

THE ROLE OF SECURITY ACTORS IN PROTECTING CIVILIANS

INSTITUTIONAL LEAD

Center for Civilians in Conflict

MODERATOR

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OVERVIEW

Protection of civilians is an important aspect of conflict-resolution efforts and there is a need to involve security actors in the protection of civilians. There is ample research to show that one of the primary reasons why young men across the world join armed non-state actors is violence against their families and communities. The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) with others have been working for many years to change the mindset of military actors by making legal, ethical and strategic arguments for better protection of civilians and providing concrete tools for enhancing protection.

FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

The session aimed to raise awareness of the concrete ways in which security actors can better protect civilians in conflict. It profiled specific approaches that the Nigerian military, civil society and conflict-affected communities are taking to improve protection and mitigate civilian harm in conflict areas. It also highlighted the tangible impact of these efforts on civilians' lives and on the relations between armed actors and civilians.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The protection of civilians in conflict areas is of paramount importance, not only legally, morally and ethically, but also strategically. For security actors, not protecting civilians means losing support as the space can easily be filled, thus protracting and prolonging conflicts.

An overarching approach at the strategic, institutional and operational levels have been proven to be effective in furthering the protection of civilians. In the case of Nigeria, supporting the drafting of national legislation on the protection of civilians, institutionalizing education of international humanitarian law in the military, and confidence building at a local level between communities and the military have all had positive effects.

Channels for communication are important to build trust and understanding between civilian communities and the military. It is important for the military to take local experiences from civilians into account to more effectively formulate policies that help the communities instead of hurting them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take an overarching approach on strategic, institutional, and operational levels when furthering the protection of civilians.
- The military should take local experiences from civilians into account when formulating policies.
- The military should understand conflict dynamics and the perspectives of local civilians not to cause further conflict, especially when crafting programmes for re-integration of armed groups back into society.
- Address the issues plaguing the military, such as low morale, trauma and psychological problems, which may erode their ability and inclination to protect civilians.

RESOURCE LINKS AND DOCUMENTS

Center for Civilians in Conflict, <<https://civiliansinconflict.org/>>.



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