatives.
- Workshops: thematic or skill-focused workshops can bring together disparate actors in a setting that is less explosive than dealing with a current complaint.
- Facilitating international encouragement: similarly, when threatened civil-society groups or communities get a chance to meet with UN Special Rapporteurs, embassy staff or other important international visitors, this adds to the protection available to those groups.
- Opening delicate discussions: the credibility and neutrality of the mission allows it to broach issues among polarised parties that neither would otherwise raise.
- Longer-term complex initiatives: in working groups, thematic commissions, early warning mechanism, humanitarian accords or other structures, different parties take on a responsibility to work together and address the concerns of civilians.
- Facilitating multi-partite delegations or investigations: missions can help to get state officials to visit sites of abuses and talk to local communities.
- International bridging: a mission can bring influential international actors into contact with local or national officials. This can remind perpetrators of the political costs of abuse; it can also benefit national officials, and can help progressive individuals inside abusive institutions to find additional international support for reform.
- Convening meetings: the international presence can sometimes defuse polarisation just enough to create a neutral space where moderate leaders can meet, either informally and confidentially or more publicly.

**Figure 7: Field presence can play a convening and bridging role**



“ The fact that the OHCHR sustains close relationships with NGOs and communities – this also builds confidence with state functionaries, assuring them that we are not all their enemies. We are more able to talk.  
*NGO representative, Colombia*



# 8



## PUBLIC ADVOCACY

“People on the ground can have an impact, but their power depends on their capacity to tell the world.

*UN human rights monitor*

“Because of the presence, the international community can hear a first hand report, and not just ‘the official version’ of what happens.

*Civil Society Activists, Colombia*

Public reporting and advocacy are among the most traditional tools of protection, and include human-rights reporting, working with the media and organising public events. Public exposure is a political cost to an abuser, and public encouragement is an incentive for reform. Globally targeted advocacy by a field mission can increase the level of international political attention and pressure being applied by others, generating additional future political costs for abuse. These strategies have associated risks and drawbacks, but they are broadly acknowledged as powerful. Each mission will need to choose its particular advocacy approach, based on a consideration of the overall risks and potential benefits.

Advocacy is particularly crucial when international political commitments are weak. The international community is interested in international field missions. Interested states will trust mission reports, and be more willing to bring pressure to bear with the support of ‘legitimate’ information. Political will is not static, and rather than adjusting its expectations and strategies to an inadequate level of international support, a mission can persuade the international community to increase its commitments.

### **The risks of expulsion, withdrawal and silence**

A mission is always measuring the political space available to it and taking calculated risks. Will public advocacy get you expelled? Very rarely. A host state will most often not want to suffer the political cost of expelling a credible international presence, despite having threatened to do so.

In fact, a state is sometimes so interested in the image benefits of having an international presence that a mission might even use the threat of voluntary exit as political pressure. As some respondents suggested, missions should be ready to demand ‘meaningful presence or no presence’ and be willing to leave if the conditions or constraints of access are unacceptable.

Clearly, expulsion and withdrawal carry a heavy cost. Many would say, ‘We can’t help at all if we are not there.’ But a mission also has to set standards about the level of constraint that is unacceptable. If it reveals that it will put up with anything just for permission to stay, it has little power left with which to influence. Accepting a curtailment of its public advocacy role is a powerful loss in itself.

### **Closing the space for dialogue?**

Communication and diplomacy with abusers requires contact, and some fear that advocacy cuts off options for dialogue. Some agencies report that abuser groups have sometimes ‘punished’ a mission for its public criticism by cutting off communication. In theory, public advocacy could have a net negative effect, if the protection benefits it produces are outweighed by the costs of losing other protection opportunities that depend on fluid communication.

This is a powerful dilemma, because no one has yet proven empirically that one strategy produces better protective results than another. However, field missions have navigated this dilemma, sustaining both public critique and respectful relationships in many cases.

Diminished dialogue happens sometimes, but is often only

temporary. In some cases, the public advocacy of one organisation can effectively complement the quiet advocacy of another. But when a situation is too dangerous for local people to speak out, and too many international actors leave the public role to ‘someone else’, all that remains is silence.

## Public reporting on abuses

Any mission engaging in public reporting needs skilled personnel who understand the tools of human-rights monitoring and reporting, and can adapt them to specific conflict contexts. The reporting process has three key elements.

- 1 Information gathering: this process itself has a protective impact, creating a justification for multiple diplomacy and visibility strategies, as long as it is done with great sensitivity to confidentiality and victims’ vulnerabilities.
- 2 Report preparation: a public report is a diplomatic message, and it should be technically and legally accurate, but also politically persuasive. It should augment national and international pressure and concern, and force abusers into damage-control mode. At best, a report will make explicit recommendations, which in turn facilitate the ongoing local and daily diplomacy of field officers. Reports can be regular or thematic, or part of a special investigation.
- 3 Dissemination: a report achieves nothing if it is not used effectively. Dissemination and publicity strategies must bring the message of the painstaking monitoring and writing to the target audience. Skilled media officers can make the best use of local and international print, radio, television and web-based media to achieve this.

With a sufficient presence deployed, and a good system of public advocacy and dissemination, a competent mission can earn a unique position as a credible authority on civilian protection needs and human rights abuses in a country



# 9



## DO NO HARM

Good intentions do not necessarily yield good outcomes, and examples of errors and unintended consequences are well documented. With all the uncertainties of a conflict context, field missions need discipline and good judgement to avoid hurting the people they intend to help.

The risks associated with protection missions fall into several distinct categories.

“We have to be very careful in speaking with people in the communities. Not because we think they are linked with armed groups, but because we know that those groups are watching to see with whom the community speaks. We have seen examples of retaliation afterwards. And in a small village there are no secrets. Everyone knows who talked to whom.”  
*Humanitarian field officer, Colombia*



Humanitarian assessment in Darfur

Michael Heller Chu

- Poor discipline over individual staff behaviour: missions need to implement codes of conduct, monitor behaviour and enforce compliance.
- Insufficient analysis or contextual understanding can prevent a mission from accurately predicting the consequences of its strategic protection choices. Analysis processes should rigorously keep account of potential negative impacts.
- Insufficient guidelines, planning, training or mentoring processes can lead to a mission repeating past mistakes.
- Multiple and sometimes contradictory institutional agendas and complex programming can result in negative protection consequences from programming (such as material assistance) not directly related to protection.
- Insufficient attention or commitment to local community structures and their future sustainability can result in a mission substituting for or undermining local expertise and capacities.
- Putting local staff and contacts at risk: one of the least costly ways for perpetrators to undermine a mission is through reprisals against its more vulnerable local contacts. A field mission needs to listen to local organisations and witnesses and find ways to minimise the risk of reprisal without curtailing protective action.

Mistakes are remembered for a long time. The principle of ‘do no harm’ and the rules of codes of conduct must be consciously integrated into daily operations.

# 10



## SECURITY CHALLENGES

A field mission in a conflict zone is inevitably a dangerous undertaking. International missions have suffered numerous threats and attacks, including the murder of staff members. Every mission needs to make sure that it studies existing guidelines and security resources, and prepares its own mission-specific security analysis, based on the particular political and local circumstances.

Security preparations cannot entirely eliminate risk, however, and a protection mission unwilling to take any risks would achieve little. Security strategies should therefore promote 'smart risk-taking'. A mission will make the greatest difference when it is present where the trouble is, interacting with victims as well as perpetrators. Security strategies must facilitate these interactions, mitigating the risks and making them as safe as possible.





## INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

To create effective protection missions, some institutions may need to make some changes in key areas, including: institutional attitudes towards protection; mandates and entry agreements; the scale of missions; staff skills and selection; mental-health support and lesson learning.

### **Take a committed approach**

If a mission or its staff do not project a strong belief in the effectiveness of unarmed presence, this weakens respect for the mission, and in turn, its effectiveness.

These attitude problems influence policy decisions, resulting in reduced willingness to field protection missions. Modesty and humility can be great qualities, but underestimation of the impact of unarmed presence can lead to missed opportunities for protection.

- Overcome the tendency to characterise only armed missions as protection, implicitly judging unarmed presence as weak. Armed and unarmed missions each have their strengths and weaknesses in different situations. They are distinct strategic choices, to be used separately or in combination according to their projected impact.
- Overcome morale problems. Many international organisations suffer from a prevalence of pessimism and a sense of futility. Conflicts may get worse, and effects are hard to measure, but mission personnel should not presume that they have no effect.
- Respect the work of other institutions. Inter-agency squabbling destroys the potential for collaboration among allies, and creates vulnerabilities to 'divide-and-conquer' strategies by those who oppose international protection efforts.

### Get the right entry agreement – and stretch it

A mission's negotiated agreement with the host government, or other formal agreement calling for its presence, needs to keep options open, allowing the maximum room to manoeuvre.

- Ideally, a mission will negotiate a flexible mandate, giving it:
- unconstrained access to all territory, parties and communities
  - commitments by armed parties to communicate and meet with the mission, respond to inquiries, support the mission politically, refrain from actions or statements to undermine it, and guarantee its security
  - a clear legal framework, with the authority of international law and treaty agreements
  - unconstrained right to gather information, without limits on public statements or reports
  - the right to choose and prioritise technical-support tasks according to the mission's own protection strategy
  - technical agreements facilitating logistical support and provision of the mission, so that blockages cannot be used to paralyse it.

“When you have poor agreements to back up the presence, then the need for a very multi-skilled civilian presence increases dramatically.

In this case, the fact that the GOI [Government of Indonesia] was responsible for security was a fatal flaw, putting all the protection burden on us, with little to back it up.

*UNAMET, Local team coordinator*

If a mission has sufficient moral authority and political support from its institutional headquarters, it can have even greater control over the interpretation of formal agreements, and can engage more flexibly in proactive presence .

### **Make the mission big enough**

A small mission can carry out many tasks of proactive presence, with incremental impact. A larger mission, however, can affect the national consciousness, becoming a player with clout that is hard to ignore or manipulate. Its protection efforts accumulate and reinforce each other, creating a powerful momentum.

The optimal mission size depends on the size of the territory; its population, the number of ongoing abuses, the scale and nature of combat, the security risks, transportation and other logistical factors, the complexity of roles the mission will engage in, and the levels of complementary and collaboration with other institutions on the ground.

Research carried out for this manual suggests that the missions with greatest impact needed at least 15 expatriate international observers per million local people, and over 4 observers per 1000 square kilometres. However, given the more comprehensive task of proactive presence outlined here, even those mission sizes previously considered adequate might better be considered a minimum.

## Use the right mix of skills

- Mission leadership and heads of sub-offices should be selected for the highest possible level of strategic, diplomatic and managerial capacities, with the ability to improvise under unpredictable conditions.
- Under this leadership, a good protection mission should include a range of professional capacities and experience.
- Staff selection must be rigorous, as mistakes by poorly screened field personnel damage a mission's reputation and credibility.
- Missions with insufficient female field staff may find it difficult to respond to the particular protection risks faced by women and girls in conflict zones.
- Selection of good field officers is a subjective process, requiring face-to-face contact and decisions by evaluators with good judgement and field experience.

### Profile of a protection field officer

- There was a high level of consensus among all interviewees about what the criteria should be for selecting field officers.
- Professional qualifications can be useful, and availability for an adequate minimum stay is vital, but more intangible personal characteristics, skills and experience are also important for successful fieldwork.
- These include:
- commitment to civilian protection
  - flexibility, tolerance, respect and cultural sensitivity
  - practical problem-solving capacity
  - demonstrated comfort in the field
  - strong analytical skills
  - strong and diverse communication and diplomatic skills
  - being a team player
  - conflict-resolution skills
  - relevant language fluency
  - ability to cope with stress.



## **Provide adequate and appropriate training**

Appropriate training for a field operation must cover the full spectrum of a field officer's mission experience, including:

- off-site training before deployment, both general and mission-specific
- on-site training/orientation after arrival in the mission
- an ongoing mentor relationship with a more experienced field officer
- periodic training refreshers during mission service
- regular appraisal, and debriefing on conclusion of service.

The primary methodologies of training for complex political work have to be experiential and practical, focusing on participatory learning to develop problem-solving skills as preparation for work in the field.

Implementing adequate training demands a serious institutional resource commitment of budgets, qualified training staff, a time commitment in the work plans of all field staff, and minimum training thresholds.

War and attacks on civilian communities have particular and differentiated impacts on women and girls, who in any case suffer specific forms of human rights abuse in those communities. It is essential, therefore, that gender awareness is included in training of staff. Gender diversity in staff composition is similarly important.

## Care for morale and mental health of mission staff

Field service workers in conflict zones are vulnerable to mental-health problems. A mission has a responsibility to encourage skills for self-care and mutual support among team members, and to provide training for coping with stress. It should also provide adequate services for people who have been traumatised or burnt out. Future protection field missions need to make greater policy and resource commitments to addressing these needs, and take advantage of the many well-developed tools of psycho-social support.

## Learn from the past and build for the future

Any institution fielding protective presence should be planning beyond the current mission, and considering how skills, expertise and lessons are going to be developed for future missions. This involves:

- › sharing and analysing comparative strategies and techniques
- › developing a cadre of experienced field officers and managers who have learned the lessons of past missions
- › expanding this cadre by mentoring and training new field officers in the lessons from the past

# 12



## CONCLUSION

Effective field presence can significantly contribute to and enhance the protection of civilians. The specific lessons and recommendations of this manual, are relevant to a wide range of deployments of international missions and agencies on the ground in conflict zones. The international community needs to take greater advantage of the protective power of field presence, and deploy more such missions.

What is needed, though, is not a passive presence for its own sake, but well-informed and carefully analyzed strategies and tactics that use the presence of each field officer to influence all the actors around them. The five key strategies of sustained diplomacy, visibility, encouragement and empowerment, convening and bridging and public advocacy are basic building blocks for any protection mission. Other strategies and activities will also emerge in particular situations.

These ideas will contribute to protection only when they are applied on the ground. We hope that each organisation or mission will take our recommendations as a basis from which to develop appropriate and



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SLMM monitors with LTTE cadres

effective strategies for their particular situations, and take greater initiative for the protection of civilians. Ideally, they will build our suggestions into their own training and planning. This may mean using this manual as it is, but it could also mean integrating the lessons into their own internal manuals and training materials.

Protection is a terribly difficult challenge, and this manual by no means presumes to have all the answers. The tools of proactive presence must be used together with a wide range of other efforts to assist and protect victims of violence and war all over the world. It is our deepest hope that this manual will assist institutions and individuals, and that it will encourage greater deployment of protection missions and more active use of proactive presence tools by field officers worldwide.











