PoC Week 2022 Side Event

Unlocking Access to Provide Assistance and Protection to Children Affected by Conflict

Concept Note
(Virtual event, Zoom)

Objectives
On 23 May, Geneva Call and UNICEF, with the support of the EU, Germany, Qatar, Belgium, Switzerland, the United States of America, and the Dominican Republic, with OCHA and ICRC, aim to convene a virtual side event to the annual Security Council open debate on the Protection of Civilians to discuss various aspects related to humanitarian access and the protection of individuals, including children, living in complex and conflict-affected settings. The objectives of the event can be listed as follows:

• To identify challenges related to the negotiation of humanitarian access in conflict settings, with emphasis on those aiming to ensure the protection of children, the provision of education and essential health services, including the distribution of vaccines.

• To discuss measures that should be taken by parties to armed conflict to abide by their international responsibilities and by various actors, including Member States, international organizations and NGOs to facilitate humanitarian access for children in conflict-affected areas.

• To share best practice for effective practical measures that can be replicated to better reach children for humanitarian assistance and protection?

Background
Humanitarian access is essential to save lives, alleviate suffering, and preserve human dignity during armed conflict. It aims to enhance the protection of individuals, including of children, and to provide life-saving assistance and basic services such as food, water, shelter, education, and health care. International law, and in particular international humanitarian law (IHL), sets forth the legal framework that governs issues related to humanitarian access and assistance. These rules impose specific duties on both State and non-State actors to safeguard civilian wellbeing and ensure the effective provision of essential services during armed conflict. But the international community has long recognized that compliance remains challenging. This is because parties may lack knowledge of international standards and/or the incentives to abide by the applicable rules or the organizational structures and resources that would allow them to recognize, understand, and implement these obligations. In this context, developing and implementing effective and practical strategies to seek engagement with all parties to conflict and relevant stakeholders, as necessary and feasible to earn and maintain access to and for the populations in need is required more than ever.
This side event examines the current landscape of humanitarian access efforts, focusing on perceived shortcomings in facilitating compliance with IHL obligations and exploring some approaches to improve humanitarian access in conflict settings. Specifically, this panel centers on how best to provide children in conflict-affected areas with access to protection, health services (including vaccines), and education. Special attention will be given to the situation of girls. This focus follows the recent UN Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021) calling for “full, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access, without delay, for humanitarian personnel and medical personnel […] in order to facilitate, inter alia, COVID-19 vaccinations”, which was recognized as critical for safeguarding the continuation of children’s education and wellbeing. Some of the issues to be raised during the side event are expected to persist over the coming years, signaling the dire need to strengthen discussions related to humanitarian access and the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection in armed conflict. Civilian populations, especially children, remain deprived of access to basic services due to a combination of displacement, entire systems and public services that have been weakened or have ceased to function, the economic fallout of COVID-19, and climate change. Each of these issues present specific challenges: religious and ethnic minorities are more susceptible to rights violations in conflict zones and disadvantaged communities are hit harder by the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. An understanding of how these factors shape the nature and form of humanitarian challenges is necessary to devise measures that better reach and effectively protect and assist children in conflict settings.

Practical measures designed to ensure that parties to conflict promote better access to protection and essential services for children should:

- Seek to ensure that humanitarian actors can effectively deliver—and that children in need can receive—humanitarian assistance and protection in a manner that is rapid, responsive, unimpeded, and consistent
- Be in line with international law, including the principles articulated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and humanitarian principles
- Reach all targeted populations requiring assistance and protection services; and,
- Enable ongoing assessments to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented measures

The panelists have been carefully selected to ensure a broad geographical representation that allows for a full exploration of the challenges encountered in providing humanitarian aid, the policy considerations of promoting IHL compliance, and the sharing of best practices to assist and protect children through strengthened humanitarian access.

**Agenda**

I. Opening remarks:
   - Her Excellency, Ambassador Antje Leendertse, Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the UN

II. 30 minutes panel discussion
   - Ambassador Alya Ahmed Al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN
   - Ms. Marie Lequin, Head of Eurasia, Geneva Call
   - Ms. Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa
• Mr. Christian Cardon, ICRC, Chief Protection Officer

III. 40 minutes: Moderated Q&A Session

• Mr. Aurelien Buffler, Chief, Policy Advice and Planning Section, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) United Nations

IV. Closing Remarks

• Ms. Joanna Darmanin, Head of the Humanitarian Aid Thematic Policies Unit at European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)