WEBINAR SUMMARY

Panellists

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Protecting Civilians: Mission Impossible? Humanitarian Leadership in Action

The championing of protection by senior humanitarian leaders, including Humanitarian Coordinators (HC) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT), is critical for putting protection at the heart of the humanitarian response. This expectation is clearly affirmed in the IASC Principles Statement on the centrality of protection in humanitarian action from December 2013. An important aspect is the protection of civilians in armed conflicts which had never been more vital given the perilous situation of tens of millions of civilians in contexts such as Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, the Central Africa Republic, Yemen, and others.

In this webinar, speakers discuss practical steps that they have taken to strengthen the centrality of protection, with a focus on the protection of civilians. It covers actions taken by the HC to influence parties to the conflict in Iraq to enhance the protection of civilians. It also covers actions by the Protection Cluster to support frontline humanitarian workers deal with the inevitable protection dilemma they will face.

Practical steps for senior humanitarian leaders to strengthen the centrality of protection

1. Ensure that protection is a standing item on the HCT agenda, supported by the presentation of the Critical Protection Issues (CPI) Note. The Note can be prepared by the Protection Cluster Coordinators focused on the most critical protection priorities and include recommended actions for HCT members.

2. Use an IHL framework to advocate publicly and privately on the protection of civilians. Establish or use existing networks of important stakeholders to influence parties to the conflict. Include NGOs that have extensive networks with communities that they may use to pass on life-saving information to the population.

3. Engage OCHA and other humanitarian Civil Military Coordination staff to support outreach with all stakeholders and influence the concept of operations and standing operating procedures of military and security actors. The focus should be on integrating measures to protect the civilian population and uphold IHL.

4. Promote the use of a draft protection framework, which provides practical guidance to front line humanitarian workers on how to deal with the operational dilemmas that they face. The framework should enable humanitarians to become familiar with protection issues so that they can act in a timely and predictable manner when faced with a dilemma.

> **"Protection is the foundation of all humanitarian work, and humanitarians have a duty to do all they can to protect civilians whenever and wherever they are at risk. Like never before, disrespect for IHL and the obligation to protect civilians is increasing. Nonetheless, and no matter how difficult the task, protection should be a central concern in all humanitarian operations. This should be made clear in the terms of reference of every humanitarian staff."**
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> **Lise Grande,** *DSRSG, Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator in Iraq*

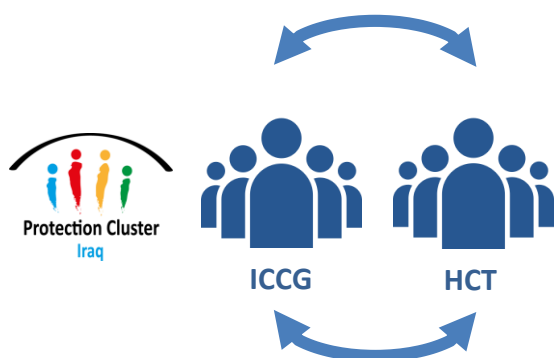**Ms Lise Grande** *DSRSG, Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator in Iraq*

Iraq is one of the most complicated, brutal, large-scale conflicts in the world today. During the impending military campaign to retake Mosul, nothing will be more important than the protection of civilians. The anticipated humanitarian impact of the campaign could be enormous, given the urban character of the conflict, the use of the population as human shields and with over a million people that will need protection and assistance. There are also more than 100 different parties to the conflict, with varying degrees of respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). Engaging with some of these groups is extremely difficult, if not impossible. The HC outlined her efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians in Iraq using two examples: 1) the Fallujah operation and 2) preparations for the Mosul operation.

What steps can humanitarian leaders, including HCs and HCTs, take to strengthen the respect for the protection of the civilian populations in armed conflicts?

♦ **The HC should be given the space and have the political backing within the UN bureaucracy and by partners, NGOs, and donors, to raise and advocate for difficult protection issues**.

♦ **Use an IHL framework to advocate publically and privately on the protection of civilians.** Engage in high-level advocacy with all parties to the conflict (UN member states, government, military and other armed groups) to highlight the principles of IHL and their obligations to protect civilians. During Fallujah, advocacy with government and security actors focused on securing safe passage for civilian fleeing the conflict and mitigating the impacts on civilians from the aerial campaign. IHL is a key component of the intensive planning currently underway for Mosul OCHA Civil Military Coordination staff are trying to work with the security actors to integrate measure to protect the civilian population and uphold IHL as part of the concept of operations for the Mosul operation.

♦ **Use the different capacities of each member within the HCT to reiterate the obligations of the parties to the conflict under IHL and pass information to vulnerable people.** For example, the Iraq HCT includes UN member states who are also parties to the conflict or have influence over the security actors. As such, these members' privileged relationship can be used to disseminate messages concerning their obligations to protect civilians. In addition, many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have extensive communication networks within local communities that can be used to relay life-saving information such as the location of safe escape routes to vulnerable people.

♦ **When urgent protection problems arise, engage relevant HCT members to work as a small team to generate a rapid solution.** For example, if there is a specific case where IDPs are threatened to be sent back to dangerous conditions, the HCT can identify members of the team to develop a position on the problem to guide the operation.

How does the HC work with the HCT to bring centrality of protection at the heart of the response?

♦ **Exercise leadership to ensure that protection is at the centre of humanitarian planning, preparedness, and response**.

♦ **Have a simple protection strategy/framework** that makes use of the influence and capacities of each HCT member.

♦ **Ensure that protection is a standing item on the HCT agenda, supported by the presentation of the Critical Protection Issues (CPI) Note.** The Note can be prepared by the Protection Cluster Coordinators focused on the most critical protection priorities and include recommended actions for HCT members.

♦ **Establish accountability mechanisms**, for example the Iraq IDP call centre and the PSEA network.

♦ **Putting protection at the forefront of the operations requires funding and capacity.** Humanitarian operations and protection programmes must be well funded and manned with the appropriate number and level of experienced staff.

♦ **Ensure there is a collective leadership** to push forward a clear and streamlined integration of protection into statements and actions across humanitarian partners, by making use of the draft protection framework.

M. Dennis Ardis *Protection Cluster Co-Coordinator, Danish Refugee Council*

In Iraq organisations have faced the dilemma of whether to provide much needed humanitarian aid in centres used to screen fleeting civilians. The provision of assistance is required to adhere to the humanitarian imperative, but by doing so, humanitarians risk compromising principles of impartiality, 'do no harm', and respect for fundamental human rights. As a result, the draft 'Taking a Principled Approach: Framework for Defining Humanitarian Engagement when Humanitarian and Protection Concerns Are Present' was developed to facilitate principled humanitarian response across the clusters. The framework was developed with the idea of providing practical guidance to operational actors with respect to interventions at critical sites where practitioners are faced with these difficult dilemmas.

In the case of Iraq, partners have been hesitant to intervene in certain locations, where there are severe protection concerns, lack of adherence to principles and an absence of clear advice and guidance. As such, based on initial work undertaken by the Shelter Cluster, the Protection Cluster has worked across the ICCG and clusters to develop a practical framework that will provide clarity on the type and level of response in different situations.

What is the purpose of the framework?

♦ **The framework provides practical guidance to facilitate operations when the most difficult situations.** For example, with Shelter-NFI interventions, it recommends the type of NFIs that should be distributed at a transit center, given that when people move, they are likely to take the items with them. Similarly, it recommends different thresholds of support across interventions. For example, the provision of life-saving medical assistance in disputed transit sites has a higher priority than education.

♦ **The framework reinforces the distinct roles and responsibilities of the Protection Cluster, the ICCG, and the HCT**: I) For the **Cluster**, it presents a concrete mechanism for translating protection guidance into practice. II) For the **ICCG**, it provides nuanced, yet concrete guidance for partners – the type of guidance that reflects the operational reality faced in Iraq. III) For the **HCT**, It reinforces the role of the HCT as the primary forum for strategic and policy-level decision-making and recognizes that the nature and scope of the humanitarian response ultimately carries heavy political implications.

♦ **The framework serves as a tool for encouraging consistency and predictability within the response**, as well as transparency and accountability. It is a tool for facilitating principled humanitarian action in the most difficult situations, and providing clear guidance when compromise is required.

What are the components of the framework?

The draft framework includes four color-coded categories related to the severity of the protection and humanitarian concerns at issue.

For example, the "red" category reflects a basis for conversation. In practice, partners should not hesitate to provide truly lifesaving assistance, except in the most extraordinary of circumstances. The category primarily exists to ensure that, if aid is not being provided, there is a conversation as to why.

The result is a cluster-specific matrix with a hierarchy of interventions for each key location.

	Green — Relevant full cluster responses are given as appropriate to the location. Relates to situations that might entail protection concerns but stakeholders agree that the nature and scope of those concerns do not warrant the provision of a limited humanitarian response.	Yellow — Only limited first line responses are provided. Relates to situations that entail serious protection concerns. This category has been included on the basis that some middle-ground, between a life-saving and a full response, is likely necessary in many contexts.	Orange — Only life-saving assistance is provided. Relates to situations that entail extremely serious humanitarian and protection concerns	Red — No assistance is provided. Relates only to the most extreme circumstances under which no aid can be provided due to the underlying concerns, which should be objective, clearly stated in writing, and made widely known if this category is evoked for denying the provision of aid.
Checkpoints				
Screening facilities				
Transit Sites				
Other non-camp				
Camps				

How can the Protection Cluster ensure that the Framework is used by humanitarians on the frontline?

Skepticism can arise regarding the applicability of the Framework in field operations, especially because humanitarians at the frontline must often make quick decisions when faced with the urgency of assisting and protecting civilians bearing the brunt of conflict. To address this issue, the Framework provides specific and actionable guidance applicable for specific locations. It includes a colour-coded system to evaluate thresholds for engagement, to ensure applicability. Nonetheless, it is also the role of the HC/HCT to push the use of the Framework to humanitarian staff.

Why is it important to have the support of senior leadership?

Having the support of humanitarian leaders is crucial, as only senior leadership has the mandate and the authority to ensure the centrality of protection is prioritised through strategic and policy-level decision-making. They can also ensure Protection is brought up during high-level planning and during advocacy meetings with governments and military.

How does the Protection Cluster support leaders?

Protection is a standing item on the HCT agenda (through the Critical Protection Issues Note) and the Cluster frequently appears on an ad hoc basis, often at the request of the HCT, to facilitate discussion of thematic or site-specific issues.

What is the difference between the roles and responsibilities of a Protection Cluster Coordinator and HC?

The Protection Cluster identifies protection issues and undertakes data collection and analysis. The Cluster provides technical guidance and recommendations to the HC/HCT. In order for the centrality of protection to be meaningful, it needs then to be taken forward by the senior leadership of a humanitarian operation, i.e. those who are able to make strategy decision at policy and operation level. HCs, for example, can interact with governments and military leaders involved in the context, and can practically carry forward the recommendations given put the Cluster

This summary is a combination of presentations from the webinar and broader learnings from the STAIT team. To listen to the full webinar and to access recordings of past webinars, visit the STAIT webinar: http://www.deliveraidbetter.org/