

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
PRINCIPALS MEETING**

**7 April 2005**

**9:30 – 13:00 hrs**

**Room I, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

**Addressing the Protection Crisis in Humanitarian Situations**

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In the last five years, humanitarian agencies have come a long way in recognizing the importance of rights-based programming and using a protection framework to understand and address the needs of civilians caught in conflict or displaced from their homes. The broad consultation work, led by ICRC through a series of workshops with humanitarian and human rights actors, arrived at a broad definition of protection which stems from the legal framework of human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law and ‘anchors’ many current IASC policy documents (including the IASC policy on the collaborative response). While the policy and conceptual work has led to greater recognition of the importance of a protection analysis and framework, more work is required to further translate the concept into meaningful action at the ground level.

Over a similar period there have also been improvements within the political arena in recognizing the international community’s responsibility to act in the face of massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Since 1999 for example, the protection of civilians, particularly women and children, has become a formal item on the agenda of the Security Council. The ERC regularly reports to the Security Council on protection of civilians, based on the 10-point platform submitted to the Council in December 2003.

There are however important challenges remaining, both at the technical field level and at the political level in the Security Council. In Darfur, the international community responded too late to a number of clear indicators that a human rights crisis was in the making. Even after humanitarian access was belatedly granted by the Sudanese government, the agencies took too long to deploy experienced protection staff and put in place the necessary protection structures.

The collaborative approach to IDP protection has not been a success in Darfur. However, if we agree that national authorities are not only part of the collaborative response but actually have the foremost responsibility, the main responsibility for the relative failure in Darfur is with the government of Sudan. Agencies can and should do more in Darfur, but we also need to recognize that the most coordinated and resourced protection efforts are likely to fail in contexts where the host government is part of the problem rather than the solution and security for agencies is not ensured.

The recently announced increased commitment of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights for more field-based monitoring, promotion and

protection of human rights is significant and very welcome. This step must also be matched by adequate resources and support in order to allow the office to carry out its role and vital mandate.

Although it is difficult to capture the complexity of advancing and clarifying the protection agenda in brief form, there are several priority areas for future action.

### **Protection Strategies and Advocacy**

In order to avoid ad hoc, uncoordinated and ultimately ineffective protection activities, country teams need to ensure that realistic, action-oriented strategies are in place that include effective advocacy components.

Strategies need to clearly identify priorities, based on what is possible in a given context and who will do what to achieve the objectives. A country team's ability to undertake protection work differs substantially between Darfur and Uganda, for example.

Strategies and a division of labour must start with an assessment of the affected population and clear identification of threats and patterns of violations. A comprehensive analysis should also lead to innovative and creative tactics by humanitarian agencies to use programming to further strengthen respect for the rights of civilians and the displaced. Urgent attention is required for issues such as sexual and gender based violence and camp management.

Advocacy efforts should also be included which promote respect for rights of civilians by appropriate authorities and actors. Messages should be clear, dynamic and unified within the country team.

Monitoring implementation of the strategy and ensuring accountability is a vital component and responsibility of the Humanitarian Coordinator and the IASC country team.

### **Protection Capacity**

Agencies need to increase their internal protection capacity in order to promote rapid and adequate deployment of experienced protection and human rights officers during critical stages of an IDP emergency. The experience of Darfur and elsewhere underlines the importance of having senior experienced staff in place.

The InterAgency Internal Displacement Division of OCHA has also been requested to develop a standby Protection Capacity to be at the disposal of humanitarian agencies including UNHCR, UNICEF and OCHA. The profiles would also include individuals who could support the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Although still in the planning stage, the goal is to have a number of pre-selected, pre-trained experienced individuals with 'protection profiles' available through a specialized project, working closely with standby partners such as the Norwegian

Refugee Council. A core team of at least 10 experienced senior staff able to rapidly lead and manage protection activities until agencies are able to deploy staff is a key component of the project.

The main task would be to establish and support appropriate structures and plans in support of the Humanitarian Coordinator or protection-mandated agencies. Support would include management, strategic advice, intervention and monitoring of key civilian humanitarian protection issues, including for IDPs.

The individuals would be intensively trained by all agencies.

The intention is not to duplicate existing standby arrangements but to provide a global senior complement to them. By taking an ‘interagency’ approach, it should be possible to build a future protection capacity from which all can benefit rather than compete over limited resources.

**Proposed Actions by the IASC Principals:**

- Strongly encourage agencies to increase their protection capacity at the field level
- Strongly encourage HCs and IASC country teams to develop and implement action orientated protection strategies at the field level with clear division of labour
- Welcome the intention of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to become more active at the field level
- Welcome the initiative to develop a protection standby capacity and requests agencies to work jointly with OCHA/IDD to continue to develop the concept and its implementation
- Strongly encourage further dialogue among protection-mandated agencies, OHCHR, UNHCR, UNICEF as well as OCHA and DPKO to ensure complementarity and effective action in the field