

- Civil-Military Relationships
- Position paper (21.10.2009)¹

There is an intensive debate in international crisis management about the relationship between humanitarian organisations and military stakeholders². NATO has coined the term (CIMIC/civil-military cooperation). Members of the AGGV (Global Responsibility - Austrian Platform for Development and Humanitarian Aid), however, prefer the term “civil-military relationships” (CMR). It has a wider implication with none of the otherwise-disposed subordination to military aims, as is the case with CIMIC.

What is humanitarian aid?

“Humanitarian aid” is seen as those measures provided for the saving of human life, the decrease of human suffering and the protection of human dignity during and after armed conflicts and/or disasters.

Accordingly, humanitarian relief organisations and the armed forces have different tasks and aims. They differentiate massively in their methods of work, structures, thinking, culture and language.

Principles of humanitarian aid³

1. Humanitarianism/humanity: the uppermost aim is to ensure the survival of affected people in acute need and to alleviate their suffering. Correspondingly, the dignity of people must remain guaranteed.
2. Neutrality: humanitarian aid favours no side (party) in an armed conflict or any other confrontation.
3. Impartiality/non-discrimination: humanitarian aid is based exclusively on need without discrimination of the recipients (meaning unconditionally and without discrimination of ethnic origin, sex, religion, social status, nationality or political opinion).
4. Independence: humanitarian aid is given independent of political, economic, military, religious or other aims.

Fields of conflict with CMR

The essential fields of conflict in civil-military relationships are given from the principles of humanitarian aid:

- Differing aims/interests: humanitarian versus geo-strategic/political interests. Military aid is a means to an end – in the end the achievement of a political aim. It can thus be connected to party aims or conditions.
- Threat to the practicability of humanitarian aid: the realization of humanitarian aid for all needy sections of the population is impossible without the acceptance of all conflicting parties and the civil population and their trust in neutrality, impartiality and the independence of relief organisations. This trust, however, can be damaged in the long term through mutual appearance with armed forces.

¹ Compiled by the “Humanitarian Aid” working group, passed by the board of the Global Responsibility working group on 21.10.2009

² In Austria, for example, the creation of an overall state foreign operation concept (FOC) for the cooperation of all protagonists was strived for in the current government programme (XXIV legislature period).

³ Compare: “Humanitarian Aid Consensus Paper” of the Global Responsibility Working Group (http://www.globaleverantwortung.at/docdownload.asp?g=1&doc=aggv_aghuhi_konsenspapier_februar2009.pdf)

- Safety risk: the loss of trust and acceptance by the civil population can also be a safety risk for relief organisation workers and hamper humanitarian aid and at worst make it impossible.

Demands and Conclusions

Global Responsibility thus rejects the mixing of military activity and the provision of humanitarian aid.

Nevertheless, the overriding humanitarian aim to save human life and alleviate suffering in exceptional situations can require a pragmatic approach.

Subsidiarity is the basic principle: the use of military resources together with humanitarian-military campaigns and other activities are to be considered **only as a final option** – when there are no other civil alternatives and when vital aid can only be provided with military support.

Thus all civil-military coordination undertaken by humanitarian organisations takes place exclusively with the aim of saving life and alleviating human suffering – impartial, neutral and independent.

The following principles must be respected:

- Humanitarian aid must take place with **impartiality** for **all groups of the population in need** and based on their need. It must not be bound to political, military or any other conditions.
- **Access** to the total population suffering need must be permanent and according to gender (under special consideration of the UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1612 Security Council resolutions⁴ and subsequent resolutions) and must be fostered and not hindered.
- The safety of relief recipients must in no way be endangered by civil-military coordination.
- Clear distinction between humanitarian and military protagonists: humanitarian aid workers must never depict their work as part of a military operation. Military personnel must never depict themselves as civil humanitarian aid workers.
- **Independence:** the planning, running and control of the given aid must remain the tasks of the relief organisations. Independence of their operational and strategic decisions is to be maintained. Humanitarian relief organisations must not carry out the tasks of the armed forces or represent or implement their affairs.
- No limitation to **freedom of action of the humanitarian relief organisations:** e.g. freedom of movement for aid workers, the execution of independent assessments, selection of recipients according to need, selection of workers, communication flow (e.g. media).
- The following guidelines are seen as the **essential principles and basis for civil-military relationships between humanitarian relief organisations and the armed forces**⁵: Oslo, MCDA⁶, and the corresponding IASC⁷ or SCHR⁸ guidelines. These are fundamentally shared by members of the Global Responsibility Working Group.

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⁴ UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; UNSCR 1820 Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a Security Challenge; UNSCR 1612 Children and Armed Conflict

⁵ Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (2006/07): <http://tiny.cc/Onr9k>

⁶ Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (2003) <http://tiny.cc/KS3uo>

⁷ Inter-Agency Standing Committee: <http://tiny.cc/rPFft>

⁸ Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) Standpoint Paper: <http://tiny.cc/j1VRo>