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Safeguarding Civilians during a Pandemic:

The repercussions of COVID-19 on the Protection Agenda

Thursday, 28 May, 2020

11:00am–12:30pm (EDT)

International Peace Institute

Zoom [Zoom link]

The International Peace Institute (IPI), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Permanent Missions of the United Kingdom, Estonia, Niger and Canada are pleased to invite you to a public event entitled “Safeguarding Civilians during a Pandemic: Repercussions of COVID-19 on the Protection Agenda.” The virtual policy forum will be convened as part of Protection of Civilians (POC) Week, on the margins of the 27 May UN Security Council Open Debate on POC. The online event will provide an opportunity to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on civilians affected by conflict and humanitarian crisis, as well as the repercussions of the subsequent public health measures adopted to mitigate its propagation on protection activities and humanitarian assistance.

Panelists will analyze how COVID-19 and containment strategies have amplified existing vulnerabilities of civilian populations caught in conflict and humanitarian crises, and raised new protection challenges for humanitarian workers, peacekeepers and human rights defenders. Touching on specific country contexts, they will discuss how protection activities have been adjusted in the field to continue fulfilling critical functions, respond to emerging needs and support public health efforts, including by taking into consideration the gender dimension of the crisis.

The policy forum will take place virtually on **May 28, 2020, from 11:00am to 12:30pm (EDT)**.

Opening Remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. James Roscoe**, *Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations*
- **Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris**, *Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Speakers:

- **Ms. Laetitia Courtois**, *Head of Delegation to the UN, International Committee of the Red Cross*
- **Mr. Koffi Wogomebou**, *Senior Protection Advisor, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)*
- **Ms. Caitlin Brady**, *Director of Programme Development and Quality for the DRC, Save the Children*
- **Ms. Heather Barr**, *Acting Co-Director, Women’s Rights Division, Human Rights Watch*

- **Ms. Natacha Emerson**, *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

Moderator:

- **Dr. Namie Di Razza**, *Senior Fellow*, International Peace Institute

Concluding Remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Abdou Abarry**, *Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Niger to the United Nations*
- **H.E. Mr. Richard Arbeiter**, *Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations*

Context

COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. As of May 4, 2020, there have been more than 3.4 million confirmed cases and over 239,000 confirmed deaths worldwide.¹ Countries have put in place various control measures to limit the spread of the pandemic, including travel restrictions, lockdowns, social-distancing requirements, and remote-working arrangements, among others. These measures have had far-reaching ramifications, including with respect to national and international responses to conflict, instability, and humanitarian crises.

There is growing concern with the spread of the virus in fragile contexts like the Sahel region, the Central African Republic, Yemen, and Syria, among others. Both the pandemic and the measures established to prevent its spread have created unique protection needs and exacerbated the vulnerability of civilians already affected by armed conflict and humanitarian crises. As highlighted by the Secretary-General's Report on Human Rights and COVID-19, they are notably having disproportionate effects on women, children, the internally displaced, refugees and migrants, older persons, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups.² The multi-faceted human and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 could also exacerbate or contribute to instability, further heightening the risks faced by these vulnerable groups and prolonging conflict and humanitarian suffering.

In this context, protection actors operating in conflict and post-conflict environments have had to adapt their operational strategies and way of working to "avoid activities that could aggravate the situation of those they seek to help."³ Humanitarian access and assistance have been constrained by strict limitations of movement and the reduction of human and financial resources. UN peace operations have frozen all troop and police rotations⁴ and have to revisit their protection strategies, which are often based on patrolling, community engagement, dialogue with armed groups, and capacity-building activities. As state-

¹ World Health Organization, "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic," available at www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019.

² United Nations Secretary-General, "COVID-19 and Human Rights", April 2020, available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf

³ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Professional Standards for Protection Work: Third Edition," 2018.

⁴ United Nations, "Impact of COVID-19 on UN Peacekeeping," available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/impact-of-covid-19-un-peacekeeping>.

imposed restrictions have raised human rights concerns, they also contributed to hamper human rights monitoring and investigations and reduce possible interactions with victims and witnesses of abuse.

Co-organized with the Permanent Missions of the United Kingdom, Canada, Estonia and Niger, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), this event aims at facilitating a discussion on the current protection challenges raised by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual event also seeks to identify measures that can be taken at the national, regional and international level to ensure that protection concerns and needs—whether or not they are related to COVID-19—are adequately addressed while the pandemic persists.

For questions contact: Beatrice Agyarkoh, agyarkoh@ipinst.org, 212-225-9628

You must register to attend this event