Emerging practice in effective civilian harm mitigation
PoC Week Side Event to UNSC Open Debate on PoC
27 May 2021 | 11:00am – 12:30am EDT
Meeting to be held virtually via Zoom

On 27 May 2021, the Government of the Netherlands, in partnership with PAX, the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), and the American Bar Association Center for Human Rights will convene a public event, entitled “Emerging practice in effective civilian harm mitigation”. A diverse group of expert panelists will explore emerging practice in civilian harm mitigation, ranging from partnered military coalitions to civilian protection. This event will take place virtually as part of the “PoC Week” on the margins of the UN Security Council Open Debate on PoC.

More civilians were killed in conflict-related violence in Mali in 2020 than in any previous year, in a pattern of increasing deaths in each of the past four years. In Yemen, hostilities have directly caused tens of thousands of civilian casualties, including thousands of children. In Afghanistan, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), government airstrikes, suicide attacks and targeted killings continue to cause extensive civilian casualties despite peace talks. This is in addition to the many thousands of civilians who have experienced indirect harm as a result of conflicts throughout the world.

Every security actor has a responsibility to protect, under international humanitarian and human rights laws, and to ensure that they mitigate harm to civilians that could occur as a result of their presence, activities, and operations. In recent decades, efforts by national, regional, and international actors to improve the protection of civilians in armed conflict (PoC) have been partly driven by acknowledgment of the physical and psychological harm to civilians and civilian objects from the presence and results of their operations. More actors recognize the value of minimizing harm from military and police operations to protect civilians, including from unlawful harm (e.g. IHL violations) or avoidable lawful harm. This includes the impacts of attacks on civilian infrastructure and conflict-related environmental damage, and other reverberating effects of military operations must also be considered.

However, these approaches to conflict-related civilian harm remain under-employed during conflict, inhibiting effective harm prevention, mitigation, and response. For example, armed actors may not i) gather information on potential or already occurred harm to civilians, ii) track and integrate analysis of potential and already occurred harm to civilians into planning and conduct of operations to minimize or prevent future harm, iii) or respond to harm after it occurred. While some actors may be unwilling or unable to assess the full extent of harm to civilians as a result of military and policing operations, others may lack practical guidance on navigating challenges such as mitigating reprisals against civilians, or planning for geographically remote or urban warfare. The rising trend of coalition and partnered security arrangements in current conflicts can contribute to the complexity of CHM planning and implementation, as well as complicate lines of accountability.

Despite these challenges, new and innovative practice reflects local, state, regional and multilateral actors’ commitment to progressive approaches to reducing civilian harm. The event seeks to examine these operational measures, by States and non-state actors at the national level, within regional or multinational coalitions, or within security partnerships. Drawing on recent practical tools and guidance, panelists will highlight how evolving practice is improving the mitigation of civilian harm.

Please register via http://bit.ly/CHMEventPoCWeek2021 by 5pm EDT on 26 May 2021. Prior registration is required to attend. Joining instructions to follow via email. For more information, please contact Ms. Brittany Roser at roser@paxforpeace.nl or +1.646.318.8698.