Side event to the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel of 20 October 2020

Protection of civilians in the Central Sahel context: A mirage in the desert or a dream within our reach?

Online event: 12 October 2020, 17h00-19h00 CEST

Link: https://zoom.us/j/97785500884?pwd=M2RNck5mRjZuQVZSbUQ0Y0ZYNFEyUT09

As the crisis in the Sahel continues to deteriorate, security forces face important challenges to respond to the complex threats posed by armed violence and insecurity. Critical to their success is the way in which security forces conduct their operations. As allegations of human rights and IHL violations persist, what is being done and what more could be done to improve the compliance by Sahel countries with their international commitments in these areas and to place the protection of civilians (POC) at the heart of their security efforts? This panel will explore the impact and lessons learnt from military responses, including the Joint Force’s implementation of its Human Rights Compliance Framework (HRCF), in the region and the gaps that exist in civilian protection. It will explore ways to enhance the involvement of the population and local actors to address protection concerns and respect for international law, both of which are important for humanitarian concerns.

Objective

At the Senior Officials’ Meeting (SOM) on 8 September 2020, panelists underscored that the crisis in the Sahel is a protection crisis. A feeling of injustice amongst the population is reinforced by a lack of trust in key institutions, including security forces. Serious human rights allegations against security forces deepen the crisis and this mistrust. As identified during the SOM, security forces need support in developing institutional and operational measures that are effective in reducing civilian harm, while enhancing their engagement and building trust with the civilian population they are mandated to serve. Some innovative and pioneering initiatives are underway, including the work of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, with support from OHCHR and CIVIC to implement its Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework, and by extension elements of national armies.

This side event will respond to the calls for greater engagement with security forces to enhance their protection of civilians’ capabilities for protection, an essential component of the humanitarian + assistance and the nexus approach in Central Sahel, without which the protection crisis and mistrust of public institutions will only deepen. This requires high level political backing and support. This side event will draw attention to this important issue, highlighting ongoing efforts and recommendations for civilian protection that Ministers can take forward at the roundtable.
Speakers and topics:

- **M. Julien Attakla-Ayinon (Moderator) - OHCHR Coordinator of Project in support of the G5 Sahel Joint Force’s Compliance Framework:** “The OHCHR Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework as one of the innovative tools and approaches in responses to the security threats that come with military operations”

- **M. Vianney Bisimwa - CIVIC Sahel Regional Director:** “Civilians’ harm reduction, a critical path to the protection of civilians”:

  The Joint Force and the Sahel armies to develop an internal strategic approach to understand the impact of their presence and operations on the civilian populations and how to improve it. Lessons learned from other experiences suggest:

  For the Defense and Security Forces to equip themselves with a mechanism or unit for identifying, monitoring, and analyzing damage caused to civilians through analysis of trends and understanding of incidents' causes and factors, to prevent and respond to civilians' casualties.

  Prevention and response imply for the Force: 1. To develop, revise, or update the rules and procedures relating to operations and their planning; 2. improve its engagement with communities in its area of operations, without putting them at risk; 3. To develop a strategic, transparent, proactive, and reactive communication approach, which puts PoC at the center and which uses both traditional and modern channels; and finally, 4. to make unilateral reparations for damage in the form of recognition, restitution, compensation in a spirit of compassion, empathy, and human justice.

  These kinds of efforts by governments, Defense and Security Forces, and the partners that support them will make protecting Sahel civilians an achievable dream.

- **General Mohamed Znagui Sid‘Ahmed Ely - G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat – Defence and Security Expert:** “PoC as an overarching priority of the G5 Sahel enshrined in key strategic documents”:

  - The Concept of Operations (CONOPS);
  - The Development and Security Strategy (including 4 axes: Defense and security, Governance, Infrastructures, Human Development and Resilience)
  - The Integrated Priority Actions Framework which includes in its Defense and Security axis PoC
  - A Regional PoC Strategy under development

- **M. Mostapha Mouzouni – UNODC Expert in Law Enforcement and Criminal justice:** “UNODC’s contribution to Human Security in the Central Sahel under the aegis of the G5 Sahel - Reconciling Security, development and humanitarian action” through:
- Information-sharing;
- Prevention;
- Sanctions; and
- Development of projects in line with the Framework of the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme.

**Professor Khalid Ikhiri - Chairperson of the Niger National Human Rights Commission:** “The perspectives and plea of communities affected by the crisis in Central Sahel and the responses of Human Rights Institutions: way forward”:

- The duty to protect is an international State obligation and a conditionality for the success of military operations against Terrorism. This duty to protect is currently challenged by many factors:
  - Weak operational capacities of State institutions and Security Forces; Lack of resources and poor management of the available resources; Poor communication and lack of trust between Security and Defense Forces and the population; Lack of responsiveness or delayed response of Security forces despite early warning signs/alerts and calls to intervene; Reluctance of population to share information (intelligence);
  - Nonetheless, the good news is that solutions do exist to all those shortcomings, which if applied, would turn the dream of a peaceful, secure and prosperous Sahel region into reality.

**Bertin Bationo - FC-G5S Legal Advisor:** “Efforts by the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel to operationalize POC through legal, strategic and operational measures”:

- Legal measures include the CONOPS, Rules, Directives and operating procedures aiming at protecting Civilians
- At the strategic level, implementation of civil-military actions to generate and reinforce trust between local communities and Defense and Security Forces, the establishment and operationalization of the MISAD/CITAC.
- At the operational level, protection of civilians is ensured through:
  - The enactment and implementation of clear Rules of Engagement and Targeting
  - The issuance of operational orders that comply with PoC principles; and
  - The Judiciarization of military operations through the operationalization of the Police component
- Challenges:
  - Distinction between civilians and combatants by the soldiers at the tactical level in a context of an asymmetric war;
  - Limited resources
Details:

Date and time: Monday 12 October 2020, 11h00-13h00 (New York), 15h00-17h00 (Bamako), 17h00-19h00 (Brussels)

Register in advance for this meeting: https://zoom.us/meeting/register/UMqf-ytrjsiEtAjaC6eroOkblI2wWaXNTkAx

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting,

OR

Link to join the session: https://zoom.us/j/97785500884?pwd=M2RNck5mRjZuQVZ5bUQ0Y0ZYNFEyUT09 (Meeting ID: 977 8550 0884 \ Passcode: 5sQzNJ)

Languages: French, English (no interpretation available)

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