

For a Safer Tomorrow

Protecting civilians
in a multipolar world

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Front cover image: Fadera Diatta, displaced by the war in Casamance (2000).
Ami Vitale/Oxfam

Back cover image: The Indian contingent of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), consisting mostly of women, arrives in Monrovia to begin its tour of duty (2007).
Eric Canalstein/UN Photo

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Summary

One night in March 2007, soldiers arrived in the village of Buramba in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). By the time they left at least 15 people were dead. 'At 5.30 in the morning', one survivor said, 'I saw the soldiers coming to our house...They kicked down the door, and killed eight people inside. Only my four grandchildren survived. [They] continued firing in the village. I fled into the bush. I returned three days later to see the bodies of my children and my mother. The bodies were in latrines; I could see the feet of my mother sticking out.'¹

The point about this story is not that it is shocking, but that in many parts of the world it is unexceptional. In the DRC, the violence that has increased since that incident has forced even more people to flee from their homes, and led to the deaths of almost 1,500 people a day.² Though no other conflict causes that kind of death rate, Oxfam's workers hear similar stories of murder, rape, and displacement from men and women from Colombia to Sudan every day. That is why Oxfam is publishing this report. Sixty years after the main Geneva Conventions enshrined civilians' rights to protection, they are violated in every current conflict. Many people sympathise with those who suffer these atrocities, but feel impotent to do anything about it. Many governments feel the same. They think that there is little that can be done. That is wrong.

Some states and non-state actors choose to kill civilians, or pursue strategies in which civilians are too likely to die. Some governments choose to protect their citizens: to keep them safe. Some do not protect all of them, or not well enough. This report will argue that this is far from inevitable – that successful examples of protecting civilians show what governments and others can do when they choose to. It will argue that they have an interest in doing so, because mass atrocities fuel the conflicts that, in an interdependent world, create security threats that cannot be contained. And an increasing number of governments have a 'moral interest' too, because their electorates expect them to help prevent, not just condemn, the atrocities they see beamed around the world through modern information technology.

Governments and others can reduce the mass atrocities that blight the world in the early twenty-first century. To do so, they need to make four changes that this report will explore. They need to:

- make the protection of civilians the overriding priority in the response to conflicts everywhere – actively working to protect civilians, and upholding the Responsibility to Protect civilians from mass atrocities, agreed at the 2005 UN World Summit, as a cornerstone of policy;
- adopt zero tolerance of war crimes – whether in counter-terrorism or elsewhere – applying the same standard of international opprobrium to war crimes committed by friends or foes alike;
- act much more quickly to tackle the trends that threaten new or prolonged conflicts – including poverty and inequality, climate change, and arms proliferation – so that we can be better at preventing as well as reacting to conflicts;
- join up effective action at every level, from local communities to the UN Security Council – so that international action works in conjunction with what works on the ground. To help achieve this, the way the UN Security Council works should be urgently reformed with greater transparency and accountability, in which the Council's members have to account for their performance in pursuing international peace and security, including their Responsibility to Protect civilians from mass atrocities. All permanent members of the Security Council should renounce the use of their veto when the Council is discussing situations of actual or incipient war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

Killing civilians

In 2006, it was estimated that the wars in the DRC, Darfur, and Iraq were killing around three-quarters of a million people a year. This is 30 times the annual death toll from global terrorism,³ but represents only a fraction of those killed and raped today in the world's 31 major conflicts,⁴ most of them unreported outside their own countries. Indeed, the great majority of these are internal conflicts, often fought for decades, and largely forgotten by the outside world, like those in Colombia or Sri Lanka.

Some things, however, *do* change. Since 2001, the global 'war on terror' has had its effect on most of the world's conflicts. In 2006, 63 per cent of the world's new refugees were from the two countries on its main front lines, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵ Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia that year, condoned



After an Israeli air strike on southern Beirut in 2006, Ashbal-el-sahel School was unsafe for children to study in.

by the West as part of the ‘war on terror’, contributed to the country’s new level of humanitarian crisis that continues to this day. In 2007, for the second year running, more Iraqis sought asylum in industrialised countries than any other nationality.⁶

Terrorism by its very nature is a crime against civilians, and the global ‘war on terror’ has been fought in the name of protecting civilians from it. Every government has a responsibility to defeat terrorism, and protect its citizens from atrocities of all kinds.

Yet in the fight against terrorism, some governments have lost sight of

this purpose and allowed too many civilians to die. In 2006, Israeli air strikes killed about a thousand Lebanese civilians in a failed attempt to defeat the threat from Hizbullah. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in 2007, these strikes exemplified a

wider and lethal ‘tendency to balance civilian casualties against military advantages that are hardly perceptible’⁷ – in other words, to justify a large number of dead civilians for a relatively small victory in the ‘war on terror’.

That tendency is one of the reasons that thus far the ‘war on terror’ is failing to defeat terrorism worldwide. 9/11 has not been repeated, but global terrorism, and the number of attacks in the Middle East and Europe, has significantly increased. In part, this has been fuelled by anger against the invasion of Iraq and the international conduct of the ‘war on terror’ itself. Too much of that conduct has been counter-productive.

Insurgents have found no difficulty in exploiting the hostility that Abu Ghraib and other abuses have created; as one Afghan man said in 2007:

*The Taliban killed two members of my family. The invading forces killed 16. You work out what side I’m on.*⁸

From 2009, the new US president will not have been responsible for the conduct of the ‘war on terror’ before that. Indeed, the new US administration has an unrivalled potential to lead international action towards the better protection of civilians worldwide. It has the chance to

re-establish international confidence in the wisdom of US leadership. In doing so, a new US commitment to the protection of civilians, and to upholding international humanitarian law, would be a profound signal that the USA wants to work with international opinion, to lead from a position of moral strength.

To date, the ‘war on terror’ has overshadowed those crises like the DRC that have killed far more people than global terrorism has. With a death toll more than twice that of Iraq, the DRC has lost 8 per cent of its people to conflict and the deadly hunger and disease that it has unleashed.⁹ If the USA lost a similar proportion of civilians, 25 million people, more than the population of Texas, would have died. In China, that figure would be 110 million people, more than the population of the Yangtze Delta. Yet the catastrophe in the DRC has gone largely unreported around the world.

Real and future danger

It has nevertheless become fashionable to celebrate the decline in the number of conflicts since the end of the Cold War. This is a dangerous half-truth. The number of conflicts has fallen substantially, but there is little evidence to suggest that that trend will continue. The threat of new wars, the failure of precarious peace deals, the political exploitation of poverty and inequality, and the destabilising impact of climate change all cast doubt on a continued decline in the number of conflicts.

In 2007 one report estimated that 46 countries with a total population of 2.7 billion will face ‘a high risk of violent conflict’ because of the ‘double-headed risk’ when climate change exacerbates traditional security threats, like the gross inequality between different groups that can be so easily exploited by extremists.¹⁰ All those countries must adapt to climate change by reducing inequalities, not increasing them. If a fraction of them fail, we may see a significant increase in the number of armed conflicts in the decades ahead. Even more urgently, the world’s *current* failure to reduce poverty and inequality means that, in the five years to 2013, any of the poorest countries in the world has been estimated to have a one in six chance of civil war.¹¹

Beyond these, there is a wide range of additional threats of major violence of global significance between now and 2020. In 2008 a survey of government officials and academics from more than 20 countries identified those that, while not being probable, are certainly possible,

including the terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction, a nuclear exchange between two countries, and the collapse of countries such as Pakistan.¹²

In short, the threat of conflict, and the killing of civilians that comes almost inevitably with it, is as great as ever – unless the world takes substantially more effective action to reduce it. This report will argue both that we can and we should.

Protect civilians? Why?

Civilians should be protected because it is the right thing to do, *and* because it is in almost everyone's interest.

First, the moral argument is simple. Every person has the right to be protected from murder, rape, and displacement. Sixty years ago, in December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promised everyone the right to 'life, liberty and security', to live free from fear and from want. But in 2008 for millions of people, that promise remains unfulfilled.¹³

Also 60 years ago, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, were agreed. That law did not just prohibit deliberate violence against civilians. It also outlawed any violence that had an impact on civilians which was disproportionate to the warring parties' legitimate military ends.

Then in 2005, at the UN World Summit, governments made the most important reaffirmation of those basic principles. Almost every government in the world agreed their 'Responsibility to Protect' their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and agreed that the international community also has a responsibility to help.¹⁴ The world's governments had said 'never again' after the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Srebrenica. After large-scale civilian suffering in the first years of war in Iraq and Darfur, it was time to try again.

An interest in rights

Tragically, it is not enough for governments to agree international law for it to make a difference in people's lives; unless governments see that the law can support their own interests, it is unlikely to be enforced. That is why it is so important to recognise that almost everyone has an *interest* in

protection and peace, not atrocities and conflict. The only people that do not are war criminals and those, such as irresponsible arms exporters and dealers, who profit from war. In security as in everything else, the world is increasingly interdependent.

On the one hand, three-quarters of conflicts are fuelled by foreign arms or one form or another of international intervention.¹⁵ On the other, no country in the world is immune to the insecurity and threats that come from conflicts thousands of kilometres away. Terrorists trained in one continent strike in another. Ninety-five per cent of the world's hard drugs come from countries at war.¹⁶ From Afghanistan to Colombia, conflicts create refugees who reach Europe, Australia, and North America. Conflicts anywhere can have a major impact on the global economy. According to Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, the Iraq war may come to cost the global economy up to \$6 trillion, twice the cost to the USA alone.¹⁷ Already, according to Oxford University Professor of Economics, Paul Collier, the economic cost of conflicts is roughly twice as much as the world has spent on international aid in recent decades.¹⁸ According to Oxfam's own research, armed conflict cost Africa, between 1990 and 2005, an average \$18bn a year, with all too clear human consequences; compared with peaceful countries, African countries in conflict have 50 per cent more infant deaths.¹⁹

In 2008, crises in Kenya and Tibet attracted attention precisely because they may have continental or global consequences. And there are no conflicts of which we truly know nothing, thanks to global media, the Internet, and the 3G phones of street protestors in Rangoon. Electorates may therefore expect their governments to prevent, not just to condemn, the atrocities that information technology beams around the world. Traditional political 'realism', in which ethics in international relations can be disregarded, and which focuses solely on power and narrow self-interest, is simply no longer an acceptable option. In the twenty-first century, as the European Union's Director-General for External Affairs wrote in 2003, 'realistic' foreign policy is just no longer realistic.²⁰

For this reason, even the richest governments in the world have moral *interests*, alongside their economic and political interests, as the UK's foreign minister put it in 2007. How big that moral interest is depends on how much pressure citizens place on their governments to protect people in their own countries – and around the world. From Colombia to Uganda, that pressure exists, from local communities and civil society; campaigns

against the Iraq war, for peace in Darfur, and to control the arms-trade show a solidarity with people suffering in conflicts. Sometimes these efforts succeed, and sometimes they do not. Sometimes, people have a moral concern that ‘something must be done’ but ask themselves what to press their governments to do. This report is one contribution to answer that question.

The challenge now is to unite and expand all that action into a global movement for civilians’ rights – so that governments’ moral interest to protect grows stronger, and they wake up to the reality that, in a world where security threats are global, upholding the Responsibility to Protect is the rational choice. But how can it be done?

Examples to learn from at every level

We *can* protect civilians, and there are examples and lessons we can learn from. Those examples include the successes as well as the failures of the international community, governments developing better strategies to protect their own citizens, and the unsung achievements of civilians themselves.

Local action

Many people in conflicts not only have stories to tell of death and displacement; they also do something about it, taking often desperate measures because those responsible to protect them are doing so little to help. They flee violence, and become refugees or internally displaced, because their governments and others are not willing or capable of providing the security they deserve. Sometimes, civilians can do more, challenging the impunity that war criminals too often enjoy, or developing strategies to protect themselves and their families. In Darfur and the DRC, women organise themselves into groups when leaving their villages or camps for the dangerous activity of collecting firewood. Success is never easy and seldom complete, but there are examples in different crises of civilians achieving real results. In Mindanao in the Philippines, local Christian and Muslim groups together negotiated with both soldiers and rebels to spare their villages, and to ensure people displaced from their homes got humanitarian assistance. In Kenya, a national organisation, PeaceNet, played a vital role in saving lives during the violence that swept the country in early 2008. It ran an ‘SMS Nerve Centre’, collecting

information about potential attacks via text messages, and immediately warning local Peace and Security Committees who, in some circumstances at least, rapidly intervened to prevent them. After the murder of a member of parliament in Nairobi in January 2008, for instance, a team intercepted a gang of youths heading to attack another community, and was able to persuade them to disperse.

In many countries, there is evidence that women are particularly good at such vital local peacebuilding. In Burundi, both Tutsi and Hutu women formed the *Habamahoro* group to confront the violence from young men of both communities.²¹ In Uganda, women ‘peace animators’ trained others to manage conflict between and within communities.²²

National responsibility

Civilians and such civil-society groups certainly cannot do everything themselves. States have the primary Responsibility to Protect their citizens. But here too there is good practice, when governments choose to protect. In 2006 Uganda changed its strategy; it agreed a ceasefire with the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), rather than continuing the futile attempt to defeat it by force. It realised that far more conflicts are now resolved peacefully than by force – around the world more than four times as many between 2000 and 2005.²³ In the ceasefire’s first 12 months, LRA attacks fell to only five a month,²⁴ and 900,000 displaced people were able to return at least part way towards their homes.²⁵

Other governments too have started to pursue policies that give the protection of civilians a higher priority – with encouraging results. Liberia used to have the worst record of sexual violence in the world; 74 per cent of women and girls were raped in the conflict that ended in 2003.²⁶ But under a new president, Africa’s first elected woman leader, Liberia’s government is now taking action to crack down on sexual violence, with a new law on rape, and a National Action Plan on gender-based violence that includes reforms to the legal and health systems, psychosocial support for survivors, and economic and social programmes for women and girls.

Regional solidarity

When Liberia’s President Johnson-Sirleaf came to power, she found only \$1m in the country’s budget. The under-resourced governments of developing countries cannot do everything themselves. At the same time, almost every current conflict crosses national borders, as the regional

dimensions of conflicts from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Darfur and Chad show only too well. The flight of refugees to neighbouring countries, as from Colombia to Venezuela and Ecuador, can strain regional stability. That is why regional leaders and organisations have both an interest and an added value in resolving apparently internal conflicts.

In 2008, when Kofi Annan helped secure the deal between Kenya's rival political leaders, he was working in a successful tradition of recent African mediation, including Nelson Mandela and South Africa's Deputy President Jacob Zuma in Burundi in 1999 and 2003 respectively, and ECOWAS (West Africa's regional organisation) in 2004 in Togo and 2007 in Guinea. Between 2003 and 2007, the European Union (EU) deployed 16 missions to help governments and other regional organisations (like the Association of South East Asian Nations) from Indonesia to Palestine, Macedonia to Afghanistan. In Darfur, it provided funds, if not more difficult contributions like helicopters, to the African Union (AU) mission before the hybrid UN–AU force belatedly arrived in 2008. Neither the AU mission nor the EU's support were as effective as they should have been, but together they did something at least to ease the harrowing plight of Darfuris. In 2008–10, the AU and EU are co-operating on their first Action Plan to build Africa's own capacities for early warning, mediation, and peacekeeping, so that Africa can do more itself, and depend on more reliable support from rich countries.

International support

Like the AU and EU, the UN's performance is certainly mixed – and the UN Security Council remains deeply compromised by one powerful member after another blocking effective action against their allies and interests. But thousands of miles from those stalemates in New York, UN peacekeeping missions – 60 years after the first in Palestine in 1948 – are focusing more on protecting civilians than ever before. In 2006, the Security Council determined that all UN peacekeeping missions should be mandated to protect civilians in imminent danger.²⁷ The Council finally recognised that peacekeepers must do more than keep the peace between opposing parties or monitor a fragile peace. They must now protect civilians from murder and rape, including implementing Security Council resolution 1325, which called on UN peacekeepers to tackle the specific threats faced by women. They must be given the mandate and resources that they need to succeed. And crucially, they must be supported by the sustained political engagement necessary to address the underlying causes of conflict.



Many of the international initiatives of recent years have had substantial effects. In 1997 some people dismissed the Ottawa treaty banning landmines as a token gesture by civil society and celebrities, but in its first ten years, it may have reduced the toll of death and injury from landmines by more than two-thirds.²⁸ Much more must be done to rid the world of mines and equally indiscriminate weapons such as cluster munitions (which more than 100 governments agreed to ban in May 2008), but the practical success of the landmines treaty has helped give momentum to more wide-reaching initiatives to control the arms trade. For the first time ever, there is now the prospect of global legally binding controls on all conventional weapons. One hundred and fifty-three governments voted in 2006 to begin work on an international Arms Trade Treaty, and by the end of 2008 the UN General Assembly should have taken another vital step nearer that aim.

Current wars of course are waged in a world in which actors other than governments and intergovernmental bodies are important. In some countries at least, private corporations are taking effective steps to reduce local conflicts (while others, including many arms manufacturers and private military companies are not). And humanitarian agencies, traditionally confined to providing physical relief, have woken up to the fact that their beneficiaries are asking for safety, as well as for water, food, and shelter. Within their limited ability, humanitarians increasingly try to provide that safety. In Darfur and Chad, Oxfam trains women in making fuel-efficient stoves that have reduced the times they have to risk attack as they venture out of their camps to collect firewood.

Fuel-efficient stoves in Kebkabiya (North Darfur) have cut the number of trips women have to make to collect firewood, during which they were at the greatest risk of attack (2005).

Getting it wrong

So what has gone wrong? If peace and protection are in most people's interest, and there are good examples to learn from, why does the crisis in Darfur or the DRC continue? If governments, the EU, AU, and UN can get it right sometimes, why do they sometimes get it so wrong?

The simple answer is that they have seldom chosen to give protection the priority it deserves. Whether it is on decisions to speak out against war crimes, to impose sanctions on abusers, or to properly fund peacekeeping, the policy that prioritises the safety of civilians is too often trumped by narrow, often short-term, political interests.

Altogether, the current world order – with the USA as the world's sole superpower, and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council – has done a poor job protecting people facing genocide and war crimes. The number of conflicts has been reduced, but the promise of the early 1990s that civilians would be fundamentally safer than during the Cold War or before, has not been fulfilled. The UN Security Council – or more fairly its powerful members – has failed more often than not to meet its objective of upholding international peace and security. Time and again when dealing with the world's conflicts, it has failed to address them (for example, Colombia), ducked the hard decisions (for example, Chad), or failed to act effectively at all (for example, Darfur), because one leading member of the Security Council after another prioritises its narrow interests and alliances over its Responsibility to Protect.

New world order

But the old world order is changing. The UN Security Council is under pressure to include new permanent members, including India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan. Russia has regained its confidence. Regional organisations are maturing, and the partnership between the EU and the AU is becoming more concrete than ever before. Perhaps most importantly of all, the world faces 'a profound shift in the distribution of global power', in the words of the US journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2008, as China increases its influence, and it becomes clear that the USA's post-Cold War position as the world's only superpower will not last forever.²⁹

As the world enters the third decade since the Cold War, that shift may begin to take place. Both the speed and impact of that shift remain far

from certain, but possibly as soon as 2020 China may join the USA as the leading powers of a new 'multipolar' world, in which India, the EU, Brazil, and others too have global, not just regional, significance. The USA may remain the single most powerful country, but, as Joseph Nye, Harvard's Professor of International Relations, put it: 'being Number One is not going to be what it used to be.'³⁰

The question is: will this 'new world order' be better at protecting civilians than the old? The answer is not yet clear. The USA, China, and others will be tested by their responses to future crises. But they will also be tested by the leadership they show in efforts to build a more effective international system, in which governments agree and abide by rules to uphold the rights of people worldwide. The post-Kyoto treaty on climate change is one obvious example. The International Criminal Court is another. But in the field of peace and security, the glaring example is the Arms Trade Treaty already being discussed. That treaty is more than an international convention to control arms transfers. It will be the clearest test of whether the world's great powers can work with the majority of world opinion to agree global rules that meet all their interests. That is their choice.

Choosing the future

Sixty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions it is time for more effective action to uphold them. We do *not* need to reinvent international law, or the Responsibility to Protect that tried to put renewed political commitment behind it in the face of the worst atrocities. The Geneva Conventions are and remain the bedrock of humanity's attempt to limit the brutal cost of war. What is needed now is consistent and vigorous application of them.

Governments must do all they can to protect civilians, to halt the world's worst atrocities once they have started, *and* to prevent them and the conflicts that make them possible. That requires much more than military action or diplomatic initiatives reacting to events that have already happened. It requires a new level of investment in building 'human security', a comprehensive approach to protect people from all their threats – extreme poverty, deadly diseases, environmental degradation – as well as from immediate violence. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948, people have a right to be free from want, as well as free from fear.

Every government shares the Responsibility to Protect civilians from war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. That means putting the protection of civilians at the heart of policy, not treating it as a half-remembered commitment to be upheld when other interests allow. For more than anyone else, this is the responsibility of the UN Security Council because, as the UN Charter says, it has the primary responsibility for international peace and security. For that reason, the way that the Security Council works must be urgently reformed. If it is not, it is unlikely that its performance will improve.

Performance-related power

In 2008, the unreformed Security Council is effectively accountable to no one. In a world where almost every other public and private organisation is judged by its performance, the Council is never effectively held to account, as shown only too well in the failure after five years to bring an end to the suffering in Darfur.

The Security Council should not be reformed only by adding a few more major powers. It *should* be urgently reformed with greater transparency and accountability, in which all of the Council's members have to account for their performance in pursuing international peace and security, including their Responsibility to Protect.

The report's recommendations are set out in full in Chapter 5.

The next section summarises the key recommendations.

Key recommendations: an agenda for a multipolar world

There is no single solution to the horrors of genocide and war crimes. Effective protection and peacebuilding comes neither from implementing international agreements nor local efforts – but from both and more; from action at every level from local communities to the UN Security Council.

From the bottom up:

Local action

- Invest in local capacity:
 - local communities to mediate, negotiate, and resolve local conflicts
 - local businesses to provide 'peaceful livelihoods' in different communities
 - local government to provide equal access to essential services, and to land, for all communities, and reduce inequalities between them.
- Include women in all peace negotiations, from the community level up.

National responsibility

- Give the protection of civilians the highest priority in every military strategy, with zero tolerance of abuse (including sexual abuse) by security forces.
- Incorporate the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into national legislation, and vigorously implement them.
- Reduce the risks of renewed or future conflict by:
 - creating 'peaceful livelihoods' for demobilised fighters, and those most vulnerable to local or global economic shocks, as a vital part of a poverty-reduction strategy
 - providing equal access for all communities to essential services including health, education, water and sanitation
 - creating confidence that those guilty of violence, including sexual violence, will be held to account, by building up the judicial system and accountable civilian police
 - managing measures to adapt to climate change so that they reduce rather than increase inequalities and tensions between different groups.

Regional solidarity

For the AU and other regional organisations, to:

- develop the capacity and will to quickly deploy mediation and diplomatic teams to intervene at the earliest stage of a foreseeable crisis
- develop the capacity and will to use sanctions targeted on political and military leaders, as well as incentives, legal instruments and, in exceptional cases, military force to protect civilians
- ratify and vigorously enforce regional arms-control agreements to prevent irresponsible arms transfers leading to violations of humanitarian law or human rights, or to the undermining of sustainable development.

For the EU and the AU, to:

- implement all the actions on peace and security under the African–EU Strategic Partnership’s first Action Plan by 2010.

For the international community, to:

- provide an increased, reliable, and predictable funding basis to support regional organisations, including the UN mandating assessed contributions for UN-authorized but regionally operated peacekeeping missions (or an alternative arrangement that guarantees full and reliable funding, together with transparency, accountability, and professional standards to ensure the effective use of the resources).

International support

For the UN Security Council, to:

- demonstrate its capacity and willingness to quickly deploy mediation and diplomatic teams to intervene at the earliest stage of a foreseeable crisis
- demonstrate a greater willingness to protect civilians in new and neglected crises, with the timely imposition of sanctions targeted on political and military leaders – asset bans, travel bans, etc. – to prevent and end war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, and to enforce co-operation with the International Criminal Court
- ensure the continued improvement of UN and other peacekeeping operations to proactively protect civilians, including from sexual violence. This would include building the UN’s doctrine of civilian protection into peacekeeping training modules, with a detailed breakdown of the specific actions to be taken

- ask the Secretary-General to provide much more systematic and timely information about the threats faced by civilians – including sexual and gender-based violence and the denial of the right to assistance
- ensure that all civilian and military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions are trained on sexual violence, culturally specific gender roles, and unequal power relations between men and women, and between peacekeepers and local people. Every UN mission should give the Security Council comprehensive information on the threat of sexual violence and its record in reducing it
- set out the steps it has taken to uphold its Responsibility to Protect, in its annual reports to the General Assembly. Individual Council members should encourage this increased accountability by including their specific contributions to upholding their Responsibility to Protect in their annual statements to the General Assembly. Permanent members should renounce the use of their veto in situations of actual or incipient war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity
- travel much more frequently to regions where civilians are under the greatest threat, and as a matter of course convene private briefings with representatives of the communities most affected and those working to support their rights to protection and assistance; and also as a matter of course convene open meetings in New York on all situations of actual or incipient war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity.

For all governments, the priorities must be to:

- work to protect civilians, as a cornerstone of every government’s foreign policy
- build national diplomatic and military capacities to enable effective implementation of the Responsibility to Protect
- challenge abuses of humanitarian law and human rights, including sexual violence, and including those committed by allies
- implement international humanitarian law, preventing any military action that is likely to have an impact on civilians disproportionate to the benefit of *that specific military action*. The long-term and uncertain benefits of a military campaign do *not* justify the killing or grave suffering of civilians
- press for an effective Arms Trade Treaty to be agreed and rigorously implemented as soon as possible, to prevent irresponsible arms transfers which fuel conflict, poverty, or serious human-rights abuses

- aim for global emissions targets to keep global warming as far as possible below 2°C, and within the current UN negotiations, press for an effective post-2012 agreement to cut global CO₂ emissions by more than 50 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050
- prioritise the most vulnerable groups in national strategies to adapt to climate change. Governments most responsible for causing climate change and most capable of assisting should provide at least \$50bn to help vulnerable developing countries, including those affected by conflict, to adapt. National adaptation strategies must consider how to reduce the risks of conflict, by building communities' resilience and ensuring that climate change does not increase dangerous inequalities between different groups
- meet the Millennium Development Goals, and specifically increase sustained international assistance for post-conflict reconstruction
- engage with domestic and multinational businesses, to ensure they follow Conflict Sensitive Business Practices.³¹

Humanitarian and development agencies

- Systematically mainstream 'safe programming' (in which all programmes are carefully tested with the active participation of beneficiaries to avoid increasing threats to beneficiaries, and where possible reduce them).
- Vigorously follow the guidelines set down by the UN Inter Agency Standing Committee to prevent and respond to sexual violence.

Aubrey Wade/Oxfam



Local campaigning against sexual violence in West Point in Monrovia, Liberia (2007).

Principal international agreements on the protection of civilians in armed conflict

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

'Human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear and want...Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.'

International humanitarian law – including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and 1977 Additional Protocols

International humanitarian law is a system of legal safeguards to limit the impact of armed conflict. It seeks to protect people who do not take part in fighting (including civilians and aid workers) and those who can no longer fight (including wounded troops and prisoners of war), and to restrict the means and methods of warfare, including the military tactics that may be lawfully employed.

The core of international humanitarian law is the Geneva Conventions, including the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949 on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the two Additional Protocols of 1977.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has summarised the essence of international law including these points:

- The parties to a conflict must at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants, in order to spare the civilian population and civilian property. Neither the civilian population as a whole nor individual civilians may be attacked.
- Attacks may be made solely against military objectives. People who do not or can no longer take part in hostilities are entitled to respect for their lives.
- Neither the parties to the conflict nor members of their armed forces have an unlimited right to choose methods and means of warfare. It is forbidden to use weapons or methods of warfare that are likely to cause unnecessary losses or excessive suffering.
- Captured combatants and civilians who find themselves under the authority of the adverse party are entitled to respect for their lives, their dignity, their personal rights and their political, religious, and other convictions. They must be protected against all acts of violence or reprisal.

The Responsibility to Protect 2005

The Responsibility to Protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity is an international commitment by governments to prevent and react to grave crises, wherever they may occur. At the 2005 UN World Summit, world leaders agreed, for the first time, that states have a primary Responsibility to Protect their own populations and that the international community has a responsibility to act when these governments fail to do so.

The concept of the Responsibility to Protect had originally been proposed in 2001 by an international commission of experts from every region of the world, funded by the government of Canada, that set out what must be done to prevent mass atrocities, urgently halt them, and rebuild societies in their aftermath.

In 2005, governments specifically agreed that:

'Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.

'The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help protect populations...In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations...We stress the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of the Responsibility to Protect populations...and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and international law. We also intend to commit ourselves, as necessary and appropriate, to helping States build capacity to protect their populations and to assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out.'



A young soldier in the Congolese army (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo).

Nabil Elderkin

Introduction

In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 1000km from Kinshasa, Oxfam runs a public-health programme for 410,000 people. Most are displaced within their own vast country, having fled the conflict that has killed 5.4 million since 1998.³² Jean Dedieu's story is painfully familiar:

It was 9 o'clock in the morning. We were in the field four kilometres from our home when we heard the shooting. We tried to get back, but it was impossible because there was shooting everywhere. People were being killed. Eventually, I managed to reach home. They'd killed my mother, my father, and my first born.³³

Jean's family were not the only people killed that day. On a typical day in 2004, when Jean was interviewed, 1,225 died in the DRC's brutal civil war, and that was not the bloodiest year.³⁴ In comparison, Iraq's death toll from 2003 to 2006 averaged 538 a day, according to one of the highest estimates.³⁵

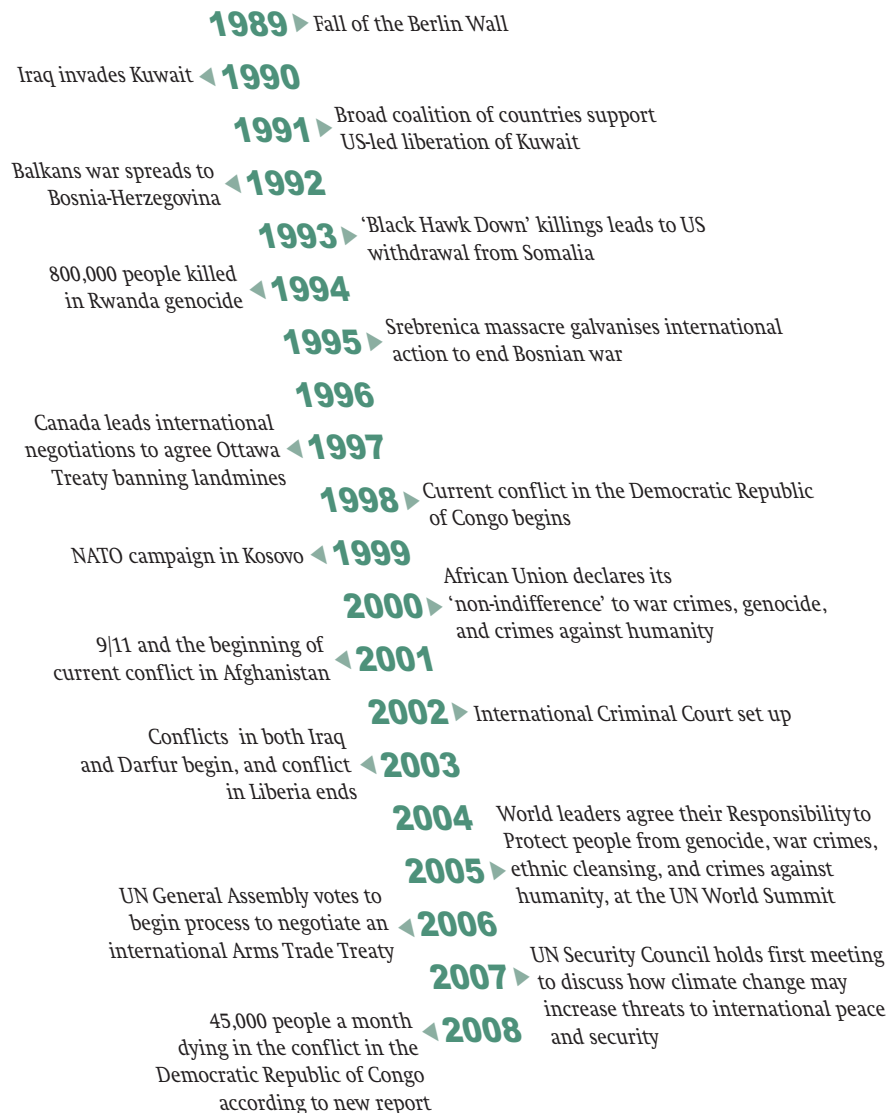
The wars the world neglects are as deadly as the ones that hit the headlines. In 2007, the conflict on the Philippines island of Mindanao displaced half as many people as in Darfur that year; while during 2006 and 2007, twice as many civilians were killed by the conflict in Sri Lanka than were killed by that in Afghanistan.³⁶ And in almost all conflicts, for everyone killed, far more women, children, and men are displaced or injured – often brutally and sexually. In the first half of 2007, 4,500 sexual attacks were recorded in one region of the DRC, South Kivu, alone.³⁷ In the same year in Colombia, up to 4 million people (9 per cent of the country's population) remained displaced, unable to return home,³⁸ because they fled from violence:

When my son was 12 years old his uncle was killed in front of him. We don't know who killed him. They took him and tied his hands behind his back, made him kneel and then slit his throat with a machete right in front of my son.

Efilvia P., Mestiza, Colombia³⁹

Twenty years of peace?

The post-Cold War world



New wars and old

Like Colombia – and Mindanao and Sri Lanka – many of these conflicts have been fought for decades. They are not new, and that they have become so protracted, by some almost accepted, is one of their greatest tragedies. In these long wars, the millions of people displaced and suffering are often ignored even within their own countries.

But some things *do* change. Since 2001, the global 'war on terror' has had an effect on most conflicts. In 2006, 63 per cent of the world's new refugees were from the countries on the war's two main front lines: Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁰ In the same year, Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia, condoned by many in the West, worsened the country's humanitarian crisis, and caused hundreds of thousands of Somali civilians to flee the disproportionate violence by all sides. Though Ethiopia came in to support Somalia's own transitional government, its own and allied soldiers have killed hundreds of Somali civilians, as in March 2007 when they tried to dislodge insurgents from civilian neighbourhoods in Mogadishu.⁴¹

In its own eyes, the US administration has pursued the 'war on terror' to exercise its duty to protect its own civilians from terrorist violence. Yet around the world, the conduct of the 'war' has not ended the real threat from al-Qaeda and related networks, but has helped to increase insecurity and the suffering of civilians in the attempt to do so. In 2008 the Brookings Institution's Michael O'Hanlon wrote that, 'there are clearly situations in which the Bush administration's view of how to prosecute the war on terrorists – or to support countries as they do so – conflicts with the goal of protecting civilian life.'⁴² In some countries, like Colombia, the rhetoric of the 'war on terror' itself has made the resolution of long-running conflicts more difficult, not easier. Labelling armed opposition groups 'terrorist' after decades of conflict has done nothing to persuade them to change their tactics or uphold international humanitarian law.

From death and displacement...

Whatever the label, the long-term cost of conflict is extreme poverty for whole countries. In the short term, it is death and displacement for millions. In the DRC, 8 per cent of its population have been killed – or died from the additional hunger and disease that conflict has brought.⁴³



The village of Tama in Darfur continues to burn, more than a week after it was attacked in November 2005.

Lynsey Addario/Corbis

Another 2 to 3 per cent have fled their homes to become refugees in other countries or displaced within their own. In Darfur, most reports say at least 200,000 people have died. Ten times that number has fled from violence to elsewhere in Darfur or across the border into Chad. In September 2007, one woman, Hawaye, sitting in the Djabal refugee camp in eastern Chad, explained why. She spoke of her ordeal to the writer Mariella Frostrup, who recounted her story:

Her husband was away when the rebels arrived and set about their business – the livestock rounded up, homes torched, men and boys mutilated and murdered, and finally the moment that she replays over and over, when one of the horsemen rode up and, with a machete, decapitated the baby that she held in her arms. She didn't have time to mourn. The murderers took her with them and kept her hostage for 15 days, repeatedly raping her. ⁴⁴

Too often, Darfuris have not fled to safety, just to another level of danger. In 2007, Oxfam asked men and women in camps in Darfur, where it provides aid for 400,000 people, about their life. The constant response was words such as: 'we feel like we're imprisoned',⁴⁵ because of the threats they faced when going to fetch wood or water outside, and because it remains far too dangerous for people to leave the camps and return home. When asked about their hopes, the commonest response was simply 'we need protection'.

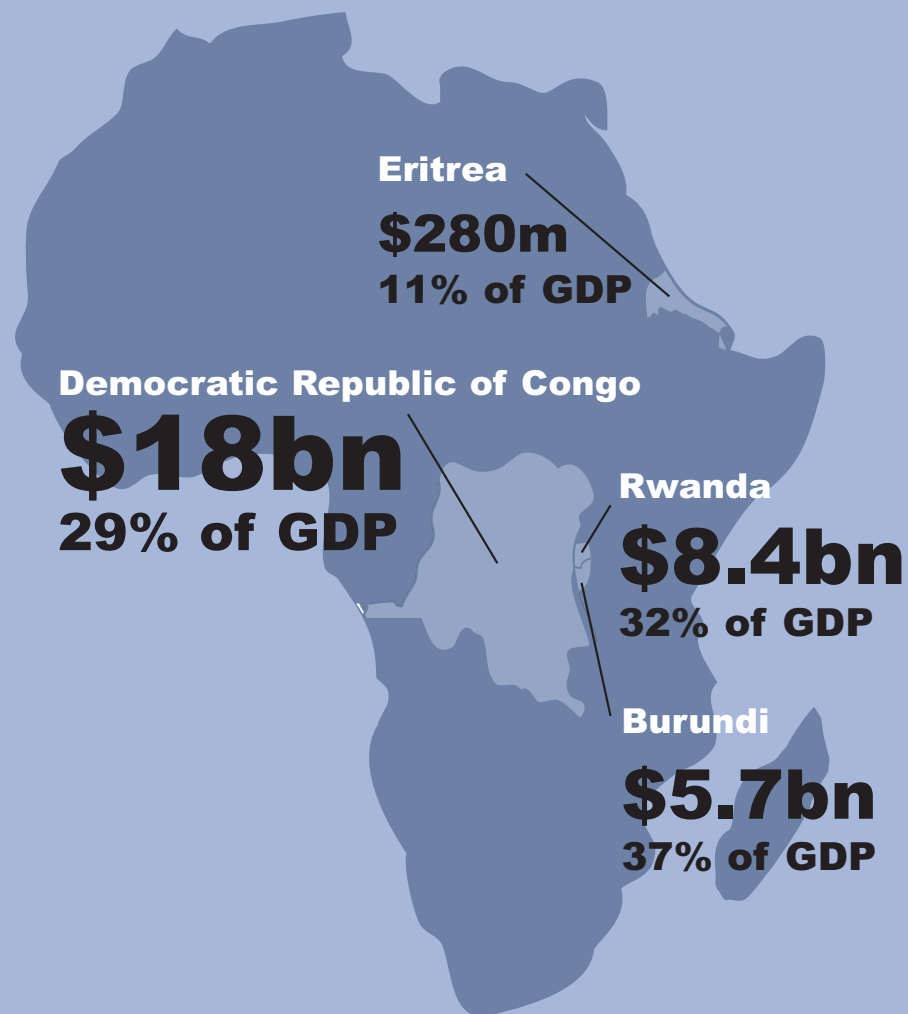
...to protection and security

That – protection – is the theme of this report. But what does it mean? How can people in the midst of conflict protect themselves and their families, or be protected? What can be done to mitigate the violence, and to prevent and resolve the conflicts that cause such a heavy toll of civilian life? In the following chapters we will try to answer those questions.

Chapter 2 will look at the *different* as well as common threats that men and women, girls and boys, and different groups face. Then it will ask whether these threats are likely to be reduced or increased. It has become fashionable to celebrate the decline in the number of conflicts since the end of the Cold War. This has ignored the threat of old conflicts resuming, and the new threat of climate change undermining security. The chapter will conclude that – unless we do something about it – the number of conflicts, and threats to civilians in them, may be about to get worse.

Africa's missing billions

The cost of conflict 1990–2005



Source: Oxfam International, IANSA, and Saferworld (2007) 'Africa's Missing Billions', Oxford: Oxfam International Briefing Paper

Chapter 3 will show that something *can* be done, for the surprising reason that something already is. At every level, from local communities to the international community, there are many examples of successful action to protect civilians.

Chapter 4 will ask why these are isolated examples rather than the norm. It will show that, again at every level, people *choose* to kill civilians and to fail to protect them. It will show how the 'war on terror' has not only failed to stem this tendency, but has also contributed to it. It will put this in the context of the changing world. It will argue that the 'old world order' – an unreformed UN Security Council and the USA as the world's sole superpower – has done a poor job at protecting civilians. It will argue that the new, 'multipolar' world that is emerging, with the rise of China, India, and other powers, and regional organisations like the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), can do a better job – *if* the world's great powers, both old and new, choose to do so.

Chapter 5 will set out a realistic agenda for this new multipolar world: action at every level to protect civilians, from far greater support for local communities on the ground, to a reformed UN Security Council that is, for the first time ever, in some meaningful way accountable for its performance.

Why should we protect civilians?

Before that, we will only ask one question: *why* should we do more to protect civilians, when the world faces so many other compelling challenges from climate change to nuclear proliferation?

It is not just to reduce the toll of civilian life. It is also because to do so is in the interest of almost everyone – except the war criminals, and irresponsible arms exporters and dealers who profit from war. For developing countries, these conflicts are the single most important reason that much of sub-Saharan Africa, and too many countries elsewhere, remain trapped in poverty. And for the whole world, the effects of these conflicts reach across the globe so that no country, however rich or distant, is immune.

For development

For developing countries, the interest should be clear. Most countries at peace have made enormous progress in reducing poverty. Those in conflict have not. In 2007, Paul Collier, Professor of Economics at the



Martin Adler/Panos Pictures

Dani comes to pray each morning where Paddy's nightclub once stood in Bali, Indonesia. It was bombed by terrorists in 2002, killing 202 people, mainly Western tourists. Dani sold trinkets to tourists, but she hasn't had any customers for a while. She has had to sell her wedding ring in order to buy food for her family.

University of Oxford, wrote that 73 per cent of the world's poorest billion people survive in countries at war – or in countries recently at war and still struggling with the lingering effects. It is not difficult to see why:

The cost of a typical civil war to the country and its neighbours can be put at around \$64 billion. In recent decades about two new civil wars have started each year, so the global cost has been over \$100 billion a year, or around double the global aid budget.⁴⁶

There is nothing automatic about the link between poverty and conflict: millions of people are impoverished in countries at peace, and it is sometimes poor people, as well as rich warlords, who find a livelihood through violence. Yet the challenge to overcome poverty is nevertheless, to a significant degree, the challenge to overcome war. Conflict impoverishes far more people than those who benefit from fighting or exploiting natural resources in war-torn regions. At the same time, poverty, and especially inequality between different groups, increases the risk of conflict. It is that inequality that can be exploited, as in Kenya in 2008, along religious or ethnic lines to ferment fear and hatred between communities. When one group has unequal access to livelihoods and services, it is so easy to blame another. It is that poverty and inequality that make countries more vulnerable to the economic and political shocks, like disputed elections, which can ignite major violence. It is this vicious circle that means that any of the world's poorest countries, not just those in fragile post-conflict situations, has been estimated to have a one in six chance of armed conflict in the next five years to 2013.⁴⁷

For global security

Most current conflicts take place within one country. Yet three-quarters are fuelled by foreign arms or one form or another of international intervention.⁴⁸ At the same time, no country in the world is immune to the insecurity and threats that come from conflicts thousands of kilometres away. Terrorists trained in one continent strike in another. Ninety-five per cent of the world's hard drugs come from countries at war.⁴⁹ From Afghanistan to Colombia, conflicts create refugees who reach Europe, Australia, and North America. Conflicts anywhere can have a major impact on the global economy. According to Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize-winning economist, the war in Iraq may come to cost the global economy up to \$6 trillion, twice the cost to the USA alone.⁵⁰ In the 1990s, five conflicts in far poorer countries, from Somalia to Haiti, cost the global



German section of Amnesty International and Oxfam Germany campaigning for an international Arms Trade Treaty in Berlin, June 2006.

Mathias John/Amnesty International

economy \$280bn.⁵¹ In 2005, a study of six different crises from Afghanistan to Sudan calculated their relative costs to the international community (quite apart from the costs to the countries themselves and their neighbours), and weighed these against the costs of measures that the international community could have taken or could still take to prevent conflict. In every single case, the cost of preventing conflict was substantially less.⁵²

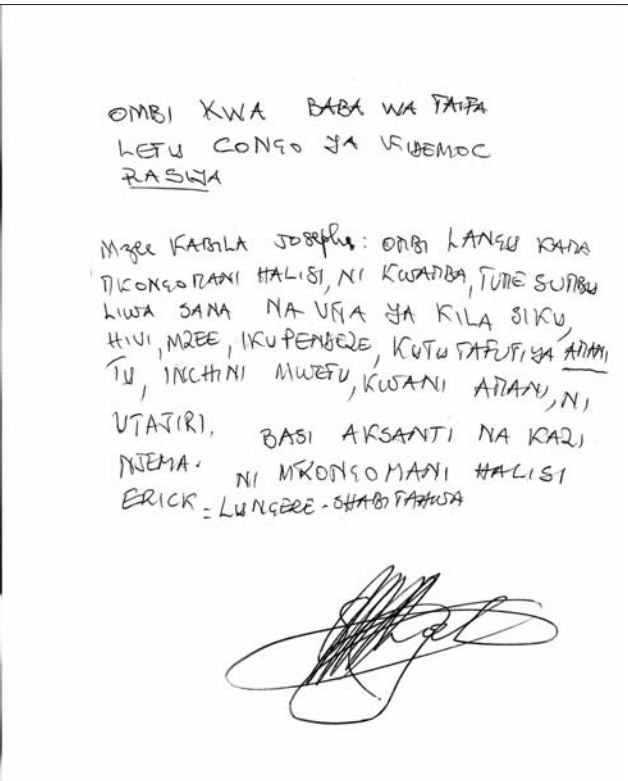
There are no conflicts in countries so far away that their impact may not affect the security of all others. In 2008, crises in Kenya and Tibet attracted attention because they may have continental or global implications.

For our moral interest

There are no conflicts of which, because of global media and the Internet, we truly know nothing. For this reason, electorates and constituencies may expect their governments to prevent, not just to condemn the atrocities that modern information technology beams around the world. Traditional political 'realism', in which ethics in international relations can be disregarded, and which focuses on power and self-interest as driving forces, is simply no longer an acceptable option. As Robert Cooper, the EU's Director-General for External Affairs, wrote in 2003:

*'Realistic' doctrines are not realistic...Foreign policy will be influenced by the media and by moral sentiment. We no longer live in a world of purely national interest. Human rights and humanitarian problems inevitably play a part in our policy-making.*⁵³

Therefore, even the world's richest governments have moral interests, as well as economic and political interests, in conflicts around the world, as the UK's foreign minister ruefully observed in 2007.⁵⁴ How big that moral interest is depends on how much pressure citizens place on their governments to protect civilians in their own countries – and around the world. From Colombia to Uganda, that pressure exists, from local communities and civil society; around the world, campaigns against the Iraq war, for peace in Darfur, and to control the arms trade represent a solidarity with people suffering in conflicts. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes they do not. The challenge now is to unite and expand all that action into a global movement for civilians' rights – so that governments' moral interest to protect civilians grows stronger.



Nabil Elderkin

An internally displaced young person's letter to Congolese President Kabila: 'My request to you as an ordinary Congolese: we continue to suffer every day and our lives have been disrupted. Our dear President, the only thing we want is that you bring peace into our country, because peace is wealth.'

Because protection is a right

Only a global movement can encourage governments to see what some already do: that their self-interest can coincide remarkably closely with the moral need to uphold civilians' right to protection. That overarching right includes the right to be free from the fear of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (as well as any violation of international humanitarian law). Virtually every government agreed, at the UN World Summit in 2005, that it had a Responsibility to Protect civilians from these crimes. Almost 60 years since the main Geneva Conventions were agreed in 1949, the Summit demanded immediate and decisive action whenever civilians are threatened – action that has often been lacking.

The Responsibility to Protect, however, was also a commitment to take action before such atrocities took place, to prevent the conflicts in which such crimes are all too likely. It demands more than action to stop the suffering in Darfur, the DRC, and elsewhere. It demands early and ambitious moves to prevent the spiral towards atrocity.

The Responsibility to Protect embodies the world's commitment to prevent and respond to the very worst crimes, and its vital added value is in keeping the world's attention sharply focused on them. This can only be fulfilled, however, in a broader context of preventive action to build what has increasingly been called 'human security', a comprehensive approach to protect people from all threats – extreme poverty, deadly diseases, environmental degradation – as much as immediate violence. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed, 60 years ago in 1948, people have a right to be free from want, as well as free from fear.

That comprehensive approach to human security depends on the combination of two things. The first is effective and accountable states, and through them regional and international bodies, upholding their Responsibility to Protect their citizens both from immediate violence, and from the long-term insecurities of inequality and injustice that make violent conflicts more likely. The second is the active citizens themselves, taking action to protect themselves and their families, and to hold their governments to account.⁵⁵



Ndosho 2 camp, a spontaneous site set up by displaced people on the outskirts of Goma town, Democratic Republic of Congo (2007).

Marie Cacace/Oxfam

Listening to those living in human *insecurity*

Most importantly, that broad sense of human security is what people living in unsafe situations want. Before anything else, governments and their organisations, up to and including the UN Security Council, must do more to ask these people about how they want to be protected from the variety of threats that they face. Chapter 2 will explore this existing range of threats and it will show that, rather than continuing to decline, the number of conflicts in which civilians die may be about to increase.

“Today my life means nothing. My sisters were raped and killed. I have no more relations. I have no children. I have no parents. I have nothing. I only ask God to take away my life so I can find peace.”

Tatiana Ume, a Congolese woman, was eight and a half months pregnant when she and her family were attacked by militia at a checkpoint. The baby died before its tenth day.

Source: Amnesty International (2004) 'Casualties of War: Women's Bodies, Women's Lives', London: Amnesty International Publications.

Real and future danger

The first thing to do to improve security is to ask people what they need in order to be safer. All over the world, Oxfam asks people what threats they face, what they are doing to protect themselves, and what would make them safer. They tell us about a range of threats from killing and torture, to rape and the abduction of children, and help us understand the different fears of old and young, men and women, and different religious or ethnic communities.

This chapter will highlight these different threats to civilians. It will then look at the rights to protection from these threats that international humanitarian law is supposed to provide. Finally, it will ask whether this level of threat, and the scale of armed conflicts, is likely to decline or increase in the coming years. Will the substantial reduction in conflicts since the Cold War continue? Or will the combination of 'old risks', like inequality, and new risks, like climate change, mean more conflicts in the future?

The threats people are facing

'War on women'

One day in Colombia, paramilitaries took Elvia Rosa, a 29-year-old mother, away. 'I have not seen her anymore,' her daughter said. 'She was tied to a pole and raped all day. They tortured her to death. A neighbour saw them leading her by the pole close to a track near the school...Nothing could be done, who would dare untie her?'⁵⁶

More brutally than anything else, the harrowingly widespread use of rape and sexual violence in current conflicts illustrates the differing natures of threats faced by women and by men. In 2007, the UN Security Council recognised that sexual violence had become 'systematic' in many conflicts.⁵⁷ In the same year, Oxfam asked people in 17 communities in eastern DRC about the threats they faced; 15 identified sexual violence as key among them.⁵⁸ In towns like Shabunda, seven out of ten women had been raped. It is little surprise that human-rights groups dub the DRC's conflict as a 'war on women'.⁵⁹ In early 2008, there were 1,200 recorded



A female Colombian guerrilla in the Meta region south-east of Bogota (1998).

John Moore/AP Photo

sexual attacks a month, and given the difficulties in recording accurate data, this is probably a fraction of the real figure.⁶⁰

Like most violence against civilians, sexual attacks are seldom mindless, but more often a weapon of terror, a strategy to humiliate the woman, and destroy the bonds of her whole community. Where a woman is perceived to belong to a man, rape is a strategy to humiliate the enemy who is supposed to possess her. In Rwanda today, there are as many as 20,000 children, now teenagers, born of Tutsi mothers raped in 1994 by Hutu men, in an attempt to destroy the Tutsi community by violating 'their women'. Such violence, however, is not confined to rebels or those pursuing terror and genocide. Those with a duty to protect perpetrate some of the most vicious attacks. After a rebel ambush in Mutunba, Burundi, government soldiers attacked local women. Chantal Manani was one of them:

*The soldier led me to a bush and demanded that I lie down and get undressed, or he would shoot me and my husband. With great force, he tore off my underwear, and kicked me. I fell naked to the ground. A few seconds later he was on top of me.*⁶¹

Shamefully, aid workers and peacekeepers have also abused women, either through sexual assault, or exploiting their power, and demanding sex for protection or food. In 2006, there were 371 reported allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN and related personnel.⁶²

In 35 conflicts men and boys have also been raped, although the numbers are much lower than for women and girls.⁶³ Like women and girls, men and boys can face specific threats because of their gender; their role as protectors can drive them to be fighters and to be killed, or targeted precisely because their male identity makes any man a potential fighter. In 2007 in Darfur, the task of collecting firewood fell to women partly because men feared they would be killed, and so instead they exposed women to the risk of attack.⁶⁴

Child soldiers – and dead children

In many areas of conflict, children are at risk of being recruited as soldiers. In 2005, as many as 250,000 child soldiers were used in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Somalia, the DRC, Rwanda, and Chad.⁶⁵ In 2008, the Iraqi government revealed film showing children as young as 11 being armed and trained by al-Qaeda.⁶⁶ In Colombia, a quarter of guerrilla and

Forced to flee

2.65 million

**people newly displaced
in 2006**

91%
**of these were fleeing
from conflicts**

Note: 2.65 million is the net increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced people in 2006. Source: UNHCR (2007) *Statistical Yearbook 2006*, Geneva: UNHCR Statistical Annex. Available at: www.UNHCR.org/statistics. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2007) 'Internal Displacement Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2006', Geneva: IDMC (last accessed June 2008).

paramilitary combatants have been children,⁶⁷ and in 2007, one girl soldier's file, found on a computer belonging to the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas, was published in a Colombian magazine. 'Paola' had been recruited when she was 15, far older than many child soldiers around the world. After attempting desertion and then suicide, and enduring repeated punishments, she killed another guerrilla and eventually died fighting the Colombian army.⁶⁸

Many child soldiers are killed all around the world, but this number is just a fraction of the number of civilian children who die in modern wars. In 2005, the UN estimated that 2 of the 3 million deaths directly related to conflict since 1990 were of children.⁶⁹ Another 6 million have been maimed or permanently disabled,⁷⁰ and it is no coincidence that the world's highest rate of deaths of mothers and children within the first year after birth is in the country experiencing the world's deadliest conflict, the DRC.⁷¹ One mother, Siskala, told Oxfam how her children had died as they were fleeing from fighting:

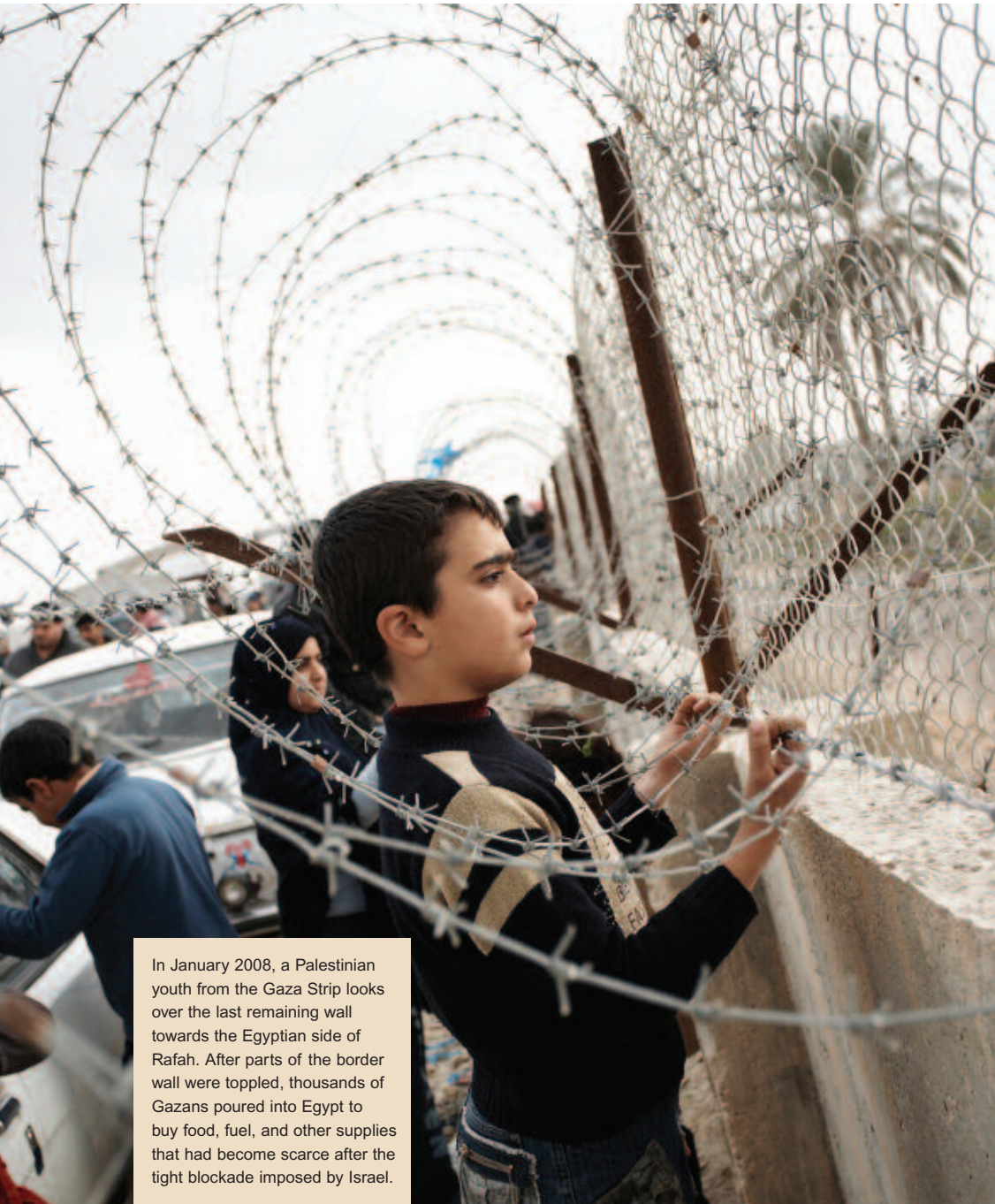
When the children died, we didn't have time to stop and bury them. We had to lay them on the ground, cover them with grass – and keep running.⁷²

Forced to flee

Everyone becomes more vulnerable when forced from his or her home. Women are more likely to be raped. Children may lose their families, and elderly or disabled people are often left behind in the horror of fighting. Maria was running from such violence in Ituri in the DRC:

Every time we stopped we heard the fighting coming behind us. It was following us. We had to leave my mother behind. She was old – and unable to run any more. We couldn't carry her and the children. We had to leave her in a house. When the militia found her in that house they killed her.⁷³

Almost 40 million people have currently fled their homes and now live as refugees abroad,⁷⁴ or as internally displaced people in their own countries.⁷⁵ For many, like Maria, each time they escape, fighting follows them. In 2006 two out of three internally displaced people were still exposed to serious threats; twice the proportion in 2003.⁷⁶ In other words, most people flee from one place only to live in fear in another. In early 2008, many Kenyan women fleeing to camps for displaced people found the threat of sexual attack as great in the camps as outside.⁷⁷



In January 2008, a Palestinian youth from the Gaza Strip looks over the last remaining wall towards the Egyptian side of Rafah. After parts of the border wall were toppled, thousands of Gazans poured into Egypt to buy food, fuel, and other supplies that had become scarce after the tight blockade imposed by Israel.

Jason Larkin/Panos Pictures

Some displaced people return home, but their numbers are easily balanced by new or escalating conflicts, which force millions more to flee. Since 2003, one Iraqi in seven has been forced from their home.⁷⁸ The global ‘war on terror’ has been the most important single factor this decade forcing people to flee violence. In 2006, 63 per cent of the world’s new refugees were from the two countries on its main front lines, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁹ By late 2007, when some Iraqi refugees were returning, the numbers still fleeing had reached such a level that surrounding countries, and 11 of Iraq’s 18 provinces, had restricted access to new immigrants.⁸⁰ Many Northern countries have not responded well either. Like refugees from many other conflicts, Iraqis have faced a harsh reception in most Northern countries: harsher than those seeking asylum could once have expected, as the 1951 Refugee Convention’s prohibition on forcibly returning refugees has been steadily eroded. Between September 2006 and September 2007, the UK forcibly returned 72 Iraqis,⁸¹ despite its acceptance that Iraq’s ‘[state] institutions have been unable to protect individuals from gross human rights violations.’⁸²

Deprived of aid⁸³

Millions of people need emergency relief because they have been forced to flee from their livelihoods. Millions never receive it – because the violence they tried to flee denies them access to the aid they need. In 2004, 10 million people were unable to reach humanitarian assistance because warring parties deliberately deprived them of it, or because of the sheer intensity of conflicts.⁸⁴ In 2007, 18 million people had no or very limited access to humanitarian aid for similar reasons.⁸⁵

In June 2007, ever-worsening security forced Oxfam to withdraw from one of Darfur’s largest camps, Gereida, massively affecting the assistance that got through. As Oxfam’s Sudan director at the time, Caroline Nursey, said:

*As usual in Darfur, the people who will suffer most are the civilians who have already been attacked, forced from their homes, and had their lives thrown into turmoil.*⁸⁶

In the first nine months of 2007, five humanitarian workers were killed in Darfur. Eleven were wounded, over 60 assaulted, over 100 abducted.⁸⁷ In Afghanistan, 34 were killed, and 76 abducted.⁸⁸ In the four years after 9/11, there were 92 per cent more attacks on aid workers than in 1997–2001.⁸⁹ Some of this is explained by the fact that there have simply been a lot more aid workers in the world’s violent humanitarian crises. But it is also

Collateral damage

Operation Iron Fist was launched by the Ugandan government against the Lord's Resistance Army in May 2002. Across Acholiland in Northern Uganda, people were forced from their homes: according to the government, this was for their own safety.

48 hours

the amount of time the government gave residents of Acholiland to move into camps on 3 October 2002

2 million

the number of people displaced. Half of them were under 15 years old.

94%

the proportion of the people in Acholiland who were displaced

1,700

the number of displaced people per hectare in some camps, without adequate provisions for water, sanitation, or health care

5,000

the number of people dying each month in the camps in 2005. The death rate was three times that in the rest of Uganda

Source: taken from Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda (2006) 'Counting the Cost: Twenty Years of War in Northern Uganda', Kampala: CSOPNU

because some Islamist militants and Western governments have combined to portray international aid agencies, including their local staff, as allies in the 'war on terror' – as former US Secretary of State Colin Powell once said, a 'force multiplier' of military efforts.

Politically motivated attacks on aid workers have increased nine times faster than robbery, although it is not always certain precisely what the political motivation has been. Oxfam, for example, has never found out who exploded a bomb outside its offices in Kabul in late 2005. A 2006 study summed up the difficulty well:

Not all, and perhaps not even the majority of attacks in Afghanistan can be ascribed to the global war on terror...Many are opportunistic and criminal. But the insurgents themselves have stated that aid workers and election workers were being targeted because they were seen as instruments of the coalition intervention.⁹⁰

There was no doubt, it concluded, that at least some attacks on humanitarian workers were because, in the eyes of the Taliban, humanitarian agencies had become 'linked to a world ordering agenda', and, consequently, 'fair game'. The insurgents' perception of humanitarians as Western collaborators has only been intensified by some of the tactics of coalition forces, such as providing relief in civilian clothes, and, in Afghanistan, setting up Provincial Reconstruction Teams that combine relief and military roles. When relations between civilian humanitarian agencies and military forces get too close, the humanitarians become targets, and their operations are curtailed. When that happens, it is civilians who bear the double cost of the conflict and being cut off from aid. It is not surprising therefore that humanitarian agencies jealously guard their 'humanitarian space' – their ability to operate independently and impartially – for their own security and for their ability to provide life-saving aid.

Trapped in poverty – trapped in conflict

The impact of armed conflict goes deeper than violence, displacement, and the denial of humanitarian assistance. In many conflicts, the number killed by direct violence is dwarfed by those who die from the indirect effects of war. In northern Uganda, 3,791 people were killed between January and July 2005. Altogether, however, 35,000 people died in those same months, mainly from poverty-related diseases, in the camps for displaced people in Kitgum, Gulu, and Pader: a mortality rate three times Uganda's average. Most would have lived if they had not been displaced by war.⁹¹



Genocide survivors Kemal Pervanic (Bosnia) and Grace Mukagabiro (Rwanda) stand in the mock graveyard erected by Oxfam campaigners outside the United Nations headquarters in New York in order to urge governments to endorse the Responsibility to Protect civilians against future mass killings (2005).

Fred Askew/Oxfam

In addition, local people who care for those who flee in turn become impoverished. Aid workers judged that by 2007, host families in parts of the DRC were in as much need of humanitarian assistance as the internally displaced people they sheltered.⁹²

Conflicts cost affected countries billions of dollars each year that could otherwise be invested in their development. In 2007, Oxfam's own research estimated that African countries directly affected by conflict had lost an average \$18bn a year from 1990 to 2005, a cautious estimate that did not count the economic impact on neighbouring states. Despite this caution, the study showed that, even when war is over, its long-term impact on a country's economy could last for years. Liberia, for example, was only gradually emerging in 2007 from its brutal war that ended in 2003. Commenting on Oxfam's study, its President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said:

This is money Africa can ill afford to lose. The price that Africa is paying could cover the cost of solving the HIV and AIDS crisis in Africa, or provide education, water and prevention and treatment for TB and malaria. Literally thousands of hospitals, schools, and roads could have been built.⁹³

Nor is the impoverishing impact of war confined to Africa. In Iraq, the rate of child malnutrition rose from 19 per cent to 28 per cent in the four years after 2003.⁹⁴ In March 2008, five years after the invasion, the International Committee of the Red Cross said that the country's health care was 'in worse shape than ever'.⁹⁵

Rights in crisis

This chapter has, so far, looked at how modern conflicts affect ordinary civilians, the people who Oxfam works with around the world. The rest of the chapter will explore whether this is likely to get better or worse.

Before that, however, let us remember why the endemic violation of every person's right to be free from violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation is fundamentally important. Sixty years ago, in December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was agreed. But for millions of people, the Declaration's aspiration for all people to achieve 'freedom from fear and want', and its commitment to the universal rights to 'life, liberty and security' are no more realised now than they were then.⁹⁶



Buildings destroyed by repeated heavy bombardments in Beirut, Lebanon (2006).

Shaista Aziz/Oxfam

A year after the Universal Declaration, governments agreed the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the core of international humanitarian law, as a symbol of determination to put the horrors of the Holocaust and the Second World War into the unrepeatable past. International humanitarian law prohibits not only deliberate violence against civilians, and against what civilians need to survive, but also any military action that has a disproportionate impact on civilians, beyond the minimum necessary to achieve combatants' legitimate military ends.

Sixty years later, however, the killing of civilians is still the norm, not the exception. From Sri Lanka to the DRC, government forces and non-state actors simply flout the law, or justify attacks by interpreting the Geneva Conventions in a way their authors would never have recognised.

In October 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned some governments for interpreting almost any level of civilian killing as 'proportionate' to their military goals:

Instead of taking into account, as envisaged by international humanitarian law, only military advantages that are substantial and a fairly immediate consequence of a specific attack, there has been a tendency to balance civilian casualties against military advantages that are hardly perceptible or may arise only in the longer term or as a result of the overall military campaign.

He might have been referring to the hardly perceptible success of counter-insurgency strategies in countries like Afghanistan. But the example he gave was this:

This tendency was evident, for example, in the government of Israel's justification for civilian casualties resulting from its military campaign against Hizbullah in 2006, a campaign that was subsequently determined...to constitute a significant pattern of excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force.⁹⁷

Ban condemned insurgents too, for their 'deliberate attacks against civilians, hostage-taking, the use of human shields and other illegal practices.' Indeed those atrocities and the disproportionate response of some governments are part of the same modern problem. Ban feared that 'militarily superior parties will respond increasingly with methods and means of warfare that violate the principle of distinction' (between civilians and combatants). Oxfam aid workers too see this trend, from Gaza to Kabul, of all parties jeopardising the safety of civilians, one side hiding among them, the other giving little heed to their protection when attacking, and this

“My hope is that in the future, the Responsibility to Protect will be exercised not after the murder and rape of innocent people, but when community tensions and political unrest begin. It is by preventing, rather than reacting, that we can truly fulfill our shared responsibility to end the worst forms of human rights abuses.”

Desmond Tutu, Anglican archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa

Source: D. Tutu (2008) 'Taking the responsibility to protect', International Herald Tribune, 19 February, www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/19/opinion/edtutu.php

seems to be getting worse. In 2007, Ban concluded that the ‘deliberate targeting and attacks against civilians have become more widespread in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, and the DRC’.⁹⁸

Where does the responsibility lie?

Fundamentally, national governments have the responsibility for protecting their citizens. And in conflicts *all* parties, including all kinds of non-state actors, have the responsibility to limit their military action in the way that the Geneva Conventions laid down.

Every party to the Geneva Conventions has also signed up to a more universal obligation – not only to respect, but also to *ensure* respect for the Conventions, to do what it can to see that they are upheld around the world. In 2005, at the UN World Summit, governments reaffirmed that basic principle that they had to protect and ensure protection for civilians worldwide. Almost every government in the world agreed its Responsibility to Protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and agreed that the international community has a responsibility to help.⁹⁹

Governments’ obligation to ensure respect for every aspect of international humanitarian law remained vital. The new agreement on the Responsibility to Protect built on this and added a new commitment to halt and prevent these most egregious crimes. That responsibility is primarily of each state to its citizens, but the 2005 agreement underlined the fact that mass atrocities are not simply the internal affairs of each country. When thousands of women are raped in the DRC, children killed in Iraq, or displaced in Colombia, they are crimes that shock the conscience of the world. As the AU said in its founding Constitutive Act in 2000, there must be ‘non-indifference’ to ‘war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity’.¹⁰⁰ In 2005, almost every government in the world accepted this. They agreed that the international community has a responsibility to support national governments’ own efforts to protect their citizens, and if national authorities are unable or unwilling to do so, that the international community must come together to ensure that that responsibility is fulfilled.

Fragile peace

Between 2000 and 2005

3 times
as many conflicts
were ended by negotiation
as by military victory

2 out of every 5
conflicts restarted
within 5 years

Source: Human Security Centre (2008) 'Human Security Brief 2007', Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, p.35, using data from the UCDP/Human Security Report Project Dataset, www.hsrgroup.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=111 (accessed 2 July 2008).

An uncertain future

Governments will have to uphold that Responsibility to Protect in a future that can at best be called uncertain. While some wars have ended this decade, new ones like Iraq have begun. The rest of this chapter will show that, rather than continuing to decline, the number of conflicts in which civilians die may be just as likely to increase.

In 2008, a survey of government officials and academics from more than 20 countries identified a wide range of threats between now and 2020, none of them probable, but all of them possible – ranging from the 'megaterrorist' use of weapons of mass destruction, to a nuclear exchange between two countries, to the collapse of a number of countries including Pakistan.¹⁰¹ The most probable threat of war in the future, however, may be the resumption of old ones, as millions are trapped in 'half war/half peace' like the DRC or south Sudan. In 2002, Sri Lanka's long-running conflict with the Tamil Tigers was meant to be over, when a ceasefire was signed. But neither the government nor the Tigers trusted each other or believed that the agreement could work. By 2006 full-scale military action and bombings had resumed. Sri Lanka is not unusual. Post-conflict situations are not safe and stable, but fragile and dangerous. Within five years, almost half the world's peace deals have collapsed into renewed war.¹⁰² Such precarious situations are currently so numerous precisely because of the achievement of ending a number of conflicts from Aceh to Haiti. They are simultaneously a sign of success and a cause for concern.

Poverty and inequality

It would be optimistic to expect no new conflicts to begin. According to a study published in 2007, any of the poorest countries in the world has a one in six chance of falling into civil war in the next five years.¹⁰³

Academics debate the origins of the First World War a hundred years on. The causes of future wars are even more difficult to predict, but they may be about the 'old' risks as much as the new. What has always increased the risk of conflict will continue to do so. That includes poverty and particularly inequality, and the discrimination against minorities that can turn religious and ethnic differences into fault-lines of conflict. When people see no hope of a peaceful livelihood, especially if they are unjustly deprived of one, they may turn to violence instead. When the state cannot or will not deliver equal access to basic services or land, the lure of rebel



Kanga-Usine open mine in Mongbwalu, north-east Congo, where artisanal miners make a living searching for gold in holes in the mud. The NGO Caritas Bunia works to protect the rights of these small-scale miners and to ensure that mining development brings tangible benefits to local people and the Congolese economy (2006).

Richard Wainwright/CAFOD

groups that can provide them may seem attractive. When people feel excluded from both the political process and economic development, it can be a lethal combination. None of these tensions automatically cause conflict, but political leaders can exploit all of them, and young men's sense of powerlessness, to encourage them to violence.

In early 2008, Oxfam's Peace and Reconciliation Officer in Kenya, Daniel Kiptugen, summed up the roots of the violence that had gripped the country this way:

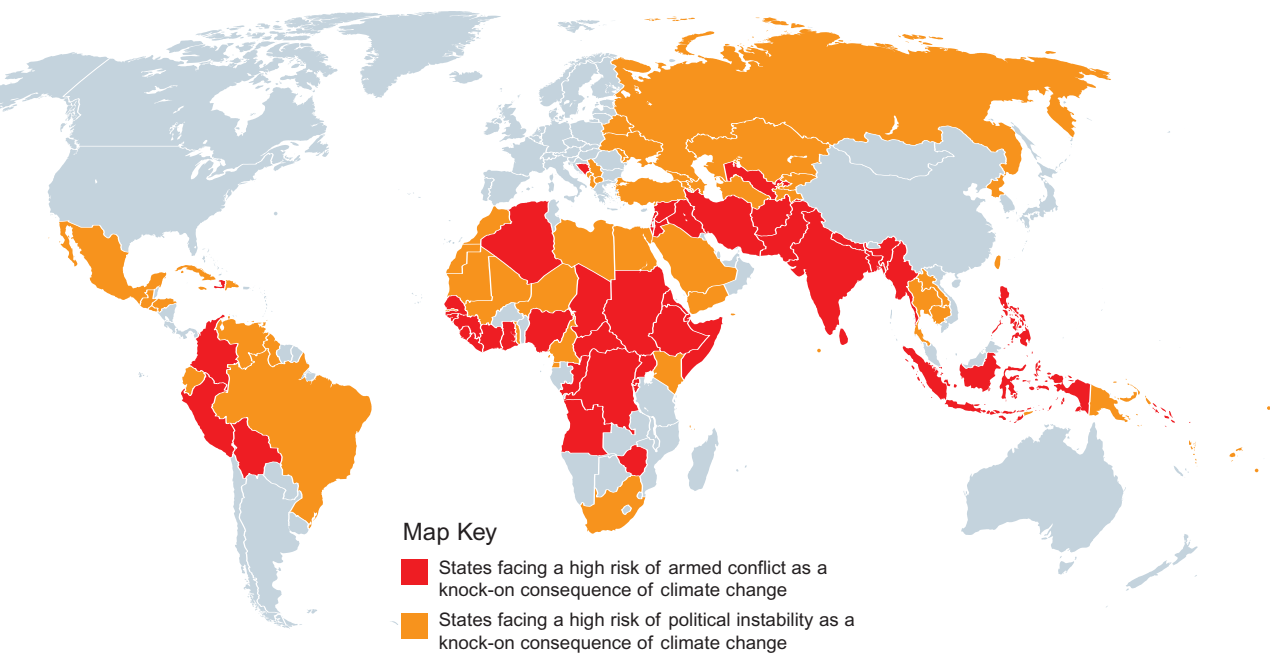
Yes, the violence is playing out along ethnic lines, but it is not true that people have always hated each other. This has been caused by politics. The root causes go much deeper into poverty, inequality and frustration.

It is because of such links between poverty, inequality, and violence that sub-Saharan Africa is likely to remain the centre of world conflict. And it is because of the current failure to meet the world's Millennium Development Goals that, based on current trends, the number of conflicts fed by poverty and inequality is not likely to rapidly decline.

Fighting over natural resources

At the same time, conflicts over natural resources have not gone away. In 2007 in Niger, the rebellions of the 1990s flared up again, inflamed by a sense of injustice over how proceeds from the country's uranium were distributed.¹⁰⁴ Often, the resources fought over are not the so-called 'conflict resources' like diamonds, but land or livestock. In Colombia, guerrillas and paramilitaries force people off their land, and, while the government lacks the will to protect small landowners' rights, big landowners seize large areas of the country.¹⁰⁵ Every year thousands of families are killed or deprived of their land and livelihoods, with little recourse to justice. In 2007, 105 bodies were found in mass graves in Putumayo, where paramilitaries and guerrillas fighting over land to grow coca killed local peasants.¹⁰⁶ In West Pokot in north-west Kenya, cattle are not only a vital livelihood, but part of the way of life. Before a Pokot man can marry, he must have a healthy number of cattle. 'Because they are poor, they look for cows outside their communities', Abraham, a local pastor, explains. Cows are acquired through raids, including over the border into Uganda. 'We don't have enough water in Kenya and because of this, the community moves around Uganda in search of pasture and water. They fight when another tribe comes in search of this at the same time.'¹⁰⁷

Climate of conflict



Technical note

The IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report of 2007 shows that global warming will have global effects, varying in both kind and degree. Research by International Alert in 2007 identified 102 countries* as being at risk of significant negative knock-on socio-political effects, using three criteria for selection:

1. Their presence on a variety of international watchlists: the UK Department for International Development's 'proxy list' of Fragile States, the Global Peace Index ranking of 121 states (bottom 50 positions), the International Crisis Group 'crisiswatch' list, the World Bank's list of Low Income Countries Under Stress;
2. The presence of an operational UN peacekeeping force;
3. The prospect of, or their engagement in, economic or political transition (e.g. from autocracy towards democracy or leadership succession).

Within this group of 102, 46 countries were identified as facing a high risk of armed conflict. Primarily these are countries with current or recent experience of armed conflict, because this is a reliable indicator of propensity to further violence. In addition, particularly weak institutions of government and very poor economic performance were used as guides to the selection. It should be borne in mind that armed conflicts vary widely in their levels of lethality and in whether they occur at a local, national, or regional level.

*A full listing of these countries can be found at the end of the references on page 44 of International Alert's 2007 report (see source).

Source: D. Smith and J. Vivekananda (2007). Adapted from 'The Doubled-Headed Risk' diagram in 'A Climate of Conflict: The Links between Climate Change, Peace and War', London: International Alert, www.international-alert.org/climate_change.php (accessed 15 November 2007).

While some companies seek to improve the safety of civilians, there are still many disputes about the conduct of others. In June 2007, a military court in the DRC, trying individuals in relation to an alleged massacre in 2004, acquitted three employees of an Australian/Canadian company, Anvil Mining, whose vehicles had been used in the incident. Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, however, condemned the use of a military court to try civilians and expressed disquiet at the verdict.¹⁰⁸ The court ruled that Congolese soldiers had requisitioned the company's vehicles, and according to Anvil, it had 'under the force of law complied' with the Congolese army's demand.¹⁰⁹ The controversy however continued, and a year after the verdict, African and international human-rights groups called on the Australian, Canadian, and South African governments to pursue investigations against Anvil or those governments' nationals named in the DRC trial.¹¹⁰

In 2005, the UN reported that the grab for natural resources had been a primary cause of a third of recent wars,¹¹¹ and such incentives for conflict are not likely to decline. As one man, Alphonse, in the DRC put it: 'When war is about money, it's difficult to stop.'¹¹²

Climate insecurity

Human-induced climate change will exacerbate the natural variability of the climate with diverse effects. Some land will dry up, other areas will be flooded, but wherever vital resources like water and land become scarce, powerful groups will choose to distribute them equitably – or not. Where they do not, and deprive unfavoured groups, violence is more likely to follow.

In Darfur, environmental change has already been cruelly mishandled, so that some groups suffer far more than others. For centuries, communities have managed conflicts over land, pasture, and water, but as the environment has changed, this has become increasingly difficult. Aquifers have not recovered from the droughts of the 1960s and 1980s, causing many communities – including pastoralists, traditionally excluded from many of Sudan's legal protections and social services – to move south in search of more secure livelihoods. This movement itself has put greater strain on resources.¹¹³

But it is the political response to environmental change that made the fundamental difference. Government failure to manage scarce resources exacerbated local tribal and political conflicts, and these growing conflicts fed a vicious cycle of environmental degradation. Armed groups



Crispin Hughes/Oxfam

Women from Apamulele adakar (herding group) in Kenya, escorting cattle on a day's journey for water. They climb and walk some 30km to bring back water for their families. In future, such groups may have to go even further in search of water, and as they do so risk greater competition with other groups (2002).

razed villages – and created the demand for scarce wood to rebuild them. According to a 2007 study, if displaced Darfuris are ever to return home, they will need up to 16 million trees to rebuild their homes.¹¹⁴

Across the world, climate change will make some areas less habitable, increasing the number of environmental refugees fleeing desertification and flooding by up to 200 million. By 2010, there may already be 50 million. These seem startling numbers, until it is remembered that around 900 million people are already affected by desertification today.¹¹⁵ Some will move to areas already suffering from shortages of water, food, and land, which will increase the risk of conflict. In Bangladesh, environmental pressure has already had violent results. As many as 5000 people have been killed in the last 20 years in fighting between migrants and indigenous groups in the Chitagong Hill Tracts (where land has been taken from the Jumma to accommodate Bengalis from the plains). If sea levels rise by around 1 metre by 2100 as expected, up to a fifth of Bangladesh may be flooded. Millions of people may be forced from their homes. If the intense competition for land is mismanaged, the prospects for more violence are real.¹¹⁶

In 2007 one report estimated that 46 countries, with a total population of 2.7 billion, will face 'a high risk of violent conflict' because of the 'double-headed risk' when climate change compounds more traditional security threats. Another 56 countries, with an additional 1.2 billion people, will face 'a high risk of political instability, with potential for violent conflict a distant risk in the longer term'.¹¹⁷ If a fraction of these countries fails to manage these combined pressures, we will see a significant increase in the number of armed conflicts. Whether they do or not will depend, in part at least, on whether they design their national adaptation strategies on climate change to reduce the risk of conflict and disaster, and to contribute to effective poverty-reduction strategies to reduce inequalities.

Arms proliferation

Beyond all these risks of conflict, the proliferation of arms, especially small arms and light weapons, is an incendiary addition that helps to make conflicts more prolonged and lethal. That proliferation is gathering pace. In 2006, worldwide military spending passed its highest Cold War peaks,¹¹⁸ and every year 10–14 billion new units of small arms ammunition are added to the total.¹¹⁹



Some of the unexploded devices that a Chinese battalion of UN peacekeepers found in the town of Hiniyah in Lebanon (2006).

UN Photo/Mark Garten

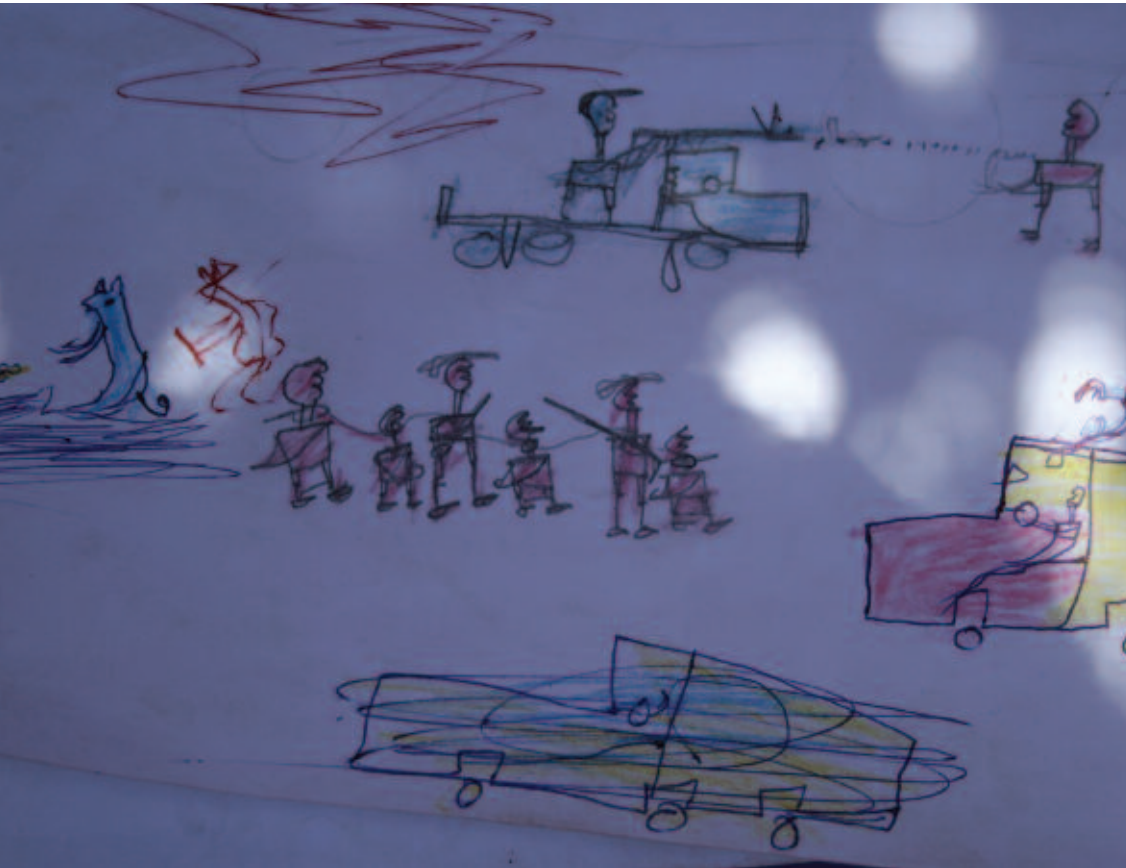
From West Africa to the EU, regional arms-control initiatives have tried to curb this proliferation, and have begun to have an impact. But they are in danger of being overwhelmed by changes in both the technology and the globalisation of the arms industry. Seventy-six countries now manufacture small arms ammunition. New producers like India, South Africa, and Brazil are now major arms exporters. Modern weapons are assembled in one country – often with weak export controls – from components made in many others.¹²⁰

For national governments and regional organisations, it is increasingly difficult to have any truly effective controls, and without effective regulation, there are no means to ensure that arms do not fuel conflicts and killings. Some companies even break international law in pursuit of a deal. In 2002, the air charter company Aerocom was part of an arms trafficking network that shipped thousands of AK-47s from Serbia to Liberia, contravening a UN arms embargo.¹²¹ But the irresponsible transfer of arms and ammunition, which results in weapons falling into the hands of groups who choose to kill civilians, is a problem in much wider circles than just these relatively small embargo-busting companies. Among the DRC's armed groups, arms have been recovered that are believed to have come from Germany, France, the UK, Belgium, South Africa, the USA, Russia, China, Egypt, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia.¹²² As one man, Urothi, in the eastern DRC put it:

*Now we are seeing so many guns. All these militia have guns. And they can get so many more guns. While they have this supply it is very hard to see when the fighting and killing will stop.*¹²³

The UN's former commander in the DRC, General Patrick Cammaert, saw the futility of disarmament without controlling the supply of arms at the same time. 'You had the feeling,' he told a press conference organised by the *Control Arms* coalition in 2007, 'that you were mopping the floor when the tap was open. One moment you disarm a group, and then a week later the same group has fresh arms and ammunition.'

While the need to control all arms should be clear, effectively indiscriminate weapons, like cluster munitions, present particular threats. Months after the Israeli-Lebanese conflict of 2006, for example, unexploded bombs and shells still littered parts of southern Lebanon.¹²⁴



A Darfuri child's perception of life in Darfur, drawn during Oxfam's public-health work in Kalma camp, South Darfur (2007).

Jane Beesley/Oxfam

Choosing to protect

Faced with that future and the current conflicts in Darfur, Iraq and elsewhere, many people sympathise with those suffering, but feel impotent to do anything about it. Many governments feel the same. They think that there is little that can be done. That is wrong.

None of what we have just described is inevitable. It depends on choices. Some states and non-state actors *choose* to kill civilians, or pursue strategies in which civilians are too likely to die. Some governments choose to protect their citizens. Some do not protect all of them, or not well enough.

The more effective protection of civilians will not just rest on the noble aspiration of the Universal Declaration for a world free from fear. It will rest on the good practice of some governments, and on the successes they and others, not least civilians themselves, have achieved. Chapter 3 explores those examples of good practice.



Elders from a village peace committee in Isiolo, Kenya, discussing ways to resolve cattle thefts and murders carried out by their Samburu neighbours (2002).

Ami Vitale/Oxfam

Building on success

Civilians suffer the destructive force of conflict first and worst, but they are also often the first to develop ways to protect themselves. Many do not sit back and suffer the systematic violation of the international humanitarian law they experience. They do something about it. Success is never easy, and seldom complete. But to varying extents, in different crises, groups of civilians are achieving real results.

People protecting themselves

When faced with a gun, most people do what they are told. In 2007 in the DRC, Oxfam interviewed men and women in the Beni area of North Kivu. In eight out of nine communities, they gave up whatever armed groups demanded – goods, money, crops, sex, or forced labour. But even there, they had tactics to reduce the threats. Women walked in groups, and men and women limited their work in the fields – despite the obvious consequences – to reduce the threat of abduction or rape.¹²⁵ In late 2007, one woman, Mukishimana, told Oxfam about the threats they still faced – and some of the tactics they used:

*To try and protect ourselves we go in numbers. We get widows and old women who do not have children to accompany us. As a mother, I am scared for my daughters. They go to work in the banana plantation to get something to eat. I know it's not safe. But for a whole day's work they get some bananas, which gives them something at least.*¹²⁶

In the occupied West Bank, groups of Palestinian farmers, known as the Popular Committees against the Wall, challenged Israel's positioning of its 'security barrier', so that it would not block their access to the markets where they sold their produce – and won in Israeli courts. One member, Hifthi Hourani, explained how they did it:

*In Tulkarem, with forty demonstrations, and visits of scores of international delegations, Israel was forced to change the route of the wall...free[ing] the villages of Baqa Sharqiya, Nazlet Issa and Nazlet Abu Nar from being imprisoned.*¹²⁷

National civil-society organisations, like Kenya's PeaceNet, can also play a vital role even in the most difficult circumstances. Funded by Oxfam, it



Girls in a refugee camp in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, take part in some participatory photography training funded by Oxfam. The images they captured show how they view access to water, health care, education, and livelihoods (2008).

Leslie Knott

runs an 'SMS Nerve Centre' in Nairobi which collects information about potential attacks via text messages, and immediately warns local Peace and Security Committees which, in at least some circumstances, have been able to rapidly intervene to prevent bloodshed. For example, on 28 January 2008, after the murder of an MP in Nairobi, a team intercepted a gang of youths heading to attack another community, and was able to persuade them to disperse.

Women seeking peace

Even once a conflict is over, people can be faced with violence or continued suffering, *and* find ways to overcome these. Four out of five Rwandan women have suffered psychological trauma for years after the 1994 genocide,¹²⁸ but a group of widows established a self-help organisation, AVEGA (Association des Veuves du Genocide – Association of the Widows of Genocide), to provide social, medical, and psychological support. As one member said:

*With little help from the government or local authorities, we have little choice but to rebuild our nation and try to heal the wounds ourselves.*¹²⁹

Women are often particularly active in such work. Across the border in Burundi's Karuzi province, one Tutsi woman was disgusted at killings by Tutsi and Hutu alike. She invited 15 Tutsi and 15 Hutu women to her house. Together, they formed the *Habamahoro* group: Hutu women challenging their brothers, Tutsi women talking to Tutsi men, denouncing anyone who committed violence.¹³⁰ In Uganda, women 'peace animators' have trained other women to draw on their own experiences of armed violence to manage conflict between and within communities.¹³¹ In West Africa, it took the mediation of women – the Mano River Women's Peace Network – to prevent conflict erupting as thousands of refugees entered Guinea from Liberia and Sierra Leone.¹³² As the UN Security Council recognised in 2000, when it passed resolution 1325 on women's role in conflict, there appears to be something universal about women often being particularly effective in helping to resolve conflicts.

Holding the state to account

Sometimes people challenge the authorities that fail to protect them. In Chocó, Colombia, civilians prevented the expansion of a policy that increased their risk of being attacked. The government's 'Forest Guardian'



The Indian contingent of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), consisting mostly of women, arrives in Monrovia to begin its tour of duty (2007).

Eric Canalstein/UN Photo

scheme paid civilians to provide information, ostensibly about local coca production.¹³³ In reality, there was little coca produced. In the eyes of the guerrillas, this put the civilians in the pay of the state, implicated in their conflict. As one man put it in 2007, 'if we did this we would all be killed.'¹³⁴ A thousand 'guardians' had been enrolled, and the government wanted a thousand more. Local people protested, and accompanied by Oxfam, representatives successfully lobbied the Colombian government. The 'Forest Guardian' scheme continues, but this expansion was halted.

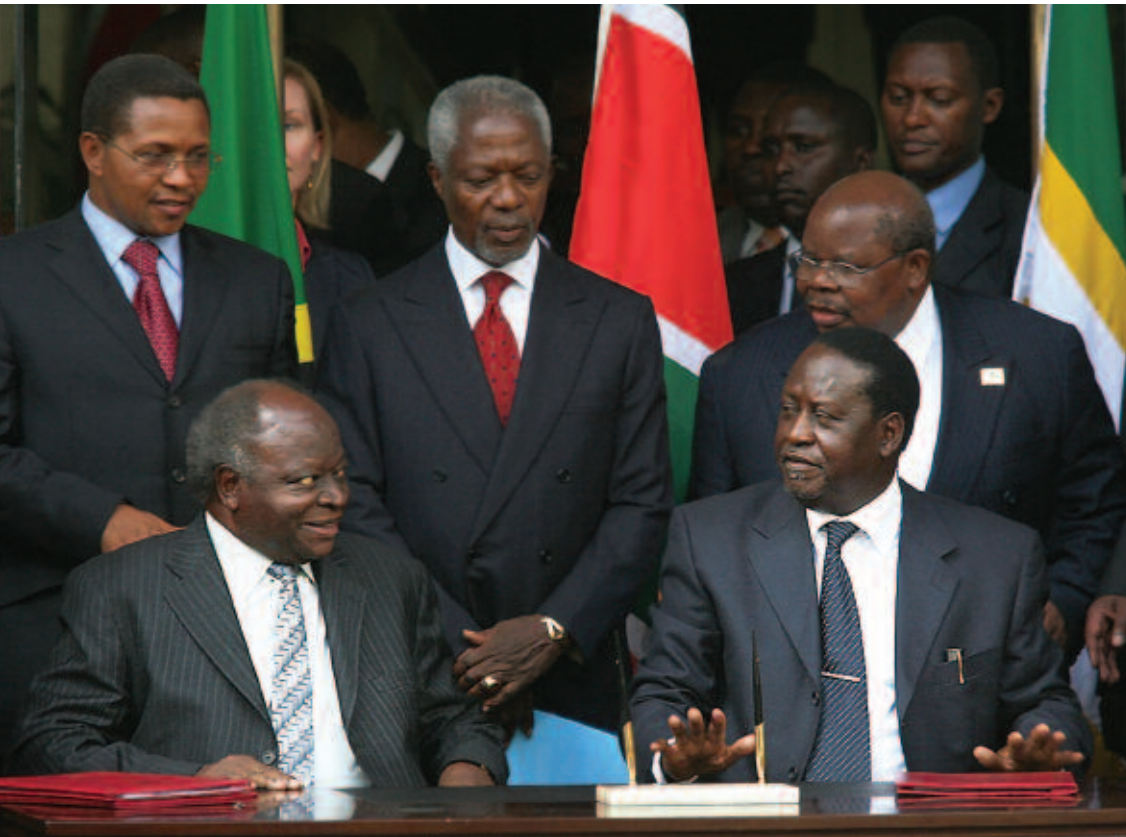
Civilians – and indeed civil society – certainly cannot do everything themselves, and it is states that have the primary Responsibility to Protect their citizens. Some states have very limited capacity, but even with minimal resources they choose to do what they can. There are examples of good practice, as well as bad, and some of them come from countries emerging from the most vicious conflicts.

Leadership of national governments

Liberia was characterised by gross levels of violence: killings, amputations, and perhaps the highest level of sexual violence in the world. According to one study, 74 per cent of women and girls were raped during the conflict that ended in 2003.¹³⁵ As in many post-conflict settings, some of that violence goes on. In 2007, Liberia's Association of Female Lawyers still received reports of up to six rapes a day.¹³⁶ President Johnson Sirleaf set out a National Action Plan on gender-based violence. It includes reforms to the legal and health systems, with better training and case management, psychosocial support for survivors, and economic and social programmes for women and girls.¹³⁷

Much more needs to be done. Impoverished Liberians in remote communities still have no redress when their rights are violated, because the system of justice is so weak, and because they are simply not aware of the law. These huge practical difficulties leave a 'culture of impunity' that still must be challenged, despite the progress in some areas.

It was a new president who prioritised Liberia's struggle against sexual violence. Elsewhere, existing governments have learnt lessons, and changed strategies, to improve the protection of their citizens. In 2006, Uganda recognised that military means alone could neither end the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)'s rebellion, nor protect civilians from it, and so the government agreed a Cessation of Hostilities with the LRA.



Simon Maina/AFP/Getty Images

Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki (left) and opposition chief Raila Odinga (right) sign an agreement on 28 February 2008 in Nairobi, under which Mr Odinga became Prime Minister. Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete, chief mediator Kofi Annan, and Tanzania's former president Benjamin Mkapa look on.

In the ceasefire's first 12 months, the average number of LRA attacks fell to five a month,¹³⁸ and 900,000 displaced people were able to move towards their homes.¹³⁹ In much of northern Uganda, men, women, and children still fear violence, and only political agreement can secure a lasting peace; at the time of writing, the Juba process was continuing to pursue that. But an Oxfam survey in 2007 found that 60 per cent of those displaced thought life had become more peaceful since the ceasefire. One woman in Madi Opei camp told Oxfam:

*It is getting better now. We can go to the fields and send our children to the wells to collect water. And there are no abductions.*¹⁴⁰

Added value of regional organisations

In both Liberia and Uganda, progress depended on governments choosing a strategy that gave a higher priority to protecting their citizens. With the best will, however, some governments struggle to do that. That is why regional organisations like the AU and EU, the UN, and the wider international community must share that responsibility, supporting the governments most directly affected.

Sometimes there may be such a lack of trust and such a degree of fear between national governments and their armed opposition that they cannot negotiate a peaceful resolution themselves. Regional organisations and others can sometimes mediate successfully, and help find a solution that was otherwise impossible. Nelson Mandela's mediation in Burundi in 1999, followed by South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma's in 2003, were both crucial in reducing Burundi's violence, and allowing tens of thousands of Burundian refugees to return.¹⁴¹ In 2004 and 2007, it was ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) whose mediation reduced dangerous tensions in Togo and Guinea respectively. In 2008, Kofi Annan helped secure the deal between Kenya's rival political leaders, as much as an African elder as a former UN Secretary-General. As some analysts, like Thelma Ekiyor of the West Africa Civil Society Institute, have said, this is the 'unheralded' work of some African leaders and regional organisations already upholding their Responsibility to Protect.¹⁴² It is also part of the wider success of recent peaceful mediations; between 2000 and 2005, 17 wars were resolved through peaceful mediation, whereas only four ended through military victory – reversing the balance of most of the twentieth century when the most common way to end wars was simply to win them.¹⁴³



Nigerian troops, part of the African Union mission in Darfur, on patrol in Labado (2007).

Paul Jeffrey/ACT-Caritas

At other times, national governments choose not to uphold international humanitarian law. That is why regional organisations and others must be prepared to use early and muscular diplomacy, sanctions, and incentives to persuade them.

And sometimes national governments will simply be facing security challenges that stretch across their borders, and are impossible to solve alone. Regional organisations like ECOWAS in West Africa and SADC (Southern African Development Community) in Southern Africa, as well as the Nairobi process for East Africa, for example, have at least begun to take steps to control the proliferation of arms across national borders. None of them are perfect but they are examples of regional organisations starting to address the security challenges that national governments, on their own, cannot.

For the AU similarly, its first major operation, the AMIS (African Union Mission in the Sudan) mission in Darfur, was far from perfect. But without it, the conflict there would have been even worse. Initially, AMIS significantly improved protection for many Darfuris. In some parts of the region at least, once or twice a week AU soldiers would patrol areas that women visited to collect firewood, and prevented at least some attacks.¹⁴⁴ But after two years without sufficient support from the international community, AMIS found itself under-resourced and its staff often unable to protect themselves, and its performance dropped considerably. Later, Oxfam workers heard complaints from displaced men and women that some AU troops would run away from trouble, and fail to investigate attacks.¹⁴⁵ Now in 2008 the AU is developing more experience, as part of the hybrid United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur, and, beyond Darfur, it is slowly developing the confidence and capacity to take more effective steps to reduce conflict.

Such military forces are seldom the best way to protect civilians, and they will always fail unless they are part of a wider strategy that tackles the political and economic causes of the conflict. They are, however, the starkest indicator – because of their enormous cost – of whether regional organisations and foreign governments are willing to support the protection of civilians in other countries. While Northern support for the AU in Darfur was inadequate, there have been positive examples where Northern governments, regional organisations, and others have provided vital complements to what conflict-affected governments have been able to do, and taken the lead in international efforts to support them. In 2006,



A woman carries bananas as Polish soldiers from a joint EU and Congolese force patrol the streets of Kinshasa in 2006.

Issouf Sanogo/Getty Images

for example, Australia helped the Timor-Leste authorities stop spiralling violence, and the EU and ASEAN (the Association of South East Asian Nations) completed a successful monitoring mission in Aceh, Indonesia.

Africa and Europe – partners for peace?

Elsewhere, the EU's support to the AU in Darfur has certainly not been as good as it should have been. Funding has been relatively generous, but more politically difficult contributions, like providing European helicopters, have not been forthcoming. Nevertheless, the growing partnership between the EU and AU on peace and security, building up the AU's capacity to prevent and respond to future crises, is increasingly important. In the DRC, the EU has helped reform the country's security services, and twice sent troops; in 2003 to halt spiralling violence in Bunia, and in 2006 to help the authorities successfully complete elections. Both actions presented a clear added value above and beyond the UN peacekeeping mission already in the country, because most UN peacekeepers simply do not have such a high level of training or such good equipment. This is not an ideal model for the future; UN peacekeeping operations should really be adequately trained and equipped. But as long as the world's most militarily capable countries refuse to commit significant numbers of troops to the UN, this added value of the EU and others will remain.

That added value also rests on the AU and EU both realising their mutual self-interest. Africa needs the EU because, for all Europe's history of exploitation on the continent, the EU is a model regional organisation that has built peace in Europe through spreading prosperity. And the EU needs the AU because geographical proximity means that Europe will be the first to feel the effects if the AU fails to uphold peace and security in Africa.

In 2007, they agreed the first Action Plan, covering 2008–10, to implement their Africa–EU Strategic Partnership across a range of issues from trade to governance, and, in terms of conflict, to make the AU's emerging African Peace and Security Architecture fully operational. That means support for a host of initiatives, including the AU's Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise, and the African Standby Force (both its military and civilian dimension).¹⁴⁶



The United Nations Security Council Chamber during a meeting on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2007.

Devra Berkowitz/UN Photo

The structures of the EU as well as the AU, however, have room for improvement. The EU has often been slow or, as on the Middle East, divided. In Darfur, its African Peace Facility was inadequate to provide predictable funding for the AU. In the period of this Action Plan to 2010, it must find a better way to do so, while working with the AU to press the UN to set up a mechanism that the AU can genuinely rely on.

France has led all the EU's most high-profile missions, from those in the DRC in 2003 and 2006, to EUFOR in Chad in 2008. And under France's presidency of the EU in the second half of 2008, the EU has the chance to define its global role more clearly than ever before. The European Security Strategy, originally agreed in 2003, can now be revised to accept the EU's role in upholding the Responsibility to Protect, in Africa and beyond.

That Strategy already goes wider than Africa. The EU's 16 missions to conflicts between 2003 and 2007 have ranged from Macedonia to Palestine, from Afghanistan to Indonesia, as well as Africa, supporting national authorities and other regional organisations, like ASEAN, as well as the AU. Yet, as the EU's response to the crisis in Darfur and Chad has shown, it has not yet overcome the slowness and disagreements that have marred Europe's common foreign policy to date.

At the time of writing, the future structure of EU foreign policy is not entirely clear. To many, it needs a new more powerful high representative for foreign affairs, combining powers that have been split between different posts, as well as a new External Action Service at her or his disposal. What all agree is that it is time for the EU to live up to its potential to protect civilians around the world.

The role of the UN Security Council

One of the reasons that the EU, AU, and other regional organisations have a real added value is because global governance is still so weak. If the UN Security Council was never stalled by permanent members protecting their allies and interests, and if the UN had access to peacekeepers with the equipment and training of the major military powers, there would never be a need for the AU or EU to impose their own sanctions on governments attacking their own citizens, or to deploy EU troops to back up weaker UN missions.



A worker from Landmine Action clearing mines in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan 2003.

Landmine Action

So, although they are key elements of the international system recognised in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the importance of the AU, EU, and other regional organisations rests in part on the admission that the UN cannot under current conditions do all that was originally intended. But that does not mean that there have not been major improvements in the UN.

In 2006, the UN Security Council determined that the mandates of all future UN peacekeeping missions should include provisions for protecting civilians in imminent danger, including from sexual violence.¹⁴⁷ The Council finally recognised that peacekeepers must do more than keep the peace between opposing parties or monitor a fragile peace. They must do everything possible to protect civilians from murder and rape. They must effectively implement Security Council resolution 1325 which called on UN peacekeepers to tackle the specific threats faced by women. Traditionally, the troops provided to the UN have simply not been trained or equipped to do so. And protecting civilians may be only one among many objectives a UN mission is given. But this too is beginning to change. In 2007, the UN developed a military doctrine to put into practice the objective of protecting civilians. Sixty years after the first UN peacekeepers were deployed in Palestine in 1948, UN peacekeeping is larger than ever before, with 83,000 uniformed and nearly 20,000 civilian personnel at the end of 2007,¹⁴⁸ and at least has the potential to be more effective than ever as well.

That potential has not yet been realised, however, as the demands on the UN peacekeeping system far surpass the resources it receives to carry them out. Too often, peacekeepers are deployed as a substitute for the serious, principled political engagement necessary to resolve the underlying issues driving a conflict. Too often, they are expected to deliver results that they have neither the mandate, resources, nor political leverage to deliver.

Despite the scepticism of many, some international agreements have also had a significant impact. The 1997 international ban on landmines has contributed to the annual casualties from landmines falling by perhaps more than two-thirds.¹⁴⁹ Much more needs to be done, but partly because of the practical success of that treaty, there is now significant momentum to control the trade in small arms and light weapons, and other conventional arms. At the UN General Assembly in late 2006, most governments backed the need for an international Arms Trade Treaty and agreed to start work towards a comprehensive legally binding instrument, which for the first time will bring in common standards for the international transfer of all conventional weapons.

“There can be no successful business in an unsuccessful society and there can be no successful society without successful business. Prosperity requires peace.”

Nepalese National Business Initiative (NBI) (2005) information booklet (Kathmandu, Nepal: NBI).

Business sense

Governments have the primary Responsibility to Protect their citizens, and most of the above initiatives have been undertaken by them or by intergovernmental bodies. But all this is being done in a world in which the private sector, civil society, and others share a significant role in protecting civilians.

For all the profit made from ‘conflict resources’ or the arms trade, most businesses thrive in peace, not war, and have an interest in security. In Colombia, the country’s largest electricity supplier, Interconexión Eléctrica SA, had its pylons attacked 1200 times between 1999 and 2006. ‘There was a sense of crisis’, the company said. ‘We had to do something that could bring long-term stability and sustainable peace.’ It set up and supported 20 ‘peace and development programmes’, and convinced other companies to do the same.¹⁵⁰

In Mindanao in the Philippines, Datu Paglas was one of the worst hotspots for violence. But three companies – PagCorp, La Frutera, and Oribanex – developed a banana plantation where Muslims and Christians would work together. ‘Christians are no longer viewed as superior or more specialised than Muslim employees’, one trainer said in 2006. The plantation has helped to reduce inter-religious tensions. The area is safer, and the rebel MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) no longer try to force Muslim workers to join their conflict. The plantation is now also one of the most profitable in the Philippines.¹⁵¹

Foreign companies can also have a useful impact – and prevent a negative impact – through their operations and investments. Organisations like International Alert and Amnesty International have developed guidelines of good practice to ensure that companies do not, for example, recruit security guards with records of human-rights abuse. Other companies have used their investments to influence other corporate behaviour. In 2006, a number of European-based companies, funds, and banks disinvested from companies involved in the production of cluster munitions.¹⁵²

It would be too early to say that protecting civilians has become an important part of most companies’ social responsibility. Some companies’ potential to fuel conflicts is as great as ever. The lack of accountability of some mercenary companies was exemplified by Blackwater’s operations in Iraq. The company was forced to leave the country following allegations that it killed 17 civilians in Baghdad in September 2007.¹⁵³ Much of the defence industry similarly



By burning wood more efficiently, women in Darfur can cut down on the number of dangerous trips needed to collect wood outside the safety of the camps (2005).

Oxfam GB

remains out of effective control. But in the private sector as a whole, there are positive examples, and guidelines built upon them, that enlightened companies can follow, and which an increasing number do.

Humanitarian protection

While most companies (sensibly) seek to avoid conflict zones, humanitarian agencies have no choice. They support populations in need, even in the most dangerous circumstances. And when governments are not protecting their citizens, it is increasingly humanitarian agencies that are on the ground, trying to bring some measure of safety as well as sanitation or shelter, while ensuring that the relief work itself does not compromise civilians' safety in any way. In 2007, Marc DuBois, Head of Humanitarian Affairs at Médecins sans Frontières wrote that 'violence against civilians in Darfur would have continued at much higher levels were it not for the protection efforts of (*inter alia*) many humanitarian NGOs.'¹⁵⁴ In the town of Kebkabiya, Oxfam and Relief International trained 400 women to build stoves that burned fuel more efficiently, so that they would be less frequently exposed to the risk of attack on trips to collect firewood. Khadija was one of these women:

*It's safer for my children. The risks of violent attacks have been reduced due to making fewer trips to gather wood.*¹⁵⁵

In truth, judging the right approach to help make people safer is often far from simple. Elsewhere, it may not simply be a question of how to provide relief. The relief itself may increase the threats to civilians. For three months in 2007, families in Kisharo, DRC, told international NGOs to stop distributing plastic sheeting, because they feared being attacked by looters more than they feared being without shelter.¹⁵⁶

Influencing

Aid workers know only too well that what they can do to protect people is a fraction of what governments should be doing, but they are also increasingly alert to the impact of their programmes on people's safety, and often well placed to persuade more powerful bodies to fulfil their responsibilities. In West Timor, for example, a 2003 Oxfam survey of refugees, asking them where *they* wanted to be resettled, helped persuade the Indonesian government to change its policy that would have forced refugees to move away from their communities.



Watching a video in Cyembogo village hall, Rwanda; a community cinema for both Tutsis and Hutus, part of a larger project bringing Tutsi and Hutu communities together in shared development work (2003).

Ami Vitale/Oxfam

Humanitarian agencies' potential to influence others can of course go far wider than that. In the past ten years, they have become regular commentators on conflicts in the international media, and even to members of the UN Security Council. In the process, they have often been torn between 'naming and shaming' the governments that abuse their own citizens, or instead keeping quiet for fear of being expelled, and thereby losing their ability to help those in need directly. In the past few years, Oxfam and a number of other agencies have become increasingly more sophisticated in trying to find a middle way through this dilemma. While their programmes on the ground have become more sensitive to the safety of their beneficiaries, their advocacy has become more varied, sometimes using private 'humanitarian diplomacy', sometimes public campaigning, depending on the risks and benefits of different approaches in different crises.

Development for peace

A far wider group than humanitarian agencies has also learnt lessons from working in conflict. Development donors and agencies have recognised the impossibility of reaching the Millennium Development Goals with the current level of global conflict. And yet, for two reasons, they have found it difficult to invest sufficient development assistance in the countries at risk of conflict to do enough about this. First, it is both costly and risky to provide development assistance to the so-called fragile states in conflict, emerging from it, or at risk of it, which have been the most off-track regarding achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Second, the very label 'fragile states' is a vague term that can discourage development assistance to the countries that most need it.¹⁵⁷ In 2006, these states received only 10–15 per cent of official development assistance.¹⁵⁸

Donors' concern to show that their assistance works has discouraged them from focusing sufficiently on countries at risk of conflict. Some are now, however, recognising this for the short-term strategy that it is, and giving a higher priority to such countries. As Robert Picciotto, Visiting Professor at King's College, London, wrote in 2006, 'to get the best results you have to look at aid as venture capital. If you can prevent war, it means US\$60 billion in the bank.'¹⁵⁹



During Liberia's brutal conflict, D. Twe Memorial School in Monrovia was looted and closed down. In 2006 it was reopened as part of an Oxfam-funded project that provided employment for local people who restored the buildings and made new furniture and school uniforms. This education and employment is providing at least some kind of peace dividend.

Aubrey Wade/Oxfam

This new attitude to development in insecure countries must continue and be increased. Donor governments must invest – despite the challenges – in the countries most at risk of conflict. This means investing in effective and accountable institutions, in peaceful livelihoods and in equal access to essential services – so that the lack of livelihoods, or unequal access to services, cannot be continuing causes of instability.

At the micro level, some donor governments and development agencies have also developed conflict assessments to help ensure that their interventions reduce rather than increase the risk of conflict. The wrong development aid, just like the wrong humanitarian aid, can make matters worse, by increasing the inequality between groups that do and do not receive it. The right aid can do the opposite. Even as violence engulfed parts of Kenya in early 2008, Oxfam workers were able to help save some lives, building on the local peacebuilding that they had supported for some years. Daniel Kiptugen, Oxfam's Peace and Reconciliation Officer, recounted one such incident in January 2008:

There was this couple, both of them very sick. Local youth were about to burn down the shelter they were living in. They sent me a message that I had to intervene. I went with two elders from their community and talked to the youth. I told them they had to respect the sanctity of human life. Where did they expect the couple to go, I asked them? How would they like it, I said, if their family were put in the same situation? These guys felt ashamed.

Kiptugen managed to arrange for the couple and their children to be moved to a safer location.

Progress is uneven. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), donors are giving more funds to fragile states and post-conflict countries, but still not doing enough. In 2007, it found that the EU, seven years after it committed to mainstream conflict prevention in its development programmes, still needed to make 'more systematic use of conflict analysis as part of country level programmes.'¹⁶⁰ Governmental and civil-society development agencies must continue to get better in ensuring that their programmes are sensitive to the risks of conflict – and, at their best, are a useful contribution to conflict prevention.

Colombia (2006)

What is the best solution to the conflict with the guerillas and with the paramilitaries?

Negotiation	69.5%
Military solution	26.3%
Don't know	4.2%

Source: J.C. Rodríguez and M.A. Seligson (2007), 'The Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia' 2006, USAID, Universidad de los Andes, and Vanderbilt University.

Movements for peace and protection

Much of this chapter has been about people directly involved in conflicts doing what they can to protect themselves or others. There is another, final dimension. Millions of people who are not directly affected, who do not know anyone who has been killed or raped or displaced, also do what they can.

That human empathy starts within the countries affected. Two-thirds of Colombians favour negotiating with both the guerrillas *and* paramilitaries, rather than seeking a military solution, or following President Uribe's approach of a tough stance against guerrillas and negotiations with the paramilitaries. In the Middle East, most Israelis and Palestinians want negotiations, not continuing occupation or the cycle of violence by both sides.¹⁶¹ In Sudan, there is widespread dismay at the killings by all sides in Darfur. A 2004 study found people in other regions of the country both sympathetic to Darfuris and critical of those they saw as responsible.¹⁶²

Darfur has of course seized far wider attention, including in other parts of Africa. In a survey in eight African countries, 65 per cent of respondents said that the UN should do whatever it took to stop severe human-rights violations, as in Darfur.¹⁶³ Around the world, the Globe for Darfur coalition organised 'Days for Darfur' to keep the crisis near the top of governments' agendas. In 2008, such groups are working to build the foundations of a new Global Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, pressing for effective action in all crises, and responding to a widespread perception that far more should be done. In an international study in 2007, 76 per cent of Chinese and 74 per cent of Americans said that the UN Security Council has a responsibility to end severe human-rights violations wherever they take place.¹⁶⁴

Turning any of those public views into government policy is not always easy. In 2003, millions of people around the world marching against the planned invasion of Iraq found how difficult it is to change governments' political goals. Nevertheless, there are examples when governments calculate the political costs of different policy options – and realise the pressure is too high to ignore. In the USA, Darfur campaigners have played a tangible role in increasing US financial support both to the AU and to hybrid AU–UN missions.¹⁶⁵



A montage of some of the faces from the Million Faces Petition, which was organised by the Control Arms campaign to call for an international Arms Trade Treaty (2006).

Oxfam

Beyond such crises, hundreds of thousands of people have been involved in wider conflict issues. In 1997, the international convention to ban landmines was the result of an unprecedented global campaign, involving over 1100 groups in over 60 countries, which stimulated and supported the intergovernmental negotiations led by Canada. In 2003, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) joined Amnesty International and Oxfam to form the *Control Arms* campaign to press for assistance to communities ridding themselves of arms – and for an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) to control their supply. At that time, only three governments supported them. Following international mass campaigning, visualised by a petition of a ‘Million Faces’, they were joined by others, a group of governments from every region working together to build wider support for an ATT. In 2006, 153 governments voted at the UN General Assembly to begin the process of negotiating the Arms Trade Treaty to prevent irresponsible arms transfers.

In 2007, the UN Secretary-General called on all governments to present their views on the feasibility and parameters of an ATT. The campaign launched a ‘People’s Consultation’ in more than 50 countries, to echo this diplomacy and to press their governments to answer the UN Secretary-General’s call. It succeeded. Typically, 10 to 12 governments send submissions to such UN consultations. A record 100 sent submissions on the Arms Trade Treaty. In 2008, the process to develop it further is under way.

What stands in the way

Assuming that a mass of people worldwide can be mobilised to call for protection of civilians, what are they up against? Chapter 4 outlines the lack of respect rebels (and some governments) have for international humanitarian law, and the gap between the rhetoric and reality of protection.

“When the paramilitaries entered our hamlet it was their sixth incursion into La Gabarra; the first had been at Socuavo. Nine people were killed. As the paramilitaries advanced further, they kept killing, killing, killing, killing. When they arrived in Vetás, next to a site called 46, they attacked a building and killed and wounded some of the occupants.”

‘Ana Dilia’, displaced from Catatumbo, Norte de Santander, Colombia, interviewed for the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

Source: Norwegian Refugee Council (2007) ‘Let it be known: internally displaced Colombians speak out’, Bogotá: IDMC, p. 38.

Standing between people and protection

There is no shortage of positive examples of governments and their citizens taking effective steps to protect civilians. They remain however examples, not the norm, because there are too many other examples where states and non-state actors choose to attack, terrorise, and threaten civilians with almost complete impunity. The choice to kill is the fundamental cause of the suffering we have described – and this is where the fundamental responsibility lies. There is a yawning gap between the precepts of international humanitarian law and how most combatants choose to fight. Mirroring this gap, there is another: between what governments and the international community say they will do to protect civilians, and what they actually do. This chapter is about both those gaps.

Reasons to kill

In 2007, the humanitarian scholar Hugo Slim distinguished four different ‘anti-civilian ideologies’ that lead people to kill civilians. Some, like Darfur’s janjaweed or the killers in Srebrenica, he wrote, ‘reject the civilian idea...see every enemy whether young, old, male or female as a threat which should be utterly destroyed.’ Others ‘agree that there are such things as civilians but that the cause for which their group fights is so important that it trumps the ethic of civilian protection.’ Some would put many of the planners of the Iraq war as well as many non-state actors around the world into this category.

Slim puts al-Qaeda in a third group of killers who ‘regard civilian identity as just too slippery and ambiguous. To them, the farmer, the female newspaper editor, the member of another clan, the teacher, the policeman’s girlfriend are “not just” civilians.’ Slim’s fourth category is for those, like some soldiers of well-disciplined armies, who may genuinely regret killing civilians, but still sometimes do so.¹⁶⁶ All these ideologies are common among insurgents and rebels, and regrettably present among some government forces as well. In the DRC, government soldiers committed half of the human-rights abuses recorded in 2006. Very few of

“Our combatants don’t get paid. Therefore they can’t use prostitutes. If we politely ask women to come with us, they are not going to accept it. So, we have to make them obey us so we can get what we want.”

A soldier in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Source: J. Ward (2005) ‘Broken bodies, broken dreams: violence against women exposed’, Nairobi: IRIN, p. 182.

them were even investigated, because of what MONUC (the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) called the ‘systematic interference in the administration of justice.’¹⁶⁵ One woman told Oxfam:

*These soldiers who are here to protect us, how is it that they can come and rape us? This isn’t protection. Women are afraid. They are frightened when they see soldiers.*¹⁶⁸

In Afghanistan Oxfam interviewed 500 civilians in six provinces in 2007 and found that 53 per cent identified the Taliban, warlords, drug traffickers, or criminals as their major security threats. Around half also cited local disputes about resources (50 per cent cited land, 43 per cent water) as an even greater cause of their insecurity. But a sizeable minority – 25 per cent – perceived international forces or Afghan officials as a great threat as well.¹⁶⁹

State capacity and will to protect

Where the state fails to protect its citizens, this may of course be because of too few resources, not too little will. When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became president in 2006, Liberia’s budget contained only \$1m. Police officers earn \$30 a month, few judges are trained lawyers, and Monrovia’s central prison remains a collection of dilapidated buildings, in which prisoners are crammed up to ten to a cell.¹⁷⁰

Most commonly, there is a combination of incapacity and unwillingness to properly protect civilians. The government of South Sudan – the state within a state, set up after the 2005 peace deal – has few of the resources necessary to protect its people, not least because of inadequate international support. But it is also lack of political will and the lack of training, command and control, and sufficient resources for the rule of law that contribute to members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) committing crimes and extorting money at roadblocks,¹⁷¹ or the continuing recruitment of child soldiers by junior SPLA commanders, or the failure to investigate alleged sexual attacks by SPLA soldiers on girls as young as seven.¹⁷²

Most ironically, some governments invoke ‘protection’ not to protect civilians but to pursue their own ends. Too many civilians are abused not by rebels or insurgents, but by states’ security services that are supposed to be conducting operations to protect them. Until 2006, when Uganda



Displaced girls sleeping on the concrete floor of a cramped 'dormitory' at Kotido primary school, Uganda. The children fled to Kotido from Lord's Resistance Army attacks in July 2002. Most arrived with only the clothes they were wearing.

agreed a ceasefire with the rebel LRA, it pursued its military campaign, avowedly to protect its citizens, even though it was that campaign itself which had displaced hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁷³ Uganda was not unusual in believing that it could find a military solution, in failing to do so, and in wrapping a failed strategy in the language of 'protection'. More famously, when the USA and UK could no longer claim that they were protecting their own citizens from weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, they sought to justify their invasion by saying that it had helped to protect Iraqis. By 2004, the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was forced to argue that 'we surely have a responsibility to act when a nation's people are subjected to a regime such as Saddam's'.¹⁷⁴

Guarding against scepticism

Some governments – particularly in the global South, which has a long history of suffering from Western interference – are understandably sceptical of claims by Western governments that they are protecting civilians when they invade countries like Iraq. For some, this leads to a wider scepticism of the whole international effort to protect civilians. When, at the UN World Summit in 2005, governments accepted their Responsibility to Protect civilians around the world, a number did so with reluctance. They feared that this could be another noble concept all too easily abused.

To guard against this, further international agreements can go some way. As Kofi Annan proposed while still UN Secretary-General, there should be a UN agreement on the principles guiding the Security Council before it authorises force to protect civilians. That must be as much to prevent another Iraq, as another failure to intervene in Rwanda. It must set down clearly that the threat of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity to a substantial number of people – not the political objectives of the Council's powerful members – are the only justification for authorising force to protect civilians. But that is not enough. There must also be clear principles regarding when to use the far more widely applicable instruments available, from the imposition of sanctions by the UN Security Council, to the suspension of members of regional organisations like the AU.



Iraqis gather at the site of the devastating Sadriya market bombing on 19 April 2007 in Baghdad, Iraq. At least 127 people were killed and 148 wounded when a car bomb exploded in the market.

Wathiq Khuzai/Getty Images

Global ‘war on terror’ fails to protect

The global ‘war on terror’ has had a major impact on civilians around the world. In 2006, two-thirds of the world’s new refugees came from Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁷⁵ Since then, the world’s increasing number of refugees has been almost entirely caused by those fleeing the war in Iraq. To date, the ‘war’ has been a stark example of the contrast between an objective that includes protecting civilians, and a track record of so far failing to do so – and indeed in much of its international conduct making civilians more vulnerable. In 2006, according to the US State Department, the number of terrorist attacks around the world increased by 28 per cent. While 9/11 has not been repeated, the number of attacks in Europe and the Middle East has increased, and in 2007, the US government accepted that the ‘intervention in Iraq...has been used by terrorists as a rallying cry for radicalisation and extremist activity that has contributed to instability in neighbouring countries.’¹⁷⁶

Until the end of 2006, US action in both Iraq and Afghanistan was shaped by counterinsurgency doctrine dating back to the 1980s, written in the shadow of Viet Nam. Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution explained the impact of that doctrine on Iraqi civilians:

During the first years of the Iraq war, American forces were often too careless in the use of force, too prone to place force protection ahead of protection of the population, indiscriminate in their fire at times, and abuse of prisoners in some situations including most notoriously Abu Ghraib. They were also apparently indifferent to the well-being of the indigenous population when they tolerated looting and wanton lawlessness in the immediate aftermath of Saddam’s overthrow.¹⁷⁷

More than three years into Iraq’s war, in December 2006, General David Petraeus and Marine Lt. Gen. James Amos produced a new manual for the US Army and Marines’ counterinsurgency worldwide.¹⁷⁸ It implicitly criticised much of what had been done in Iraq, calling for restraint in the use of force to replace ‘unsuccessful practices’ that included:

- over-emphasising killing and capturing the enemy, rather than providing security for the population; and
- ignoring peacetime government processes, including legal procedures.

According to the ‘Iraq Index’, the leading non-partisan US analysis of Iraq, US troops were killing up to seven Iraqi civilians a week in the years just after 2003. By the end of 2006, this had fallen to one a week, apparently as



President Bush addresses the UN General Assembly, as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan looks on, 2002. A day after marking the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, world leaders opened their annual debate with US threats of action against Iraq at the top of the global agenda.

Doug Mills/AP Photo

a result of the deliberate decision to give higher priority to civilian safety.¹⁷⁹ In Afghanistan, by contrast, the US-led coalition has been unable to curb the number of violent attacks – up by around 25 per cent in 2007¹⁸⁰ – and US and NATO forces have killed hundreds of Afghan civilians each year, despite repeated calls from President Karzai for restraint.¹⁸¹ In the first half of 2007 alone, 230 women and children died at the hands of Afghan or international forces.¹⁸² Throughout the year, it has been estimated that as many as half of all the civilians killed were victims of those forces, not the Taliban or criminals.¹⁸³ The impact on support for the coalition is not surprising; as one Afghan man said in 2007:

*The Taliban killed two members of my family. The invading forces killed 16. You work out what side I'm on.*¹⁸⁴

Around the world, the tolerance for such high civilian casualties and any deliberate abuse of human rights has invariably been counter-productive. The only beneficiaries have been the rebels who gain greater support. In 2007, Somalia's transitional government arrested hundreds of opposition activists in Mogadishu, many of whom complained of torture by the Somali police. Support for the Islamist opposition only increased. As Abdullah Mohammed Shirwa, of the local watchdog Somali Peace Line, said: 'They are creating terrorists.'¹⁸⁵ Whether any such incident is condoned by the USA or other allies of Somalia's transitional government is usually impossible to know. The suspicion remains however that allies in the global 'war on terror' are able to continue such abuses without any effective pressure from the USA or other governments to reduce them.

Abu Ghraib and 'extraordinary renditions',¹⁸⁶ the high civilian casualties in Afghanistan and (in the past) Iraq, US silence over its allies' abuses...all these things have combined to create a dangerous impression: that the 'war on terror' must be won at all costs, and that substantial civilian suffering and the violation of international law are costs worth paying. All the evidence around the world, and General Petraeus' counterinsurgency doctrine point to the opposite: that the only way to defeat terrorism is to put a high priority on protecting civilians, and within the law.

Old world order

The 'war on terror' says much about the world order that has lasted since the end of the Cold War – with an unrivalled USA, and a UN Security Council divided over the Iraq invasion, but impotent to stop it. There



South African President Thabo Mbeki (right) and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao (left), during a welcoming ceremony in Pretoria, South Africa, 2007. Hu was on a state visit to South Africa as part of his African tour.

Denis Farrell /AP Photo

remains woefully inconsistent Security Council action between one crisis and another. Whether because of disinterest or vested interests, the UN Security Council fails to address (for example, Colombia), agree (for example, Chad), or act effectively (for example, Darfur) on a great number of conflicts affecting millions of people. At the same time, it has encouraged regional organisations to take a stronger role in their own security. To some, this is presented as benign empowerment, fulfilling Chapter VIII of the UN Charter which highlights the role of regional organisations. To the AU in particular however, deprived of the funds it needed in Darfur, it has looked like the Security Council sub-contracting its responsibility – without the resources to match. The Security Council’s ‘primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security’ (invested by Article 24 of the UN Charter) may suggest an impossible goal. But it is difficult to argue that the Council has worked as well as its founders imagined, or as civilians suffering in conflicts deserve. Despite a host of initiatives about protecting civilians, has the Council really dealt with Darfur any better than it dealt with genocide in Bosnia more than a decade ago?

New world order?

But that old world order is slowly changing. The UN Security Council is under increasing pressure to reform. China is becoming a global political as well as economic power. According to the US journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2008:

*China is well on the way to becoming a formidable global power...its diplomacy has extended its reach not just in Asia but also in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Indeed, whereas the Soviet Union rivaled the United States as a military competitor only, China is emerging as both a military and economic rival – heralding a profound shift in the distribution of global power.*¹⁸⁷

Russia too has become confident again, and a handful of regional powers are pressing for permanent UN Security Council places, or extending their global diplomatic interests. In Asia, India, and Indonesia. In Africa, South Africa, Nigeria, and Egypt. In Latin America, Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. For many, this is about gaining a political influence commensurate with their growing economic power. By the middle of this century, according to Goldman Sachs, the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) may overtake all the original G6 economies combined.¹⁸⁸ That is some way off. Already



Looking out across the bay at some of the most expensive land in the world (Chowpatty Beach, Mumbai, India, 2007).

Shreyans Bhansali, www.thebigdurian.net

however, Japan and Germany, the two Northern countries whose political influence has lagged furthest behind their economic influence, are looking forward to a more 'multipolar' world than it has been in the US-dominated post-Cold War period. Like India and Brazil, they are determined to achieve permanent seats at the UN Security Council. Though these four countries failed to achieve that during a vigorous campaign in 2005, their understandable frustration and ambition has not gone away. While UN reform runs slowly, the governments prepared to defend the Security Council's antiquated structure, still based on the world of 1945, are few and far between.

The speed and destination of all these changes is far from certain. In 2008, Parag Khanna of the New America Foundation wrote that 'America's unipolar moment' is already being replaced by 'a geopolitical marketplace', in which the USA competes 'alongside the world's other superpowers: the EU and China. This is geopolitics in the 21st century: the new Big Three.'¹⁸⁹ Few European policy makers, however, would aspire to such a grand role. The EU is looking for a real global role, but more as a model for other regional organisations than as a 'superpower', and, in terms of peace and security, most importantly as a partner with the AU. Former French President Chirac proclaimed a multipolar world in opposition to the USA, or at least to a US administration. Now, when President Sarkozy says that a multipolar world already exists, he means it in a far more co-operative sense.¹⁹⁰

Elsewhere, it is too early to say whether other emerging powers from the global South may join China in the first rank of a multipolar world. In 2007, the landmark book that marked India's 60th anniversary of independence was called *India's Century*, written by the country's trade minister, Kamal Nath, looking ahead to the rest of this century in which India has a global influence well beyond the economic. The fact that similar language citing the American or Chinese century is both commonplace and hotly debated says much about how much is changing – and uncertain – in future international relations. The USA will remain a major global power, though not alone, for decades to come. Indeed, the USA may remain the single most powerful country, but as Joseph Nye, Harvard's Professor of International Relations, has written: 'being Number One is not going to be what it used to be.'¹⁹¹



Hussein Malla/AP Photo

Two Chinese UN peacekeepers watch a French UN 155mm artillery canon fire a shell near their headquarters in the coastal town of Naqoura, southern Lebanon (2007).

Impact on civilians

The question is: will this 'new world order', whatever its precise shape, be any better at protecting civilians than the old? The answer is not self-evident. An expanded UN Security Council may be even more compromised by disagreement than the current one. Will the USA and China and other rising powers grasp the Responsibility to Protect that should come with their global status? It is not certain.

In the short term, any US president will be able to do something to re-establish international confidence in the wisdom of US leadership. Indeed, a US commitment to the protection of civilians, and to upholding international humanitarian law, would be a profound signal that the USA wants to work with international opinion, to lead from a position of moral strength. To some extent, the USA has already learnt lessons; the conduct of the war in Iraq since 2007 has not been the same as it was before that. Perhaps more importantly, the new US president will not be responsible for any of the conduct of the 'war on terror' before 2009, for the abuses that have undermined the still unattained goal of defeating global terrorism. Instead, the new administration will have an unrivalled potential to lead international action towards the better protection of civilians worldwide.

In the longer term, we may face uncertain years of US-Chinese competition. We do not know whether China's 'peaceful rise' – its committed strategy – will take into account the need to prioritise the protection of civilians, alongside its own need for natural resources, as it takes what it sees as its rightful place as a major world power. In 2007, one African security analyst concluded that 'China and India care little for anything other than a good return on their investment'.¹⁹² But they also see that stable environments for investment and energy supplies are incompatible with lingering conflicts and political crises. In 2007, China contributed to seven out of the UN's nine peacekeeping operations in Africa.¹⁹³ In the same year, the US envoy on Darfur described China's 'vital and constructive role' in pressing Sudan to accept an expanded peacekeeping mission.¹⁹⁴ Other analysts summed up China's evolving approach in its policy to another crisis:

China now views its involvement in Zimbabwe as a liability...President Hu Jintao's trip to Africa in February [2007] included stops in virtually all of Zimbabwe's neighbors, but not even a stopover in Harare...As China prioritizes its global image, boosts its leadership role, it is increasingly clear that lending fulsome support to regimes such as Mugabe's is bad politics.¹⁹⁵



Armed groups raze another village to the ground in Darfur (2004).

Scott Nelson/Getty Images

This may be part of a wider picture. According to one article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2008, ‘in just two years, China has moved from outright obstructionism...to an attempt to balance its material needs with its acknowledged responsibilities as a major power.’¹⁹⁶ China’s calculation of its economic and political interests is evolving. Gradually, a new, pragmatic Chinese foreign policy may continue emerging in which, crisis by crisis, it is more likely to be part of the solution. One unresolved question for the future is this: will China calculate that the security of its investments, its energy supplies, and its international reputation, depends on solving those crises in a way that brings sustainable stability and the protection of civilians?

And next?

The only certainty is that the future will be imperfect. But whether it will be worse – whether governments will be increasingly shamed by their failures to deal with crises like Darfur – is far from certain. It is equally possible that all the good examples of protecting people, outlined in Chapter 3, will be taken up more consistently. The old world order has not done that. The new, multipolar world order could. The final chapter will set out what that might look like in practice.

In place of failure

Sixty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions it is time to set an agenda for upholding them in the new multipolar world.

We do not need to reinvent international humanitarian law, or the Responsibility to Protect that tried to put new political commitment behind preventing the worst atrocities. What we do need is four changes that this final chapter will explore, as they relate to local actors, national governments, regional organisations, and the international community:

- Making the protection of civilians the overriding priority in our response to conflicts everywhere. The purpose is to make civilians safer, and the safety of civilians must never be sacrificed.
- Adopting zero tolerance of war crimes – whether in counter-terrorism or elsewhere.
- Acting much more quickly to tackle the trends and root causes that threaten new or prolonged conflicts – including poverty and inequality, climate change, and arms proliferation – so that we can be better at preventing as well as reacting to conflicts.
- Joining up effective action at every level, from local communities to the UN Security Council – so that international action works in conjunction with what works on the ground.

It would be naïve to think that we can prevent every conflict.

International humanitarian law was established because its authors reluctantly recognised that there will always be conflicts, and that even in them, the fundamental rights of civilians must be protected. Protecting civilians in future must mean combining better action at every level to try to prevent new or renewed conflicts, at the same time as acting swiftly and decisively to stop brutal atrocities when that prevention fails.

Effective protection and peacebuilding comes neither from international agreements nor local efforts – but from both, and more. As one of Oxfam’s staff in Kenya said in 2008, the solution is not simply national reconciliation: ‘small wins at the local level,’ he said, ‘must be replicated

and scaled up.’ In 2006, the American analyst Catherine Barnes put it well: peace must be built, she wrote, ‘from the bottom up, the top down and the middle out.’¹⁹⁷ The bottom is a good place to start.

Local action

Only empowered citizens can challenge states and non-state actors to uphold their responsibilities. And their capacity to do that frequently depends on the support they receive. In rural Afghanistan, there are many local disputes or conflicts that warlords and anti-government groups exploit to strengthen their positions in the national conflict. Yet local mechanisms for dispute resolution – councils of elders known as *jirgas* or *shuras* – have largely been neglected in the state-building process. Nearly all the peacebuilding dollars have been spent at the national level, failing to stem the local violence that, with greater support, the *jirgas* and *shuras* perhaps could have curbed. And the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, heavily funded by 13 different donor countries, have left Afghanistan’s local government institutions under-used and under-developed.¹⁹⁸ They forgot what Tocqueville once wrote, that it is local institutions that ‘put liberty within the people’s reach, and teach people to appreciate its peaceful enjoyment.’

Priorities for local actors

- Investing in local capacity
 - Local communities must be supported in their work to resolve local conflicts. They should be linked up with conflict-resolution initiatives at every level, including national decisions, to ensure that they too respond to local needs.
 - Local businesses should be in a position to provide ‘peaceful livelihoods’ in different communities.
 - Local government needs to be able to provide equal access to essential services, and to land, for all communities, and reduce inequalities between them.
- Ensuring peace meets women’s needs
 - Women must be included in all peace negotiations and resolution initiatives, from local negotiations to national-level peace talks (and indeed at every level beyond that).

- Governments should invest in women peacebuilders to help them actively participate – to implement the UN Security Council’s resolution 1325.

National responsibility

In seeking peace, governments should *not* look for an immediate comprehensive settlement. They should focus on achieving the immediate cessation of violence, and designing an effective process to negotiate a just and sustainable settlement.

If peace is to meet everyone’s needs, every section of society must be involved in negotiating it: not just the warring parties, but each ethnic or religious community, minority groups that are easily overlooked or oppressed, and women as well as men. High-level peace talks must not leave women feeling excluded, as many Darfuri women do, their needs ignored by men representing all sides. ‘For them, security is about moving forces from place to place’, one woman, Safaa Elagib Adam, said at the Libya peace talks in 2007. ‘But for a woman farmer, that’s not her business. She wants to be able to get to market or her land in safety. We need to include women to reach a sustainable peace.’¹⁹⁹

In the long term, the peace settlement must be comprehensive and sustainable: it must not leave festering injustices and grievances that allow hatreds between different communities to linger unresolved, threatening the resumption of conflict. It must not leave thousands of refugees or displaced people, or instability that destroys prospects for investment and development. It must include a right of return, and the restitution of the housing and land seized during the conflict. And those who have suffered from war crimes must feel that justice has been done, that the perpetrators have been held to account, and that the ‘culture of impunity’ that conflicts breed has been undermined. In some circumstances this will mean trial and imprisonment, either nationally or in co-operation with the International Criminal Court. In others it may mean something nearer to ‘truth and reconciliation’, or traditional local justice rather than Western-style punishment. Sometimes, it will mean a sequence in which peace must be established before anything more than ‘victor’s justice’ is possible.

To secure the peace, governments and the private sector must co-operate to generate ‘peaceful livelihoods’; opportunities not only for those demobilised from past fighting, but those in the most insecure livelihoods, who are the

most vulnerable to post-conflict failure. These peaceful livelihoods must be in places where people want to settle. It is no use forcing ex-combatants to return to poor rural areas, where the fighting may have sprung up,²⁰⁰ if they are determined to be part of the wider urbanisation that is going on around them.

Priorities for national governments

- Giving the protection of civilians the highest priority in every counter-insurgency strategy, with a zero tolerance of abuse (including sexual abuse) by their own security forces. This is a priority *above* defeating the enemy.
- Pursuing a primarily negotiated rather than military solution to conflicts. In negotiations, prioritising the immediate cessation of violence, and a *process* to agree a just and lasting settlement, with the patience to achieve it. Involving all affected groups, religious and ethnic minorities, and women as well as men.
- Incorporating the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement – the summary of relevant international law – into national legislation, and vigorously implementing them. Each affected country should have a National Plan to support displaced people, identifying the specific roles of government departments, the private sector, and civil society.
- Phasing, not forcing the disarmament of ex-combatants.
- Ensuring the adequate, timely, appropriate, and impartial distribution of humanitarian assistance to all affected communities. In this, avoiding the use of military forces. Where there is no alternative, following the applicable international standards, including the 2006 Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Assets in Disaster Relief.²⁰¹
- Reducing the risks of renewed or future conflict by:
 - Creating ‘peaceful livelihoods’ for demobilised fighters, and those most vulnerable to local or global economic shocks, as a vital part of a poverty reduction strategy. Managing economic shocks so that they do not increase inequalities.
 - Providing equal access for all communities to essential services including health, education, water and sanitation.
 - Managing measures to adapt to climate change so that they reduce rather than increase inequalities and tensions between different groups. National adaptation strategies must be tuned to reduce the risk of conflict, and to contribute to each country’s wider poverty reduction strategy.

- Distributing the benefits from natural resources equitably and transparently, and working with companies to do so too (through schemes like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative).
- Creating confidence that those guilty of violence, including sexual violence, will be held to account, by building up the judicial system and accountable civilian police.
- Building a system of governance that includes all communities, and respects all people's human rights – sharing power rather than 'winner takes all'.

Regional solidarity

None of this can be done by national governments alone. Not just because they may not have the resources, but also because the causes of almost every current conflict stretch across national borders, affected by neighbouring and regional powers. Something more must be done to support national governments, and on occasion persuade them, against their will, to better protect their civilians. In Europe, after the dismal failure to tackle the Balkan wars in the early 1990s, the EU has since been fundamentally important in ensuring the peaceful transition of eastern Europe. In part, this has been achieved through EU financial support, but it has also been due to the prospect of EU membership, which is permitted on the condition that human rights are respected and minorities are treated fairly.

Elsewhere, regional organisations are as varied as national governments; the AU, ASEAN, and others are developing at different paces and in different directions. None of them, however, have yet reached their potential to champion the rights of the citizens of their regions; many regional bodies still look like clubs of heads of state. All regional organisations must be able to tackle their errant members, so that Africans, for example, can have confidence that if their national courts cannot do so, the African Court of Justice and Human Rights will hold their abusers to account. And regional organisations must be prepared to suspend their errant members if they abuse their own citizens.

In most regional organisations, this requires a change in will. The AU, EU, ASEAN, and others should be more willing to take the first step in condemning human-rights abuses and war crimes by their member governments or trading partners. They should be more willing to impose their own sanctions and incentives, and use the other tools at their disposal, as a result. Since 2007, for example, the EU's first 'battlegroups'

have been available for deployment, but when something like them was needed in Chad that year, there was little serious discussion about using them.

In addition to greater political will, the capacity of regional organisations to reduce conflicts must be substantially increased. The EU and the AU should ensure that there really are tangible improvements in the AU's capacity by the end of their first joint Action Plan to implement the African-EU Strategic Partnership in 2010. The Panel of the Wise, Africa's Continental Early Warning System, and the African Standby Force must all be made fully operational.

The AU will also continue to need what it sorely lacked in Darfur: reliable and predictable funding. Expanding the EU's African Peace Facility may also be part of the answer, but the UN Security Council and General Assembly can no longer duck their responsibility for sorting this out. The Council's five permanent members and other powerful governments must be far more generous in supporting the AU, since most reject the only obvious alternative – a standing UN army – and there is no plan C. One common proposal is that the obligatory contributions that all governments make for UN peacekeeping be expanded and made available to UN-mandated operations carried out by regional organisations (as has been the case for the AU-UN hybrid in Darfur). Such an arrangement could go a long way towards providing the reliable funding so desperately needed. It would, however, need to be accompanied by regional organisations' thorough commitment to transparency, accountability, and professional management standards.

If the UN is to maintain its primary role in the maintenance of international peace and security, it can no longer expect 'African solutions' on the cheap. It cannot indefinitely maintain such an enormous gap between the scale of its ambition and the scale of the resources it makes available to regional organisations. As for funding UN peacekeeping operations themselves, this requires difficult decisions, and increased investment, from the world's established and emerging economies.

We must stress again that military forces are rarely the best means to protect people. As Kofi Annan said, they were only considered for Darfur after everything else had been tried. They have unforeseen consequences, and, compared with even the most active diplomacy, are extremely expensive. If they are to be used, regional organisations will need much greater international support.

Priorities for regional organisations

- Developing their capacity, and will, to quickly deploy mediation and diplomatic teams (including serving and former officials at the highest level) to intervene at the earliest stage of a foreseeable crisis; and supporting these with the resources and sustained political attention that they need in order to succeed.
- Developing their capacity, and will, to use sanctions effectively targeted on political and military leaders (including expulsions or suspensions from regional bodies, travel bans, and asset freezes), incentives, legal instruments and, in exceptional cases, military force to protect civilians.
- Ratifying and vigorously enforcing regional arms-control agreements to prevent irresponsible arms transfers leading to violations of humanitarian law or human rights, or the undermining of sustainable development.

For the EU and AU:

- Implementing all the actions on peace and security under the African–EU Strategic Partnership’s first Action Plan by 2010.

For the international community:

- Providing increased, reliable, and predictable funding to support regional organisations, including the UN mandating assessed contributions for UN-authorized but regionally operated peacekeeping missions (or an alternative arrangement that guarantees full and reliable funding together with transparency, accountability, and professional standards to ensure the effective use of the resources).

International support

Every government in the world shares the Responsibility to Protect.

This means that the international community should support the activities at every level just described. Every government must put the protection of civilians at the heart of government policy, not treat it as a half-remembered commitment to be upheld when other interests allow. Every government must show its zero tolerance of war crimes, challenging those committed by friends and foes alike.

More than anyone else, however, this is a responsibility for the UN Security Council because, under the UN Charter, it has the primary responsibility for international peace and security.

Multilateral action

If the UN Security Council can unite, it would mean Council members’ far greater ability to agree timely and effective action: diplomacy backed up when necessary with sanctions and incentives to encourage compliance. When the ominous warning signs of conflict emerge, the Council should put all its weight behind early, high-level diplomacy to prevent violence and protect civilians. When warring parties refuse to obey humanitarian law, the Council should be more willing to impose asset freezes and meaningful travel bans on political and military leaders to coerce them. When sanctions have been effectively targeted, they have often worked – like those on Charles Taylor’s Liberia in 2001. Now the Security Council’s willingness to impose stringent sanctions to tackle nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Iran is not matched by any similar willingness to impose and enforce tough, targeted sanctions on governments that attack or deny the provision of assistance to their own citizens. Those double standards must end.

Sanctions and incentives should be designed to protect civilians immediately, *and* wherever possible, to encourage an inclusive peace process to resolve the conflict. That can be a difficult combination to get right. As one senior UN official put it in 2008, ‘the ideal situation is when there is the drumbeating [of sanctions] in the background...but the drums should not make so much noise as to overwhelm [the mediation].’²⁰² Designing effective sanctions is not just about targeting leaders rather than their citizens. It is also about stopping mass atrocities immediately, and, by helping to resolve the conflict, preventing them from happening again. In 2008, a study of sanctions in 11 different situations offered positive lessons to guide such future practice by the UN Security Council and others.²⁰³

In short, the Council must not simply lead a multilateral approach to protect civilians, but it must also demonstrate a significantly more *active* multilateralism. In different ways, the Council’s performance in Iraq and Darfur created a lingering lack of confidence in its ability to act effectively to protect civilians in any major crisis. In 2008, the Council – and especially its permanent members – urgently need to show that they can take action to prevent atrocities, which will revive confidence in their ability to perform.

The Council should continue to oversee the development of UN peacekeeping to give a higher priority to protecting civilians, including from sexual violence – for example by patrolling the unsafe routes where the risks to women are greatest. And it should request the Secretary-General to provide it with much more timely and systematic information about the threats faced by civilians – including sexual and gender-based violence, and the denial of their right to humanitarian assistance. This would constitute a key part of implementing the Council’s existing resolution 1325 on the role of women in conflict, and the Council’s broader Responsibility to Protect.

None of this is difficult to imagine. But it is substantially different from the current Council where, too often, one permanent member after another blocks action perceived to be against its interests or allies.

Overall, the international community should not make new agreements on protecting civilians, but it should address the lack of international guidelines to protect people fleeing from environmental destruction, and the lack of agreed guidelines to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers.

Arms Trade Treaty – the test of a rule-based world

One of the greatest gaps in the international system, however, may be the lack of an effective mechanism to control the arms trade. Since 2006, most governments are committed to filling that gap with a robust, legally binding Arms Trade Treaty, based on their existing responsibilities under international law. They must now urgently conclude such a treaty that will be tough enough to work. Respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and a determination not to undermine sustainable development, must be the guiding principles for all governments’ decisions on arms transfers, and at the heart of the new treaty.

No single treaty, however, can tackle all the problems caused by the proliferation of conventional weapons. There must be far greater support to local communities, national governments, and regional organisations taking their own action to get existing arms out of circulation, and to do what they can to curb the flow of new arms and ammunition.

As urgently as anything, governments must tackle the unacceptable harm to civilians caused by cluster munitions, and vigorously implement the comprehensive ban agreed by more than 100 governments in May 2008. As Ban Ki-moon said in 2008: ‘By dealing decisively with cluster munitions we can reduce deaths, suffering and deprivation among civilians caught up in conflict’.²⁰⁴

Global priorities

The priorities for the UN Security Council, especially its five permanent members – the USA, China, Russia, France, and the UK – must be to:

- Demonstrate its capacity and willingness to quickly deploy mediation and diplomatic teams, including at the highest level, to intervene at the earliest stage of a foreseeable crisis; and support these with the resources and sustained political attention that they need to succeed. Peacekeeping operations cannot be expected to deliver what only political settlements can achieve.
- Demonstrate a greater willingness in the timely imposition of sanctions targeted on political and military leaders – asset freezes, travel bans, etc. – to prevent and end genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (including sexual violence), and to enforce co-operation with the International Criminal Court.
- Ensure the continued improvement of UN and other peacekeeping operations to proactively protect civilians, including from sexual violence. This would include building the UN’s doctrine of civilian protection into peacekeeping training modules, with a detailed breakdown of the specific actions to be taken.
- Ask the Secretary-General to provide it with much more systematic and timely information about the threats faced by civilians – including sexual and gender-based violence, and the denial of the right to assistance – and put these considerations at the centre of its debates, including by creating specific working groups and monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
- Ensure full and reliable funding for the AU – including its African Standby Force – and other regional peacekeeping missions, authorised by the Security Council, through assessed contributions from UN member states (or another effective means).
- Ensure that all civilian and military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions are trained on sexual violence, culturally specific gender roles, and unequal power relations between men and women, and between peacekeepers and local people. Every UN mission should give the Security Council comprehensive information on the threat of sexual violence and its record of reducing it.
- Adopt clear principles of when it is and when it is *not* legitimate to authorise the use of force to protect civilians, based on those proposed by Kofi Annan in his 2005 report *In Larger Freedom*.

And for *all* governments, in the international context the priorities must be to:

- Actively work to protect civilians – implementing their Responsibility to Protect people from the worst atrocities – as a cornerstone of every government’s foreign policy. This will involve building national diplomatic and military capacities.
- Consistently challenge abuses of humanitarian law and human rights, including sexual violence, not ignoring those committed by allies.
- Strictly implement international humanitarian law, preventing any military action that is likely to have an impact on civilians disproportionate to the benefit of *that specific military action* (not the overall campaign). The long-term and uncertain benefits of a military campaign do *not* justify the killing of civilians.
- Press for an effective Arms Trade Treaty to be agreed and rigorously implemented as soon as possible, to prevent irresponsible arms transfers leading to violations of humanitarian law or human rights, or undermining sustainable development.
- Ratify and vigorously implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which comprehensively bans all cluster bombs, and is due to be signed in Oslo in December 2008.
- Protect those seeking asylum on their territory who have fled from violence and persecution elsewhere. They must treat asylum seekers with fairness and dignity, and not send them back to places where they would be in danger.
- Meet the Millennium Development Goals, and specifically increase sustained international assistance for post-conflict reconstruction – focusing on equal access to essential services, and peaceful livelihoods for all – and the proportion of international aid given to countries at risk of conflict. This will only happen if rich countries keep their promises to give 0.7 per cent of their national income in foreign aid, and to allocate at least 20 per cent of that aid to basic services. Conflict assessments that take account of the views of affected populations should be systematically used to help design development assistance in those countries.
- Build on the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Kimberly Process (certifying diamonds) to create effective international norms covering all companies extracting natural resources from countries at risk of conflict. Their aim must be to ensure that:

- the rights to exploit such resources are auctioned in a transparent process;
 - companies share with the national governments the risks in such extraction; and
 - revenues are transparently paid to national governments, and transparently spent on reducing poverty.
- Engage with their domestic and multinational businesses, to ensure they follow the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and Conflict Sensitive Business Practices,²⁰⁵ and consider applying the EITI’s procedures to the construction and other industries.
 - Aim for global emissions targets to keep global warming as far as possible below 2°C, and within the current UN negotiations, press for an effective post-2012 agreement to cut global CO₂ emissions by more than 50 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050.
 - Prioritise the most vulnerable groups in national strategies to adapt to climate change. Governments most responsible for causing climate change and most capable of assisting should provide at least \$50bn for vulnerable developing countries, including those affected by conflict, to help them adapt. National adaptation strategies must consider how to reduce the risks of conflict, including by building communities’ resilience and, fundamentally, ensuring that climate change does not increase dangerous inequalities between different groups.

Humanitarian protection

Many humanitarian agencies dedicate a significant proportion of their resources to making people safer, as well as providing for their physical needs. Oxfam International is one of them.

This is welcome and should continue. However, there are limits to what humanitarians can do to help protect people – and they will never be able to offer the physical protection that is often required. Indeed, in many cases, a humanitarian agency's most effective action is to work with people at risk to demand that their government fulfils its Responsibility to Protect them, and to support the grassroots action that people take to make themselves safer.

Humanitarians can make their protection work more effective by:

- Developing the Protection 'Cluster' – in which one agency leads a co-ordinated response – as an effective means to identify priorities and take action, and to be held accountable for addressing the protection needs not only of displaced people but of all affected people.
- Making sure that all humanitarian programmes are carefully tested with the active participation of beneficiaries to avoid increasing the threats they face, and where possible to reduce them. Assessing the threats to the protection of all people, including different threats to women, men, boys, and girls and different groups, should be a central part of designing good humanitarian programmes.

Every humanitarian programme in a conflict-affected area (and indeed every development and reconstruction programme) should include an assessment of the risks civilians face, and how an agency can help to reduce them. Every agency should invest in protection specialists, and training staff to systematically monitor threats and methods for reducing them.

An agenda for a multipolar world

The choice

None of this is guaranteed to happen. It signals a marked departure from the 'old world order' of the Security Council's mixed performance, and the past conduct of the USA's long 'war on terror'.

It is, however, a new path offered for the multipolar world that is approaching, if the key powers of the future, and indeed all governments, have the courage to take it.

It is their choice whether or not to take the new path for peace that we have outlined. And it is a rational choice, because all governments have interests in a more peaceful world. They can continue to deal with threats to international security as now – with the conduct of the 'war on terror' to date largely discredited, and with some of the South's new powers behaving like old Western ones, more concerned with their short-term political and commercial interests than with the protection of civilians. Or they can choose to finish the job that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and the creation of the UN only started. To build a rule-based international system, where rules are enforced without fear or favour, and where civilians are protected whether threatened by terrorists or by governments.

This is a choice for those governments that within ten years will be the key 'poles' of the multipolar world. China and the USA, of course. But also India, Russia, Brazil, Japan, and South Africa, and perhaps half a dozen other major Southern countries, from Indonesia to Nigeria. The multipolar world will include the EU as well, if this regional organisation can learn to look more consistently outwards, rather than to the internal changes and divisions that have dominated its history to date. And it will include global business, coming together in initiatives like the World Economic Forum, if the private sector can recognise that stability for business requires protection for civilians.

The prospects of success

Every serious candidate in the 2008 US presidential campaign has looked to a more consensual foreign policy, in which the USA will lead more by example than unilateral force. That is a welcome sign that the new president from 2009 will be able to do something to reassert the USA's

capacity for moral leadership – a capacity that will only be enhanced if the USA takes a strong lead in protecting civilians worldwide, as a consistent defender of international humanitarian law. If that happens, the USA's potential to help protect civilians from genocide and war crimes is enormous.

In the longer term, the USA faces a choice of how to adapt to the changing world. As Princeton's Professor of International Affairs, G. John Ikenberry, wrote in 2008:

*The 'unipolar moment' will eventually pass. US dominance will eventually end. US grand strategy, accordingly, should be driven by one key question: What kind of international order would the United States like to see in place when it is less powerful?*²⁰⁶

This is not, as Sherle Schwenninger of the New America Foundation wrote, just about upholding American *values*, but also the USA's *interests*. The USA 'must fully accept the realities of a multipolar world by recommitting the United States to the vision of the world that Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his advisers had when they proposed the United Nations...In a multipolar world, it is in America's interest to try to constrain the freedom of other powers with international law and institutions.'²⁰⁷

In that, upholding international humanitarian law, and the constraints it places on all parties' war-fighting, is crucial.

China must also choose how it will approach international security issues. In 2007, President Hu Jintao said that the 'trend toward a multipolar world is irreversible', a world in which China will take a leading role.²⁰⁸

As it becomes a global power, it, like the USA, should not fear global rules, but help shape them. This means including the protection of civilians, and the international respect that goes with it, as a priority in Chinese foreign policy. China now contributes more personnel to UN peacekeeping than any other permanent Security Council member except France. It has developed its policy on Darfur, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere, and seen how its international reputation depends on this.

India too has enormous unrealised potential, as it seeks a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, if it uses its moral authority as the world's largest democracy to help lead international action to protect civilians worldwide. For years, it has played a vital role, like other South Asian countries, in contributing a high proportion of the UN's peacekeepers around the world. It now faces the choice to build on this with more

proactive diplomacy to solve the world's gravest crises, and to be at the forefront of developing international agreements like the Arms Trade Treaty to help do so.

Indeed the same challenge faces all those countries seeking a permanent seat on the Security Council or a greater role in international affairs, including Japan, Germany, and Brazil. The greater their role, the greater responsibility they have, and the greater challenge they face. The commitment of all these governments to rise to this challenge will be tested by their timely response to future crises. But they will also be judged by their leadership in building a more effective rule-based international system.

In that context, the Arms Trade Treaty described above is more than an international convention to control arms transfers. It will be the clearest test of whether the USA, China, and other great powers like Russia and India can work with the majority of world opinion to agree global rules that meet all their interests.

Performance-related power

Whether or not the major powers of the multipolar world choose to uphold their Responsibility to Protect is not just a matter for them but for all governments to demand it. In 2008, the Security Council is effectively accountable to no one. The unique power bestowed on its members is not dependent on their performance in achieving the Council's objective of maintaining 'international peace and security'.

Over the next years, the Council may or may not move to reform its structure, to accede to the demands of Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, and others for permanent seats. For the protection of civilians, however, what is most important is probably not the Council's structure, but its rising to a new level of transparency and accountability, in which the Council's members have to account for their performance in pursuing international peace and security, including their Responsibility to Protect.

Our final recommendations are therefore that:

- The Security Council should include in its annual reports to the General Assembly information on and analysis of the steps that it has taken to uphold its Responsibility to Protect civilians from war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.

- Individual Security Council members should encourage this increased accountability by including their specific contributions to upholding their Responsibility to Protect in their annual statements to the General Assembly.
- Individual permanent Security Council members should also renounce the use of their veto when the Council is discussing situations of actual or incipient war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.
- The Security Council should make good its commitment to increase its recourse to open meetings, and should as a matter of course convene open meetings, at the earliest possible stage, on all situations of actual or incipient war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.
- The Security Council should increase its engagement with civil-society actors, particularly from those communities experiencing or at risk of war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The Council should travel much more frequently to regions where civilians are under greatest threat and should, as a matter of course, convene private briefings with representatives of the communities affected and those working to support their right to protection and assistance.

Conclusion: choosing the future

Many people sympathise with the suffering of civilians, but think that it has little to do with them, or that nothing can be done. That is wrong. Much is being done, as we outlined in Chapter 3. Much more could be done, if governments and others chose to do so. Chapter 5 set out the choices they can make.

Protecting civilians is in everyone's interest, except war criminals and those who, like irresponsible arms exporters and dealers, profit from conflict. In our globalised world, none of us remain unaffected by the conflicts fuelled by cycles of violence thousands of kilometres away. Protecting civilians is the first step to reduce fear and hostility, and create the long road to peace. Upholding the Responsibility to Protect is not simply the right thing to do. In a globalised world, it is the rational choice.

When governments abuse their citizens, they can no longer hide from international attention, and none are entirely immune to the international censure that provokes. When other governments do little to protect civilians on the other side of the world, few are immune to the disillusionment of their own people, who expect them to help *prevent* – not just condemn – the atrocities that shock the conscience of the world.

In 2008, the UN Security Council has still not recovered its reputation after its failure to stop the invasion of Iraq, and its continuing failure to bring an end to the suffering of Darfur and elsewhere. Precisely because of their pre-eminent role, the USA and China find their international reputation inextricably linked to the success or failure to resolve such crises. Like all other governments, they have a moral interest in change – in more effective action to protect civilians.

How big that moral interest is depends on one thing: how much pressure citizens can place on their governments to protect civilians – how much they can show, in the founding words of the AU, their *non-indifference* to genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. From Colombia to Uganda, that pressure exists, from local communities and civil society. And around the world, campaigns against the Iraq war, for peace in Darfur, the *Control Arms* campaign, and now the Global Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect



A woman in the Democratic Republic of Congo gathers firewood for her displaced family (2007).

Marie Cacace/Oxfam



represent a solidarity with civilians suffering in conflicts. Sometimes these efforts succeed and sometimes they do not. The challenge now is to unite and expand all that action into a global movement for civilians' rights.

Only a global movement to uphold people's rights in crisis situations can encourage all governments to see what some already do: that their self-interest can coincide remarkably closely with the moral need to uphold civilians' right to protection.

Formerly abducted child soldiers join to play football in their community, Acet IDP camp, Gulu District, Northern Uganda (2006).

Jonathan Hyams

Notes

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PO Box 68357, Auckland
1145, New Zealand
Tel: +64 9 355 6500
(Toll-free 0800 400 666)
E-mail: oxfam@oxfam.org.nz
www.oxfam.org.nz

Oxfam Novib (Netherlands)
Mauritskade 9,
Postbus 30919, 2500 GX,
The Hague, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 70 342 1621
E-mail:
info@oxfamnovib.nl
www.oxfamnovib.nl

Oxfam Québec
2330 rue Notre Dame Ouest,
bureau 200, Montreal,
Quebec, H3J 2Y2, Canada
Tel: +1 514 937 1614
E-mail: info@oxfam.qc.ca
www.oxfam.qc.ca

Oxfam International Secretariat: Suite 20, 266
Banbury Road, Oxford,
OX2 7DL, UK
Tel: +44 1865 339100
Email: information@oxfam-international.org
www.oxfam.org

Oxfam International advocacy offices:
E-mail: advocacy@oxfam-international.org

Brasília:
SCS Quadra 8 Bloco B-50 Sala
401, Edifício Venâncio 2000,
Brasília-DF, 70333-900, Brazil
Tel: +55 61 3321 4044

Brussels:
Rue Philippe le Bon 15,
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 501 6700

Geneva:
15 rue des Savoises,
1205 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 321 2371

New York:
355 Lexington Avenue,
3rd Floor, New York,
NY 10017, USA
Tel: +1 212 687 2091

Washington:
1100 15th St., NW, Ste. 600,
Washington, DC
20005-1759, USA
Tel: +1 202 496 1170

Linked Oxfam organisations.
The following organisations are linked to Oxfam International:

Oxfam Japan
Maruko bldg. 2F, 1-20-6,
Higashi-Ueno, Taito-ku,
Tokyo 110-0015, Japan
Tel: + 81 3 3834 1556
E-mail: info@oxfam.jp
www.oxfam.jp

Oxfam Trust in India
B - 121, Second Floor,
Malviya Nagar, New Delhi,
1100-17, India
Tel: + 91 11 2667 3 763
E-mail: info@oxfamint.org.in
www.oxfamint.org.in

Oxfam International and Ucodep Campaign Office
Via Masaccio, 6/A 52100
Arezzo, Italy
Tel: +39 0575 907826
Fax: +39 0575 909819
E-mail: ucodep-oi@oxfam-international.org

Oxfam observer member
The following organisation is currently an observer member of Oxfam International, working towards possible full affiliation:

Fundación Rostros y Voces (México)
Alabama 105, Colonia
Napolés, Delegación Benito
Juárez, C.P. 03810 Mexico,
D.F.
Tel: + 52 5687 3002/5687 3203
Fax: +52 5687 3002 ext. 103
E-mail: comunicación@rostrosyvoces.org
www.rostrosyvoces.org

For a Safer Tomorrow

Protecting civilians in a multipolar world

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of armed conflicts in the world has fallen. But is this trend now about to be reversed?

Climate change, poverty and inequality, and the wider availability of weapons all add to the risk of conflicts increasing.

In 1949, the Geneva Conventions enshrined people's rights to be protected from atrocities in conflict. Yet civilians are still killed, raped, and forced to flee their homes, 60 years on. In 2005, almost every government in the world agreed its Responsibility to Protect civilians. Many have failed to keep this promise. Governments must now make new efforts to take up the challenge in a rapidly changing 'multipolar' world, where China and the USA will be the 'superpowers', and where India, the European Union, Brazil, and others are gaining new global influence.

Many people feel that there is little that can be done to prevent the brutal targeting of civilians that characterises modern warfare.

They are wrong. This report, based on Oxfam International's experience in most of the world's conflicts, sets out an ambitious agenda to protect civilians through combining local, national, and regional action with far more consistent international support.

Eric Canalstein/UN Photo



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