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**Multi-dimensional Peace-building Missions and Safeguarding Humanitarian Space:
*Background Note***

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Introduction

A core challenge confronting humanitarian actors in conflict settings, and to a lesser extent in slow- and sudden-onset disasters, is their ability to safeguard humanitarian space. Different environments present different challenges and opportunities to humanitarian actors to meet their objectives in a principled, timely, and effective manner.

Since the end of the Cold War, a number of old and new factors¹ have impacted on the ability of humanitarian actors to be effective. Undoubtedly, the changing global order and global ordering are significant factors. It is of no less importance that the right of civilians to be treated as non-combatants is now considered a critical issue in many circles. This has, in part, generated more attention to “the responsibility to protect” and the “protection of civilians” agendas both in and outside the humanitarian arena. Indeed, the willingness of the Security Council, African Union, NATO and others to take action that, formally at least, is geared to ensuring or enhancing the safety of civilians in armed conflict situations, as well as the growing trend to make military assets available in support of humanitarian endeavour, is seen by many as a positive trend.

It is equally apparent, however, that significant concerns abound on the role of military actors within the humanitarian arena and on the implications of military interventions that have not been sanctioned by the UN Security Council. A multitude of different experiences, the risk and reality of being associated with a party to a conflict, and the blurring of distinctions between humanitarian and other entities, has given rise to a chorus of concerns that has led to much debate and divisiveness both in and outside the humanitarian arena.

¹ The idea is not to present an indicative or an exhaustive list, nor to present an analysis of the issues but, rather, to flag that humanitarians are operating in an environment that has changed significantly in recent decades.

The issue of *humanitarian space*² including attitudes to, and degree of association with, UN-led peace-building missions³, has arisen on numerous occasions within the IASC, including, most recently, at the Working Group meeting in June 2005. Indeed, many IASC members are of the view that the absence of an agreed position or policy perspective on factors, structures, and processes that adversely affect principled humanitarian action complicates internal IASC decision-making on the overall agenda to strengthen and improve humanitarian action and capabilities. In other words, while there is consensus on the importance of humanitarian space there are significant differences of opinion as to how humanitarian entities, whether UN or non-UN, should relate to political, military and other peace-building processes and structures that are seen to dominate, manipulate, instrumentalize, subjugate, support or facilitate humanitarian action.

Subject Areas of Concern

Discussions on the importance of “safeguarding humanitarian space”, within the context of peace-enforcement, peace-building, “integrated” or “coherent” missions, have, almost invariably, proved emotive and contentious. This, in turn, has hindered open and frank discussion on a particular concern or set of concerns. Thus, following, are a series of issues that have been framed from the perspective (a) of facilitating the identification of an IASC agenda and (b) as a basis for determining modalities and timelines for IASC decision-making in this subject area.

Issue One: Implications of a unified UN position for humanitarian action

When the UN takes a unified position in post-ceasefire/peace-building settings, various humanitarian entities have concerns about the ability of the UN to provide leadership within the humanitarian arena so that the overall humanitarian strategy, and related programmes, are widely considered to be in accord with core humanitarian principles and give effect to the humanitarian imperative. In other words, if an Interim Administration, for example, includes alleged war criminals, or the central Administration does not exert authority at the provincial or sub-regional level, or fighting continues notwithstanding the formal cessation of “major combat” activities, there is a danger of humanitarian space being eroded. In sum, in many settings, there are obvious tensions “between the *partiality* involved in supporting a political transition process and the *impartiality* needed to protect humanitarian space.”⁴

Issue Two: Different Peace-building Models and Humanitarian Interface

One of the findings of the study on “Integrated Missions” (IM) is that there is no fixed template but, rather, lots of different models for UN-led peace-building initiatives.

² For the purposes of this paper *humanitarian space* is understood as respect for core humanitarian principles, including the right of non-combatants to be treated as civilians, so that there is an operating environment that is conducive to effective humanitarian action. Maintaining a clear distinction between the role and function of humanitarian actors, and that of others, tends to be a critical factor in safeguarding *humanitarian space*.

³ For the purposes of this discussion, the focus is on post-ceasefire/peace agreement environments. It is well acknowledged that pertinent issues also arise in pre-ceasefire settings including in particular in the lead-up to peace agreements. However, there appears to be a wide consensus that in open conflict situations the humanitarian imperative is paramount, needs to be respected, and that there should be no blurring of lines/images.

⁴ See “Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations” by Espen Barth Eide, Anja Theresa Kaspersen, Randolph Kent, and Karen von Hippel, May 2005

One of the recommendations of the IM study is that “form should follow function”. This tends to indicate that post-ceasefire, peace-building environments do not lend themselves to fixed formulas in terms of the institutional architecture that needs to be in place to maximize synergies between different sets of activities.

Given the diverse range of models and experiences that obtain there is some confusion as to what precisely is meant by terms such as “integrated missions”. This, in turn, has inhibited a productive exchange of views as a basis for policy formulation within humanitarian circles. For the purposes of this discussion, it may be useful to reflect on the relationship between humanitarian entities (and, by extension, humanitarian action) and different IM models as a debate about different degrees of “integration”, “insulation” and “separation”.⁵ From this perspective, the focus is on the implications of different models for impartial, independent, neutral and coordinated humanitarian action.

Various IASC members have highlighted the need for a clear and unambiguous guidance note on the policies and modalities that should frame the interface between humanitarian and other actors in multi-dimensional peace-building contexts so that humanitarian space is respected.

Issue Three: Humanitarianism Unbound

Tensions and confusion between humanitarian and other actors often occur given the ambiguous⁶ nature of humanitarianism in protracted conflict and peace-building settings and the limited ability of the humanitarian community to agree on priorities and on the outer boundaries of humanitarian endeavour. This problem is further exacerbated by the generally limited capacity to monitor, measure and report on the severity of crises and their evolution. *Note: these two issues, namely (a) scope of humanitarian action and (b) ability to measure level of need throughout a crisis need to be cross-referenced with the agenda item concerned with Benchmarks.*

Issue Four: SRSB Terms of Reference; responsibilities re Humanitarian Action

It is the view of various IASC members that the SRSB's ToR should clearly indicate the SRSB's responsibility to promote respect and support for the humanitarian imperative and principles so that there is an environment conducive to timely and effective humanitarian action. Thus, for example, if military assets need to be mobilized to provide logistic support, this will only occur at the request, and under the overall direction of, the Humanitarian Coordinator. In this connection, it appears important that the Guidance “Note on relations between Representatives of the Secretary General, Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators” reflects the importance of responsibilities and measures needed to safeguard humanitarian space.

⁵ The terms “integration”, “insulation, and “separation” are in inverted commas as degrees of integration and insulation have not been defined.

⁶ Ambiguity occurs for several reasons including the use of the term “humanitarian” as an all-embracing label for a wide variety of activities, the high number of dual mandate assistance agencies, and the lack of clear distinctions between development and relief work which is seen as positive in some instances but unhelpful in settings where conditionalities are imposed on funding for capacity-building and empowerment programmes.

Issue Five: Humanitarian Coordinators, multiple functions, selection in IMs:

Various IASC members have raised concerns about the way in which HCs are selected for multi-dimensional missions and the ability of HCs who, almost invariably, are multi-hatted, to defend humanitarian space when different agendas and objectives collide. As noted in the IM study, there is an inbuilt tension between *integrative* transitional arrangements and longer-term development. It is apparent that tensions also exist between those tasked with delivering on the humanitarian imperative while simultaneously working with Transitional Authorities who may be the source of the problem giving rise to humanitarian need. The IM study notes that the UN Secretary General has stressed that "...it is essential to ensure a conducive humanitarian operating environment, including safe and unimpeded access to vulnerable populations."⁷ From this perspective, some IASC members have indicated that there is a need for clear criteria to determine when it may be appropriate for a single-hat HC both in peace-building/transformational environments and in other settings. There is also wide interest in reviewing the HC selection process for peace-building mission contexts. *Note: This issue needs to be cross-referenced with the agenda item on HC/Coordination System Strengthening.*

Issue Six: Planning and Design of Peace-building Missions

According to the IM study, one of the key weaknesses in the strategic planning and design of multi-dimensional peace-building missions, is an evident lack of inclusiveness. In other words, key stakeholders and constituencies have not been adequately engaged in defining the overall direction and structure of such exercises in the past. This is seen as one of the contributing factors to problems that arise during the implementation phase.⁸

There appears to be consensus on the need to avoid parallel structures (namely different entities having the same task or similar agenda). However, the absence of consensus (a) on what constitutes "humanitarian action", and (b) who is in overall charge of strategic humanitarian direction and focus has, in many instances, given rise to serious difficulties in the course of the transition process. It appears that tensions between the humanitarian community and SRSG-led initiatives and perspectives are most acute in settings where military action is deemed necessary to secure the safety at-risk civilians or when political or military-driven initiatives are substantially involved in assistance work.

In sum, it appears that the planning and design process does not adequately address issues concerned with (a) the multiple responsibilities of the SRSG Deputy responsible for assistance work that often includes elements of DDRR (disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and recovery), (b) lack of commitment – or perceived lack of commitment – of senior UN managers to safeguard humanitarian space, and (c) the absence of formal and transparent processes to resolve conflicting agendas so that the humanitarian imperative is respected and facilitated. Thus, it would appear important to re-visit the apparatus and modalities of the planning process so that issues concerned with humanitarian space, principles and action are adequately addressed. This includes a structural design that has clearly defined mechanisms to resolve conflicting agendas and the need to maintain clear distinctions between

⁷ IM Report, page 28 which makes refers to the SG's report "In Larger Freedom" para 211

⁸ Other weaknesses were also identified including the general absence of field-based inputs in pre-Mission planning processes that were seen to be DPKO-driven.

humanitarian and other forms of activity. In this connection, it would also appear useful to re-visit the SG's Guidance Note on relations between Representatives of the SG, RCs and HCs (Oct 2000).⁹

Issue Seven: QIPs (Quick Impact Project), Hearts + Minds

There are lots of different experiences and perspectives on military involvement in assistance programmes – either in a relief or development context – that can be summarized as three distinct but inter-locking issues. These include (a) the implications for humanitarian space given the importance of clear distinctions between humanitarian and other actors, (b) the use of “hearts and minds” interventions to collect information for military purposes that is seen to be particularly dangerous for humanitarian programmes and personnel, and (c) the potential ramifications of short-term interventions in contexts where they run the risk of eroding or destroying, for example, pre-existing health care services that, however rudimentary, were sustainable and provided a much needed service albeit for fee-paying clients.

As noted in the IM study, “there is need for a clear doctrine” on such activities so that those in uniform, and their supervisors, (a) have clear operational guidance, and (b) mechanisms are available to address situations or issues that are in contravention of agreed doctrine.

Issue Eight: Impact studies and Evidence-based Insights on IMs

Given the profound and contentious character of the debate, both in and outside humanitarian circles, on the nature and utility of multi-dimensional peace-building missions, including their relatively high failure rate¹⁰, various IASC members have underlined the importance of the need for a series of independent studies and thorough-going research that examines the implications of different models and outcomes in terms of their overall impact on humanitarian endeavour and results.

In other words, while there are lots of viewpoints on the implications of humanitarian actors operating in partnership, or being integrated with, UN-led peace missions, there is relatively little solid research to substantiate different schools of thought on advantages and disadvantages of different models including those that pre-date the Brahimi report (“Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations”, 2000).

⁹ UNAMA support for PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) in Afghanistan is seen to contravene this guidance which indicates that relief and development are “performed by civilians”.

¹⁰ “Recent experience shows us that nearly half of the countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence after five years” Kofi Annan told a global conference of civil society activists. Inter Press Service, New York, 20 July, 2005

Proposed Actions by the IASC Working Group:

1. IASC Working Group Members to decide which, if any, of the above or other issues require policy clarification and improved modalities to enhance humanitarian space in the future.
2. IASC Working Group Members to decide on a timeframe and modalities (such as a series of meetings or a dedicated one-day meeting) to define a draft IASC policy position and related modalities to safeguard humanitarian space.

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