



International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations

Guidance from the United Nations Headquarters in Applying Protection of United Nations Missions

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. First, let me extend my gratitude to the Australian Government, particularly the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence and the Folke Bernadotte Academy for organizing the Forum around this important topic. You have been vital partners in our efforts to improve the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping, and we are encouraged by the fact that this mandated task is now the focus of so much thought and attention. In DPKO and DFS, we view the protection of civilians as one of our core mandated tasks, and we are relatively certain that those whom we are deployed to protect feel similarly.

Lessons learned over the last decade

2. That being said, the results of our efforts to protect civilians over the last decade have been mixed. We have had both major successes and significant setbacks along the way. Peacekeeping operations have quietly succeeded in protecting civilians every day through strong leadership, proactive mission staff, and the innovative approaches that missions have developed at all levels to protect civilians. Likewise, the protective effect that missions have simply in virtue of their presence and through the routine tasks that they undertake in most cases does not receive the recognition that it deserves. At the same time, there have been numerous occasions in which missions could have acted more swiftly and decisively to protect civilians under threat.

3. In any case, it has become clear that many of the deficiencies that the international community faces in its efforts to protect civilians from physical harm are systemic and must be addressed holistically. The Security Council has an important role to play in ensuring sustained political support for our efforts in the field and in garnering the resources that are required for the implementation of this mandated task. Troop and police contributors have to arrive to the mission area with the required training, capabilities, and awareness that their lives may be put on the line to protect civilians in the theater of operations. Missions, through their planning and strategy efforts, must be clear about the resources they require to implement protection of civilians mandates, must show steadfast leadership and commitment to POC, and must ensure that all relevant mission components are oriented towards the task. And the Departments of

Peacekeeping and Field Support must provide missions with the guidance and support that they need for this extremely complex undertaking. It is on this last point that I would like to provide some focus today.

4. Over the past two years, DPKO and DFS have been looking closely at the way we implement POC mandates. As a part of this effort, DPKO and OCHA commissioned an independent study on the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping operations, which you are all aware of. The study examined what Tori and her team referred to as the whole protection “chain,” from the Council to peacekeeping missions, and developed a number of very useful recommendations, some of which we have already begun to implement. This was the first in depth study of the way that peacekeeping operations protect civilians, and it contains many instructive insights that will assist us in improving our performance in this area.

5. DPKO and DFS also conducted a lessons learned exercise over the course of 2009, at the request of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, also referred to as the C34. The lessons learned note that we produced – which I hope you have all received – illuminated a number of innovative practices and approaches that missions and mission personnel have taken towards implementing POC mandates. The note also highlights a number of policy and strategy dilemmas that the missions continually confront in their implementation of POC mandates. Some of these include:

- The interpretation of the “imminent threat” clause and the “within capabilities and within areas of deployment” caveats in the Security Council mandates;
- The challenge of balancing the prioritization of protection of civilians tasks and the implementation of other mandated tasks;
- The consequences of the use of force, or failure to use force in protecting civilians;
- Balancing the responsibility of the host authorities to protect civilians with the mission’s mandate to do the same;
- And managing situations in which affiliates of the host government are responsible for attacks on civilians.

6. These dilemmas, while fundamental to implementing the POC mandate, have been left to the senior mission leadership to address in the field as they arise. As we move forward in addressing these dilemmas, we will engage with our partners and our senior mission leadership to capture the lessons learned and to identify good practices so that they would feed into our broader efforts to better our POC implementation. I hope our discussion here will help us grapple with these dilemmas in greater detail.

7. Additionally, in order to assist the “chain” of protection actors to arrive at a shared understanding of POC, and as an important step in building the conceptual architecture for POC in peacekeeping, DPKO and DFS developed an operational concept. As you will have seen, the concept aims to identify and organize the range of POC activities undertaken by the missions into a three-tiered conceptual framework.

- Protection through political process;
- Providing protection from physical violence; and
- Establishing a protective environment

8. Both the Operational Concept and the Lessons Learned Note will be useful in informing our next steps for improving the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping. We provided both of these documents to the C34 for their deliberations this year, and they were the basis for some rich – though at times difficult – discussions surrounding POC. Ultimately, the C34 gave us clearance to move forward with our efforts. In particular, they asked that we pursue three distinct tracks. First, they asked that we develop a strategic framework for mission-wide strategies. This has also been requested by the Security Council in its Resolution 1894. Second, the C34 requested that we develop POC training modules. And third, the Committee asked DPKO and DFS to outline the resource and capability requirements for the implementation of POC mandates

Strategic framework for mission-wide POC strategies

9. We have already begun work on two of these tracks. With respect to developing a “strategic framework” for mission-wide protection strategies, we will be conducting a workshop with a number of missions and representatives of the UN Country Team at the end of May. The objective of that workshop will be to develop a template for these strategies, which includes the minimum considerations that missions must take into account as they orient their missions towards executing this mandated task. While MONUC, UNMIS, and UNAMID have developed their own POC strategies, they differ dramatically in form and approach. Realizing that mission strategies must necessarily differ in light of the varied operational contexts in which they implement their mandates, there are a number of elements that strategies should reflect, irrespective of the operating environment. Without prejudging the outcome of the workshop, some of these baseline elements would include:

- The purpose and scope of the strategy: There needs to be clear statement by the senior mission leadership regarding the mission’s role vis-à-vis POC, and its principal objectives in this regard.
- Protection threat assessments and early warning mechanisms are critical for any mission with a POC mandate: Understanding the threats and vulnerabilities of civilians, and establishing mechanisms that alert the mission of impending threats to them, are essential. These are critical components for preventing attacks on civilians from occurring in the first place, which should be the mission’s overriding priority in addressing POC.
- Mission-wide POC strategies would continue to rest on the understanding that the primary responsibility to protect civilians lies with the host government, and would identify areas where the mission could provide support to the government towards this end. Strategies would have to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of

the mission vis-à-vis the host government, and other protection actors in the mission area.

- Agreed mechanisms for coordinating and consulting with POC partners are critical, and would have to be identified in the strategy.
- And a systematic monitoring and reporting system would ensure that there is a feedback loop to the decision makers, including the Security Council, to inform them of the realities on the ground and the possible limitations that the mission may be facing in implementing the POC mandates. Expectation management should be an important aspect of the POC debates. Let me come back to this issue later.

10. Once this exercise is finished and we have an agreed basic template, headquarters will begin to draft the strategic framework, which will include more detailed instructions for senior mission leadership regarding how these strategies should be developed. For the time being, the strategic framework will be geared towards the production of internal mission-wide POC strategies, as opposed to UN system-wide strategies that encompass the efforts of all UN actors in the mission area. Discussions in New York are ongoing with the agencies, funds, and programs to determine how best to move forward on a UN system-wide approach towards POC.

11. The strategic framework and mission-wide POC strategies will be an important aspect of our efforts to improve the implementation of POC mandates. However, we will need to continue developing guidance for those who plan, resource and execute protection of civilians mandates. Notwithstanding the fact that the ability of the peacekeeping mission to implement its POC mandate is essential to its credibility and legitimacy, there is no guidance dedicated to this mandated task. For example, planners joining the technical assessment missions might need guidance in terms of appropriate planning questions to ask regarding POC and what data to gather. Equally important, many of the senior leadership, including the commanders on the ground, have been requesting guidance on how to manage the policy and strategy dilemmas highlighted earlier, clarity on their roles and responsibilities with regard to POC, and more training tailored for the task.

Training

12. Our Integrated Training Service has begun to develop the architecture for POC training based on the Operational Concept and findings from the independent study and our lessons learned efforts. The training will be geared towards senior mission leadership, civilians, police and military personnel dealing with planning, supporting and implementing protection tasks in the missions and in Headquarters. This training would include modules on the political, operational, legal, humanitarian, and physical protection dimensions of POC, and will eventually also include a complement of scenario-based exercises. At the moment, we are considering a number of scenario based exercises. They include situations such as development of political and military activities indicating likelihood of emergence of violence in near future, huge influx of refugees/IDPs in tense political environment requiring protection measures, sudden deterioration of law and order requiring protection measures against bandits or other types of armed groups, intense violence by belligerents against the population requiring immediate and

robust measures, supporting the affected civilians in the immediate aftermath of violence during the consolidation phase to bring them back to normalcy. Based on the target audience, issues related to different dimensions of POC will be mainstreamed into the existing pre-deployment training programmes/courses, while some of the scenario-based exercises will be undertaken in the missions in order to reflect the different protection challenges that the missions face.

13. We are aiming to have some of these training modules finalized by the end of the year. Once finalized, they will be piloted with Member States and in the missions. We will require the support of troop and the police contributing countries that have accumulated experience in implementing protection of civilians mandates over the years. We will also need additional temporary resources during this surge effort.

Resource and capability requirements

14. We will be taking forward our work on outlining the resource and capability requirements for POC in the larger context of the capability-driven approach, which forms a part of the New Horizon agenda, and was also discussed by the C34. This will be an important step in ensuring that peacekeepers are adequately outfitted to prevent and respond to situations in which the safety of civilians is at risk.

Conclusion

15. In reflecting on the state of the POC debate only a few years ago, I believe that we have made significant progress towards understanding how we can improve our implementation of this mandated task, thanks in large part to the active engagement of many Member States and key partners. We are encouraged that the Security Council has been so forward leaning on this topic, as illustrated by resolution 1894, and we are happy that the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations gave us clear instructions to move forward with our efforts.

16. One final word on the expectation management. Achieving realistic understanding of what can be expected of UN peacekeeping in protecting civilians needs to be an important aspect of our future guidance. At the operational level, the better understanding by the local population on the limitation of peacekeeping is crucial for our overall relationship with the local community, and may even optimize our effectiveness in the mandate implementation by cooperating on prevention and mitigation measures. At the political level, it will be important to bear in mind that this is an endeavor that belongs to the entire chain of protection actors, including the Security Council and contributing countries – concerted action from DPKO, DFS, and the peacekeeping missions alone will not suffice.