



International Conference

Call for Papers

Protecting People in Conflict & Crisis

Responding to the Challenges of a Changing World

22nd – 24th September 2009

**Harris Manchester College & Queen Elizabeth House
University of Oxford**

The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (RSC), in collaboration with the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute (HPG), is organizing an international conference on the theme of “*Protecting People in Conflict & Crisis: Responding to the Challenges of a Changing World*”. This conference aims to convene a broad range of academic researchers, humanitarian practitioners, policy makers and civil society representatives to review the state of policy and practice in the broad field of humanitarian protection as we look forward into a potentially turbulent 21st Century.

Conference Theme

The current concept of protection underpinning the protection work of international humanitarian actors was devised during a series of workshops in the 1990s:

[protection is] “all activities, aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights, humanitarian and refugee law). Human rights and humanitarian actors shall conduct these activities impartially and not on the basis of race, national, national or ethnic origin, language or gender”

Since this definition was agreed, the humanitarian protection sector has taken remarkable strides. Indeed, the protection of people affected by conflict and crisis is now not only one of the central aims of the international community of humanitarian and development actors, but also one of its greatest challenges.

Recent years have seen increasing innovation in the way humanitarian protection is conceived, framed and implemented at the global level. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P), the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the UN's humanitarian reform process have all emphasised protection, elaborating new normative frameworks for the protection of civilians during armed conflict and humanitarian crisis. Roles have expanded and evolved in parallel: at the UN World Summit in 2005 government representatives reaffirmed the responsibility to protect civilian populations from crimes against humanity; the protection of civilians is often a significant component of UN peacekeepers' mandate; and an increasing number of human rights and humanitarian agencies are implementing protection activities on the ground.

Despite the growing policy engagement, however, debates continue. R2P remains hotly contested and translating conceptual understandings into action has proved challenging. The expansion of roles has raised questions around responsibilities, mandates and capacities, and at the field level genuine dilemmas exist around the interplay between national and international actors, and the effectiveness of different international protection actors in increasing the protection of populations at risk.

With so many actors seeking to ensure the protection of people affected by conflict and crisis important questions arise, such as:

- How do different national and international actors conceive of humanitarian protection and are their concepts compatible?
- Which laws, norms and institutions are relevant to the protection of civilians in crisis and are they fit for purpose to address current and future protection challenges?
- What are the respective roles and responsibilities of national and international actors and what are key challenges are faced in meeting responsibilities?
- How do populations affected by conflict and crises understand the threats that face them, how do they respond and which interventions offer most protection?
- How has protection been approached over the past decade and what lessons can be drawn?
- What are some of the critical gaps in humanitarian protection and how can they be best addressed?

This conference seeks to address these questions by providing a space for dialogue and debate on the subject of 'protection' and its place in international politics, policy, and practice today. It is intended that the conference will include representatives from diverse academic, policy and practitioner backgrounds and interests, including humanitarian, human rights, security, military, developmental and political. In particular the conference hopes to stimulate creative thinking on how the international community of states, policy makers, humanitarian practitioners and civil society actors might best face the challenges to come, both by reflecting upon the lessons of the past and scanning the horizon of future.

The conference will address the following indicative themes:

Populations at risk: Surviving and responding to protection threats

Debates over protection often focus upon the institutional, legal and organisational mechanisms of national and international actors. Often the voices of those they seek to protect are marginalised and the actions they take to protect themselves are neglected.

The conference aims better to understand the protection concerns and responses of those who are affected by crisis by asking the following questions:

- How do those affected by crisis respond to protection threats? How effective are their strategies? In what ways can protection actors build on these strategies?
- How do those affected by crisis conceive of ‘protection’? What are their views on what works and what doesn’t?
- To what degree are those at risk effectively protected?
- Can ‘protection’ be conceived differently by taking a bottom-up perspective? Can alternative protection frameworks be developed based upon such perspectives?

Concepts of Protection

Despite the consensus achieved at the ICRC workshops in the 1990s the notion of protection remains contested. ‘Protection’ has evolved to respond to changing contexts and agendas and is interpreted in a variety of ways, depending upon particular institutional mandates, organisational objectives and political priorities.

The conference will examine the developing nature of ‘protection’ as concept, discourse and norm by asking the following questions:

- How is protection characterised in conceptual, legal and normative terms? In particular, what are the key convergent and divergent views between humanitarian and human rights actors?
- What non-Western concepts of protection exist and how significant are they in shaping international protection legal and policy frameworks?
- Can differing interpretations of protection be reconciled, and how might this be achieved?
- What is the relationship between concepts of protection and its policy and practice?
- Have international legal, normative and institutional frameworks kept pace of developments in policy and practice?

The Politics of Protection

While the protection of civilians is a humanitarian and human rights *concern*, it has major political ramifications, with implications for military tactics, international relations and political action. In particular, discourses surrounding the ‘responsibility to protect’ invoke protection as a concept that both justifies military interventionism, and defines the bounds and content of sovereignty.

The conference will examine the politics of protection by asking the following questions:

- What role has the concept of ‘protection’ played in informing and shaping processes of international cooperation and global governance?
- What is the relationship between international and national protection responsibilities, and how is this reflected in the practice of governments and responses of the international community?
- In what instances has protection discourse been used by political actors to pursue political, rather than protection, aims?
- How do political approaches to protection affect humanitarian and human rights actors’ activities on the ground?
- What prospect exists for the emergence of a radical or transformative approach to protection from the grassroots? How might we envision a truly democratic politics of protection?
- What new approaches may be needed to ensure that the principle of protection is able to withstand the geopolitical transformations of the 21st Century?

Protection, security and the roles of military and armed actors

While many humanitarian actors are seeking to strengthen the protection sensitivity and impacts of assistance programmes and to implement protection-focused programmes, physical protection from direct threats is often provided by military or armed actors. Yet peacekeeping forces may lack sufficient capacity or mandates to provide effective protection, and the protection role or capacities of counter-insurgency or ‘stabilisation’ forces are affected by their status as key actors in an active conflict. Various state, paramilitary or non-state armed actors may threaten the lives and livelihoods of some while protecting others. Humanitarian agencies’ engagement and cooperation with armed or military actors may enhance immediate protection from direct threats or facilitate the delivery of assistance, but may incur trade-offs and compromises affecting the real or perceived neutrality, independence and effectiveness of humanitarian action. At the same time, advocacy and negotiation with armed actors is likely to be essential for achieving respect for IHL and human rights and for creating or maintaining humanitarian space.

- What lessons can be drawn from recent efforts to provide physical protection to endangered populations?
- How have UN integrated missions, and UN, regional and other peacekeeping or counter-insurgency / stabilisation operations and interventions affected the protection environment in practice?
- How do military actors perceive their protection roles and responsibilities?
- How have humanitarian actors sought to reconcile principles of humanitarian action with engagement and/or cooperation with different kinds of military and armed actors?
- How are humanitarian actors engaging with armed belligerents to improve protection, and what lessons can we draw from this engagement?

National and regional responsibilities to protect

IHL and broader normative frameworks emphasise the primary responsibility of the state to protect citizens. Yet, state actors are often active belligerents pursuing military or other policies that threaten people's lives and livelihoods or neglect their protection needs. Donors and other humanitarian actors are committed to strengthening national capacities and responsibilities to protect; international protection principles have been incorporated into the domestic legislation of many countries; and state actors often play an important role in protection on the ground. Yet the relationships between state actors and humanitarian organisations are often difficult and ambiguous. The 'R2P' doctrine calls for international responses where national state protection fails, but international action remains highly variable and often ineffective. Recent years have seen increasing innovation in the development of regional normative and policy mechanisms intended to enhance protection (e.g. the Great Lakes Protocol on IDPs), regional organisations, such as the African Union and NATO are playing an increasingly important role in peacekeeping, and/or political engagement on issues related to humanitarian action (e.g. ASEAN re. Burma).

- How are different humanitarian actors seeking to engage and cooperate with state actors to enhance protection outcomes – both in conflict and natural disaster responses?
- What are the key challenges to strengthening the will and/or capacities of national and regional actors to protect?
- Have innovations in regional protection mechanisms and responses improved practical protection outcomes?
- How can regional and national institutions be more effectively mobilized to deliver positive protection outcomes in the field?

Protection in Practice

Protection programming has evolved rapidly over the past 15 years and the range and scope of protection actors have expanded dramatically. While in many instances this increased engagement has benefited populations at risk, the political and practical complexities of undertaking protection activities have also posed new operational challenges for humanitarian actors.

The conference will examine the challenges faced by different actors engaged in protection by asking the following questions:

- How have protection roles and responsibilities evolved? What key successes and failures have emerged?
- Are the roles, capacities and competencies within the current protection architecture fit for purpose? How might the protection system be reformed to improve protection outcomes?
- Is there a tension between addressing the protection and assistance needs of populations? In what circumstances are they most evident and how can they be reconciled?

- How do protection approaches and activities undertaken by different protection actors complement or contradict each other? How can synergy between different forms of protection programming be better developed?
- What are the implications of different forms of settlement arrangements (formal camps, transitional camps, squatter areas, safe areas, hosting arrangements) for people's protection?
- How do we measure the outcome of protection programmes to ensure that protection outcomes are positive?

Call for Papers

The conference will take place between 22nd and 24th of September 2009 and will feature a range of keynote lectures, plenary discussions and expert panel debates, paper sessions and practice updates.

Those wishing to participate in the conference are invited to submit abstracts outlining their suggestions for the following:

Paper presentations: Those wishing to present a paper on any of the themes noted above should submit an abstract outlining the topic of their paper with a title. Those papers chosen for presentation will be included in the most suitable paper session as defined by the organising committee.

Paper sessions: Paper sessions will consist of four separate paper presentations of 20 minutes each. Those wishing to convene a paper session (or sessions) around a particular subject should provide a session title and a summary of the subject to be covered. Wherever possible those wishing to convene paper sessions should solicit abstracts from suitable authors and include their names and paper abstracts with the paper session application.

Expert debates: Expert debates will bring together a group of senior experts to debate a key question of relevance to the conference theme. Panellists will present a brief presentation on a central theme, and these will be followed by a discussion with questions from the floor.

Practice updates: Practice updates offer an opportunity for field practitioners to provide brief presentations of their experiences undertaking protection programmes and activities. These presentations will be coordinated by the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) who will draw on its extensive network of practitioners located in over 130 countries worldwide and on its track record of bringing together, distilling and disseminating experience to the humanitarian community. Presentations should be no more than 10 minutes each and should focus on the challenges, complexities and lessons learned from practical protection programmes. Those who choose to participate will be asked to provide a short written summary of their presentation to be posted on the Online Exchange section of the HPN website (www.odihpn.org).

Abstracts should address the broad conference themes above. Abstracts are welcome from all of those concerned with the question of civilian protection, whether scholars or students, humanitarian practitioners or policy makers, advocates, activists or crisis-affected civilians.

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words long, and should be submitted by Monday 1st June 2009 to rsc-conference@qeh.ox.ac.uk. Please indicate which kind of session your abstract refers to, include keywords and indicate the name of the conference theme to which your abstract most closely applies. Please give your email the subject heading “Abstract: Your Name”.

Conference publications

Forced Migration Review (FMR), the in-house publication of the Refugee Studies Centre, is interested in publishing articles and from the conference that relate particularly to protection issues relating to forced migration.

Humanitarian Exchange, the quarterly magazine of the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) is interested to publish papers and practice updates from the conference which are of relevance to operational agencies. Participants should indicate if they are interested to have their submission published and the HPN coordinator will contact them directly.

Papers, presentations and practice updates will be provided to conference participants on a CD.

Participation

The conference aims to stimulate close collaboration and dialogue between academic researchers, policy makers, practitioners, advocates, activists and crisis-affected civilians themselves, and is open to participation by each of these groups. The central aims of the conference are:

- to provide a meeting ground for academic communities and practitioners concerned with in-depth research on protection;
- to take stock of the current theory, debates, and issues of protection;
- to reflect on current practice and identify opportunities for improving protection in practice;
- to involve Southern scholars, practitioners and programme beneficiaries more strongly in debates on protection.

120 delegate places will be available at the conference. Those not wishing to present papers may register their interest in attending, though places for such delegates may be restricted. Delegates may register by sending an email to rsc-conference@qeh.ox.ac.uk with the subject title “Registration: Delegate Name”.

Important Dates

Abstract submission deadline	1 June 2009
Abstracts accepted	3 August 2009
Registration deadline	14 September 2009
Conference opens	22 September 2009

Organising Committee

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Conference Venue

The conference will be held between Harris Manchester College and Queen Elizabeth House in Oxford. For details pertaining to the venues, including directions, please visit <http://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/> and <http://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/>

Accommodation

Accommodation is available for conference delegates at Harris Manchester College and will be allocated upon a first come first served basis. Those wishing to stay elsewhere in Oxford can find useful information at the following web sites:

<http://www.dailyinfo.co.uk/venues.php?cat=hotel>

http://www.oxfordcity.co.uk/oxford/home_accommodation_hotels.html

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotels-g186361-Oxford_Oxfordshire_England-Hotels.html

Contacts

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