

# SHARING THE SPACE

## A Guide to Constructive Engagement with Non-Governmental Organisations and the Aid Community

### Purpose and Scope

When British Armed Forces are deployed on operations they often operate in the same physical space as the aid community, including Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). Acknowledging this **shared operating environment**, this guide aims to improve understanding within the British Armed Forces of the aid community and particularly the roles, motivations and methods of NGOs. This should lead to **appropriate dialogue**, sensitive to the potential limitations of the NGO-military relationship. In determining what constitutes appropriate dialogue context is key.

This guide summarises the **constituents of the aid community** and **key humanitarian concepts**. It then highlights that **it is the how, not just the what NGOs do** which is important. It then turns to the debate on the perceived subordination of aid to political and military objectives in **complex emergencies**, to help facilitate NGO-military engagement through an understanding of the potential sensitivities. There is then comment specific to **disaster relief operations**. The **so what** is then addressed in terms of improving NGO-military relations before guidance on **context specific interaction** and some do's and don'ts. Finally for those who **want to know more** there are details on where to find key reference publications.

This guide is aimed at all personnel, whether Civil-Military Co-operation (CIMIC) trained or not, who may come into contact with the aid community during any operation. This leaflet will also be made freely available to those within the aid community to encourage **mutual understanding**.

### The Aid Community

**This is primarily a guide to interaction with NGOs**, particularly those involved in humanitarian and development activities, but it is important to be aware of the multi-faceted nature of the aid community as a whole, to understand why organisations behave differently.

## The Aid Community

**Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs)** are organisations made up primarily of sovereign states e.g. United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) and World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The UN comprises many departments and agencies which may be encountered on operations. For more see Joint Warfare Publication (JWP) 3-50 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) *The Military Contribution to Peace Support Operations* Annex B.

## International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement arguably occupy a unique position. It includes the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** whose mandate **to assist and protect people affected by conflict** is enshrined in international law. The ICRC has well established processes for its relations with militaries. National Red Cross/Crescent Societies are (autonomous) auxiliaries to their governments, but may work abroad as humanitarian actors in natural disasters or conflict.

**Non-governmental Organisations** are civilian non-profit organisations – international, national or local.

NGOs may be involved in one or more (multi-mandate) of:

- **Aid Operations**  
Humanitarian/Emergency Relief  
Development/Poverty Reduction  
Conflict Resolution/Peacebuilding  
Environment/Conservation
- **Advocacy** to achieve policy change.

**NGOs are diverse** in their objectives, operations and effectiveness, varying greatly in attitude to interaction with military actors. In some circumstances no contact at all will be advocated particularly where the military are a party to the conflict.

NGOs' size and operational capacity may vary, from global organisations to small local groups. Some NGOs group themselves into networks. E.g. VOICE in Europe, InterAction in the USA and the global International Council of Voluntary Agencies.

## Key Humanitarian Concepts

### Humanitarian Imperative

The right to receive, and obligation to give, humanitarian assistance unconditionally, wherever and whenever it is needed. This is primarily the responsibility of indigenous governments.

### *Do No Harm Ethos*

Humanitarian actors should **prevent**, to the best of their ability, any **unintended negative consequences** of humanitarian assistance in a given context.

### Core Humanitarian Principles

#### Humanity

Save and protect life and dignity and prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it is found.

#### Impartiality

Help based solely on need. Non-discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, political affiliation or social status.

#### Independence

Separate from political, military, commercial or other objectives.

#### Neutrality

Without taking sides, politically or militarily.

The principle of neutrality is specifically addressed to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to ensure it not only does not take sides in a conflict, but also does not 'engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature'. The principle of neutrality was left out of the Red Cross/NGO code because some of the NGOs, while committed to giving impartial assistance, were not ready to forgo their lobbying on justice issues related to political and ideological questions.

The **humanitarian principles** are not exclusively moral values or abstract theory but rather a **means to secure access** to those suffering in order to enhance the effectiveness of aid and contribute to the **security of staff and those who benefit from their action**.

### Broader Principles

**Respect culture** and custom.

Maximise use of **local resources** and capacities.

Encourage **beneficiary participation**.

Emergency response should strive to reduce **future vulnerabilities**.

**Accountable** to both donors and beneficiaries.

Information activities should preserve the **dignity** of beneficiaries.

### Humanitarian Space

For humanitarian organisations *space* does not only refer to a physical environment, but more broadly to principles, code of conduct and modus operandi that apply to humanitarian operations. Humanitarian actors must have **access** to all vulnerable people in all areas and be free to negotiate such access with all parties to the conflict, without fear of attack, retribution or undue pressure.

Maintaining a **clear distinction**, real and perceived, between the role and function of humanitarian actors from that of the military is a determining factor in creating an operating environment in which NGOs can discharge their responsibilities both effectively and safely.

### It is the HOW not just the WHAT NGOs do

From a military perspective, NGO programmes may appear inefficient but are likely to be **culturally attuned, using local capacity** and therefore sustainable. It is not just what is done but how it is done which can be important to long-term success. NGOs have been working to erase the handout mentality, emphasising the importance of **local ownership** and empowerment, while **avoiding dependency**. In order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development, emergency assistance should be provided in ways that will be supportive of recovery and long-term development. This emphasis on **sustainability** ensures that agencies assist communities to overcome poverty and injustice over the long-term. There are however exceptions to this focus on sustainability, with some NGOs prioritising their actions on immediate life saving which may at times conflict with more sustainable solutions.

## Complex Emergencies - the Debate:

### *‘Same theatre, different scripts’*

International interventions, even if dubbed *humanitarian*, often appear as much to do with political expediency and strategic gain as a desire to relieve human suffering. From the perspective of NGOs, there is a correlation between the **politicisation of aid**, with implicit or explicit *strings attached*, and the **decreasing security of relief personnel**. The alignment of aid activities, real or perceived, with political objectives can result in aid organisations being labelled as legitimate targets by parties to the conflict. One of the greatest challenges for humanitarian actors is how to avoid becoming, even the appearance of becoming, an instrument of political or ideological objectives, while maintaining access and operational capability. Multi-mandate organisations are caught in this paradox, as agencies committed both to providing relief (according to the humanitarian principles) and carrying out development programmes which may support the political interests of host and donor governments. *Comprehensive or whole of government approaches* and the *UN integrated mission* model may increase fears amongst NGOs of **the subordination of humanitarian action** to broader political or military goals. On the other hand many NGOs recognise that some degree of coordination, consultative planning and good working relations are crucial for effective and safe operations.

The challenge to NGOs is **how to stay engaged without compromising the humanitarian principles**, thus risking being targeted or losing acceptance from the local population. A more pragmatic approach may be appropriate in some circumstances whilst strict adherence to principles may be more appropriate in others.

Similarly, there is a growing concern amongst humanitarian actors over the **militarisation of aid**. Militaries are perceived as encroaching on what traditionally have been seen as the humanitarian and development domain, **eroding humanitarian space** as the distinctions become blurred. NGO use of military indirect support to meet a critical humanitarian need can further blur distinctions. The types of activity militaries undertake under the banners of *consent winning activity* or *hearts and minds*, often quite legitimately aimed at stabilisation goals and enhancing force protection, cause concern to NGOs for who the *how* and *by whom* activities are done are often as important as the *what* is done. Fundamentally, humanitarian organisations are the professionals and are usually the preferred actors.

## Disaster Relief Operations



Disaster relief operations (see JDP 3-52 *Disaster Relief Operations*) tend to be less controversial in terms of the NGO-military relationship than other operations; however many of the sensitivities remain. Militaries can offer a high degree of self-sufficiency, minimising the strain on local resources, while operating under extreme conditions for protracted periods, including day and night operations. This ability and certain military resources and niche capabilities often present attractive options for disaster relief. However, the military are usually not specifically trained for these missions, can be selected for political motivations sometimes leading to the deployment of what is available rather than what is necessary and may be withdrawn at short notice should other priorities emerge. For these and other reasons the accepted norm is that disaster relief should be **as civilian as possible, as military as necessary**.

The UN Guidelines on *The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief*, often referred to as the **Oslo Guidelines** offers guidance on when militaries should deploy on disaster relief:

- When there is a **humanitarian gap**: no comparable civilian alternative to meet humanitarian needs. This relates to the notion of **last resort**: military assets should be unique in capability and availability.
- **Complementarity**: military assets should complement existing relief mechanisms to provide specific support to specific requirements.
- **At the request** (or at least with the consent) **of affected state**.
- The relief actions remain **overall responsibility of affected state**.
- **Civilian control**: meaning civilian direction and coordination.
- At **no cost to affected state** and in principle covered by funds other than those for international development activities.
- **Avoid dependency** on military resources.
- **Limited timeframe**.



## So What?

The most effective way to improve NGO-military relations is through **enhancing mutual understanding** of roles and cultures **while building personal relations** to foster trust, transparency and respect.

**The differences between methodologies and perspectives should be recognised and the boundaries to interaction respected.**

It is important to bear in mind that NGOs may talk of armed groups, state and non-state, as one entity just as we tend to view a homogenous NGO or aid community. **One-size-fits-all does not work** either way and previous personal experience will often colour how individuals perceive the others. In reality there are profound differences between various armed actors who can potentially be the source of either security or insecurity to the local population and aid community in a given context. Likewise NGOs vary from highly respected, effective and influential international organisations to ineffectual groups sometimes with questionable motivations.

The use of **military or armed protection** for humanitarian actors or for specific humanitarian activities should occur **only in exceptional circumstances** where there is no alternative. NGOs will tend to **prefer area security to escorts** as the former helps to maintain the humanitarian space and benefits the local community. Further information: *UN Guidelines on the Use of Military or Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys*.

A 2-way transparent **sharing of unclassified information** can benefit all through sound liaison and information exchange mechanisms. However, a clear distinction should be made between information exchange and intelligence gathering, as the latter would compromise the apolitical or independent nature of an NGO. Although only pertinent unclassified information should be shared, most NGOs understand and respect the principle of operational security. Be prepared to listen to NGOs as they will often have been in country for a long time before an international intervention (and it is worth remembering, are also likely to stay a long time after) and will have good understanding of local issues, culture and environment, not least through local staff.

## Context Specific Interaction

**For each context individual NGOs will decide the appropriate level of dialogue and interaction they are prepared to have with the military.** To enable dialogue the most appropriate mechanism should be found. This may be through a bespoke NGO forum set up in-country, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator or the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) if present. OCHA may deploy personnel specifically trained in Civil-Military Coordination. However, even if deployed do not assume that the sole means of coordination is through the UN. In many cases the humanitarian organisations may operate through the *Cluster Approach* to promote greater effectiveness in crisis response. Whatever the mechanism, coordination will be a significant challenge. Coordination *with* can be acceptable, coordination *by* is not.

**The dilemma is often that the most effective dialogue is needed when it is most difficult to achieve.**

OCHA have developed a *continuum of engagement* to describe the spectrum of possible interactions between humanitarian actors and militaries, which has been further developed by some NGOs to assist field staff to determine appropriate levels of interaction for particular scenarios. This suggests 3 interaction levels determined by the context:

- **Co-existence:** active engagement inappropriate or impossible but interaction is unavoidable – where possible, de-confliction of activity and vital information sharing.
- **Coordination:** dialogue appropriate in situations where it is possible to promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition and minimise inconsistency, often in conjunction with other agencies and via a neutral, third-party (for example, UN) – active sharing of information.
- **Cooperation:** military involvement in relief activities (i.e. humanitarian in nature) is requested in order to save lives and alleviate suffering – use of military assets for protection/relief delivery in extreme circumstances and in accordance with Military and Civil Defence Assets or Oslo Guidelines.

***“There are 4 ways to engage with the military: front door, back door, UN and the bar!”***

NGO worker



## Some Guidance

<b>Do your homework</b>	Many NGOs have websites – a little prior <b>knowledge of organisations'</b> objectives, capacities and programmes can go a long way to improve the success of engagement.
<b>Which NGOs to prioritise?</b>	Do not be put off by quantity – identify and focus on key players – the majority of effect will be delivered by a small percentage of NGOs present. If unclear on which NGOs to focus engagement with then <b>seek OCHA or Department for International Development advice</b> .  Do not ignore local NGOs.
<b>Meeting NGOs</b>	Ensure visits to NGO sites are only by prior arrangement. Respect views on carriage of weapons on their site. <b>Consider neutral venues</b> for liaison. Don't assume <i>western</i> personnel are in charge. Consider the appropriate level of interface. They are not military so don't expect to brief them like the military!
<b>Symbols</b>	<b>Visual distinction</b> between civilian and military personnel and hardware should be made.  For example, white 4 wheel-drive vehicles have traditionally been used by the UN and aid agencies in conflict zones to distinguish themselves from the military. In response to NGO concern, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan agreed to stop using white vehicles and to ensure their vehicles were clearly marked.
<b>Personal relationships</b>	<b>Trust and respect</b> are crucial in building strong personal relationships. Select carefully which personnel liaise with NGOs (ideally those with CIMIC training).  Short military tour lengths lead to a lack of continuity and explanation fatigue. Ensure handovers are thorough, taking particular care to introduce new incumbents to key NGO personalities.  Consider a register of promises/agreements made and track subsequent actions to ensure credibility is maintained despite personnel rotations.

	Use shared experience/similarities to help foster relations. For example, the experience of dislocation from friends and family in a potentially hostile environment, a sense of adventure and a culture of service to others are among similarities often shared between military and NGO personnel.
<b>Be aware of guidance publications</b>	<b>Context-specific guidelines</b> are sometimes produced to clarify and delineate the roles of military and civilian/humanitarian actors. <b>See <i>Want to Know More?</i></b> section.
<b>Simplify language</b>	<p><b>Confusion around terminology</b> is often the first barrier to mutual understanding. For example, <i>protection</i> and <i>security</i> can mean different things to different people.</p> <p>Avoid military abbreviations and terminology, and beware assumed knowledge of military organisational structures and methods.</p> <p>The word <i>humanitarian</i> has very particular meaning to NGOs. Avoid use of the word in relation to military activities.</p> <p>Avoid referring to NGOs as <i>force multipliers</i> or <i>partners</i>. There may be constructive engagement but NGOs remain independent by definition.</p>
<b>Capacity to engage</b>	Even if NGOs are willing to engage they <b>may have limited capacity</b> to do so due to the demands on limited personnel. Help them to prioritise meetings.

## Want To Know More?

General Information on Humanitarian Community	
Relief Web	<a href="http://www.reliefweb.int">www.reliefweb.int</a>
Cluster Approach	<a href="http://www.humanitarianreform.org">www.humanitarianreform.org</a>
Codes of Conduct and Standards	
The Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response	<a href="http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct">www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct</a>
The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response	<a href="http://www.sphereproject.org">www.sphereproject.org</a>
Example of NGO Guidance for Fieldworkers	
World Vision report: Principled Pragmatism – NGO Engagement with Armed Actors	<a href="http://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Principled_pragmatism.pdf">www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Principled_pragmatism.pdf</a>
Guidelines Downloadable from UN OCHA Website	
<a href="http://ochaonline.un.org">http://ochaonline.un.org</a> About OCHA>>Organigramme>>Emergency Services Branch>>Civil Military Section>>Policy Guidelines & Related Documents	
Civil-Military Guidelines and Reference for Complex Emergencies	
Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief – <i>Oslo Guidelines</i>	
Guidelines on the Use of Military or Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys	
Country Specific Guidelines – Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Liberia, DRC and Sudan	
Selected MOD Joint Doctrine Publications	
JWP 3-50 <i>The Military Contribution to Peace Support Operations</i> JDP 3-52 <i>Disaster Relief Operations</i> JDP 3-90 <i>Civil-Military Co-operation</i>	<a href="http://www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/microsite/dcdc/">www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/microsite/dcdc/</a>

**The NGO-Military Contact Group (NMCG)** is an informal group aimed at sharing information and fostering relations between the UK military, government departments and NGOs. Military representation includes Permanent Joint Headquarters, Military Stabilisation Support Group and the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. If you want to know more about the NMCG or have any comments on this publication please contact SO1 Thematic Doctrine (1) at [DCDC-ThemDoc1SO1@mod.uk](mailto:DCDC-ThemDoc1SO1@mod.uk).

