

## InterAction Recommendations for the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

March 2021

The below recommendations build on and provide greater specificity to previous exchanges between the UN High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement (hereafter “the Panel”) and InterAction on 17 November and 17 December 2020, as well as its [submission](#) in May 2020.

1. The Panel should encourage **Member States to develop national policies on the protection of civilians, to include a focus on anticipating and avoiding conflict-induced forced displacement** and minimizing harm associated with displacement. As part of developing national policies and frameworks on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (PoC), Member States should:
  - Explicitly commit to avoid causing forced displacement unless, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), it is necessary to safeguard human life, to protect voluntary displacement, and to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of civilian populations during their displacement, including by facilitating and allowing access by impartial humanitarian organizations.<sup>1</sup>
  - Anticipate the reverberating effects of military operations for civilian populations—notably from the destruction of vital systems—as part of military strategy, planning, and conduct of hostilities. This could include, inter alia: analyzing civilian objects’ functions in relation to civilian life and livelihoods and assessing potential or observed harms resulting from damage to civilian objects; forecasting displacement trends and risks and integrating relevant real-time information into operational decisions with a view to avoiding displacement; taking steps to avoid, reduce, and restrict use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) and other indiscriminate weapons use.<sup>2</sup>
  - Ensure acknowledgement of harm resulting from military operations and establish measures to provide amends, redress, and restitution to civilian populations which were forcibly displaced, experienced harm, and/or continue to suffer from the long-term effects of military operations. Amends and redress could be made at the individual or community level for displaced populations. In addition to public acknowledgement of harm or apology for harm suffered, amends may involve monetary payments where appropriate, and community-wide restoration. Amends and redress should always be context-specific, designed for accessibility by all vulnerable people, and be culturally appropriate.
  - Actively encourage and solicit the input of civil society and community actors for feeding into these PoC policies and frameworks. This should be a continuous process and result in comprehensive measures that are inclusive of civilian populations’ concerns.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See [“Displacement and the Protection of Civilians in U.S. Military and Partnered Operations.”](#)

<sup>2</sup> See [“Protection of Civilian Objects including Critical Infrastructure in U.S. Military Operations”](#) and Stanford Health Policy and InterAction, [“Building the Evidence Base: Addressing the Reverberating Effects of Military Operations on Civilian Life.”](#)

<sup>3</sup> See [“Civil Society Guidance for Model Policy: U.S. Department of Defense Policy on Civilian Harm”](#) and [“DoD Engagement with Humanitarian and Human Rights Organizations on Civilian Harm.”](#) See also examples of such contributions from [Belgium on explosive weapons](#) and [Netherlands on transparency](#) (see also [here](#)).

- This recommendation for the Panel echoes the [UN Secretary-General's call](#) for Member States to develop national-level policy frameworks on PoC. But it also goes further by stressing the necessary components for avoiding conflict-induced displacement within PoC policies.
2. The Panel should foster and cultivate a **community of practice with State champions on avoiding forced displacement in military operations and security partnerships**.
- Champions should be identified amongst Member States, and a community of practice established, for avoiding forced displacement in the context of their military operations. This community could be initiated and sustained through bi-annual meetings. Initial discussions could take place in a private forum setting for the first year (if preferable), and then opened to include civil society organizations in an observer or participatory role. Fostering a vibrant community, chaired by one or two Member States which come forward to share lessons arising from their own efforts to avoid displacement arising from their military operations, will help promote dialogue on practices that reduce conflict-induced displacement.
  - Outcomes from this process could include a set of guidelines and practical measures for States to avoid forced displacement in the context of armed conflict. This community of practice can also stimulate national PoC policy processes and help normalize and reinforce the UNSG's recommendation.
  - Topics that could be discussed among States in such a forum include:
    - Good practice and lessons learned on early warning and early action to anticipate civilian harm risks and respond to population movements, means of ensuring safe and orderly population movements when necessary to safeguard civilian lives, harnessing civilian populations' experiences and concerns through civil-military dialogue and community-based approaches (e.g., see Mali and Sahel region context).<sup>4</sup>
    - Military experience and best practices to engage civil society organizations and affected populations on displacement concerns and developing contingency plans prior to and during military operations.
    - Anticipating, avoiding, and responding to damage to civilian property, public services, and infrastructure in conflict.<sup>5</sup>
    - Minimizing and restricting the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> See CIVIC, "[Afghanistan: Community Engagement on Civilian Protection](#)." See also OHCHR, "[Status Report: OHCHR Project supporting the Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework \(1 May 2018-31 March 2020\)](#)" (in particular 16, 56, 86, 100, 105, 107, and 122). See also CIVIC, "[Waiting for No One: Civilian Survival Strategies in Syria](#)."

<sup>5</sup> See "[Protection of Civilian Objects including Critical Infrastructure in U.S. Military Operations](#)" and Stanford Health Policy and InterAction, "[Building the Evidence Base: Addressing the Reverberating Effects of Military Operations on Civilian Life](#)."

<sup>6</sup> See Airwars, "[Belgium parliament to vote on resolution to protect civilians from explosive weapons use in cities](#)."

- Challenges and opportunities to strengthen PoC through security partnerships, including partnered and coalition operations as well as other arrangements (training and equipping, support operations, regional agreements, etc.)<sup>7</sup>
  - Acknowledgement, amends, redress, and restitution for harm suffered at individual and community levels.
  - Initial engagement by the Panel with key Member States and potential champions/participants should include a focus on improving the conduct of military operations and of military forces so as to avoid causing displacement. Sustained engagement should subsequently be pursued to encourage States to engage in bilateral discussions with one another including open dialogue to share lessons and best practices on avoiding forced displacement.
  - Several countries may be useful starting points to potential championship of avoiding forced displacement, in light of their ongoing national policy processes on PoC. These include: Afghanistan; Netherlands; Ukraine; United States.
  - In addition to the permanent missions / delegations of the 4 countries listed above, the roles of the AU, EU and NATO could also be solicited for this purpose.
3. The Panel should call on Member States to actively participate in the [multilateral consultations process on explosive weapons in populated areas \(EWIPA\)](#) led by [Ireland](#) and to sign the political declaration on EWIPA.
- The contribution of explosive weapons to forced displacement in armed conflict is well documented, particularly when they are used in densely populated urban areas.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, among many other PoC concerns, a group of States have spearheaded a multilateral initiative to restrict the use of these indiscriminate weapons with wide-areas effects. Some States, like Belgium also undertake national-level processes to support their contribution to the initiative and bolster international commitments.
  - The Panel would be well placed to seize on the EWIPA multilateral process, emphasize its importance for reducing forced displacement globally, voice support for its success, and call on States to sign the international political declaration, with a view to help reduce conflict-induced displacement.
4. The Panel should encourage Member States that are parties to armed conflict to regularly engage with civil society organizations, local NGOs, and community actors throughout the course of military operations with a view to addressing displacement and related protection concerns.
- This should be conducted regularly, including before the onset of operations and after these have subsided. Where feasible engagement should be continuous, foster a reliable protection focused dialogue, and spur concrete measures to reduce forced displacement and civilian harm associated with displacement. For example, States should take into consideration the risks faced by displaced civilians, as well as those remaining behind, and should establish appropriate plans with

---

<sup>7</sup> See CIVIC, [“The Sum Of All Parts: Reducing Civilian Harm in Multinational Coalition Operations”](#) and CSIS, CIVIC and InterAction, [“The Protection of Civilians in U.S. Partnered Operations.”](#) See also [“U.S. Partnered Operations and the Protection of Civilians.”](#)

<sup>8</sup> See [“Building the Evidence Base: Addressing the Reverberating Effects of Military Operations on Civilian Life.”](#) See also [AOAV](#), [Article36](#), [Pax for Peace](#), [UNHCR](#), and many others.

communities to ensure that voluntary population movements are undertaken in a safe and orderly manner, including facilitating safe evacuation routes, exit corridors, emergency medical operations, and other contingency planning.

- Meanwhile, the Panel should consult directly with internally displaced people in affected contexts of concerns, as an integral part of its country-level assessments and development of a final report to the UN Secretary-General.<sup>9</sup> Direct engagement with internally displaced people should be pursued with a view to learning from and highlighting local experiences of military operations and displacement, and generating insights on ways to better prevent and address conflict-induced displacement.
5. The Panel should recommend **prioritized resourcing and strengthening of OCHA-led civil-military coordination (CMCoord) capacity to help facilitate civil-military dialogue on PoC.**
- This should include OCHA CMCoord staffing, training, and overall capacity to foster protection dialogue in conflict settings, notably to enhance the capacity of the Humanitarian Coordinators and the broader humanitarian community to anticipate and address civilian harm and displacement-related risks through engagement with State and non-State parties to conflict.<sup>10</sup>
  - Further to highlighting overall budgetary needs of CMCoord within OCHA, the Panel can highlight specific contexts where strengthened CMCoord capacity is urgently needed to address ongoing conflict-induced displacement and severe protection concerns. These include Ethiopia, Libya, Mali and Sahel region, Nigeria, Syria, and Yemen.

## About InterAction

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for international non-governmental organizations working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

Please direct specific questions to Katherine Kramer, Senior Manager for Protection of Civilians at InterAction [kkramer@interaction.org](mailto:kkramer@interaction.org).

---

<sup>9</sup> See InterAction Protection of Civilians Working Group, “[Minimizing Civilian Harm in Military Operations: InterAction Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement.](#)”

<sup>10</sup> See Brown University, “[Re-assessing the Civil-Military Coordination Service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.](#)”