



# **Protecting Civilians and Humanitarian Space, and Upholding Humanitarian Principles in Emergencies**

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**Submission to the Government of Canada's National Defence Consultation**

**CARE CANADA**

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## Protecting Civilians and Humanitarian Space, and Upholding Humanitarian Principles in Emergencies

Global humanitarian need is on the rise, and humanitarian crises are increasingly protracted.

Armed conflicts and climate change result in 80 per cent of humanitarian need globally, and are the biggest causes of forced displacement. Sixty percent of all maternal deaths take place in humanitarian settings. All forms of gender based violence against women and girls spike during disasters and conflict. Worldwide, 125 million people need humanitarian relief and more than 65 million people are displaced from their homes.

While women, girls, men, and boys all suffer in a crisis, structural gender inequalities mean women and girls face greater obstacles in reaching their potential and leading safe, healthy, and dignified lives. Disasters kill more women than men, and hit women's livelihoods hardest. Yet women also play critical roles in emergency situations – supporting relief and recovery efforts, and taking on increasing responsibilities inside and outside of the house.

Amid these dynamics, the Government of Canada's Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have a role to play in protecting civilians and humanitarian space, while upholding the humanitarian principles and preserving the civilian nature of humanitarian responses.

***The Government of Canada should promote respect for the humanitarian principles, preserve the civilian nature of humanitarian response and provide the political support and leadership to negotiate improved humanitarian access.***

### **// RECOMMENDATION 1: Military involvement in relief operations should be conducted in coordination with humanitarian actors, while respecting the principle of distinction between military and humanitarian operations.**

Humanitarian assistance is increasingly being delivered in conflict-affected areas. Military forces in such contexts have obligations and roles related to humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilian populations, as established by international humanitarian law and customary law. Under certain circumstances, such as areas where civilian and humanitarian agencies are unable to access affected people, the military may provide assistance or support relief operations. According to the internationally-accepted humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence – Canada also has an obligation to ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered impartially to those in need, irrespective of who they are. This is particularly important when military assets are deployed as part of a humanitarian response, which can undermine the perception of independence and safety of humanitarian workers. Humanitarian agencies rely heavily on “community acceptance” as a core element of any security strategy, and inappropriate interactions, or the perception of blurred lines between humanitarian and military actors, can undermine aid agencies' acceptance among local populations and parties to the conflict as well as increase the level of insecurity. It is critical that humanitarian assistance remains distinct and

independent of military goals in order to ensure that local authorities continue to grant humanitarian actors access to those in need, humanitarian actors are perceived as neutral and independent, and individuals are able to receive aid safely. In this way, the Government of Canada can ensure that its development/humanitarian goals are not undermined in the process of reaching its defence objectives.

***The Government of Canada should adopt new mechanisms and approaches for ensuring policy coherence between foreign affairs, international trade, international development, humanitarian assistance, environment and climate change, health and defence machineries in order to more effectively address interconnected global challenges.***

**// RECOMMENDATION 2: Where military assets, such as the DART team, are going to be deployed to humanitarian contexts, the Government of Canada should embed humanitarian advisors in the Department of National Defense to foster closer cooperation, as well as checks and balances, between Global Affairs Canada, Canadian Armed Forces personnel, and humanitarian actors.**

The principle of universality enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implies a shared responsibility for global public goods between developed and developing countries. The Government of Canada has shown that it recognizes the need to adopt more integrated ways of working between departments to address such global challenges. The nexus between domestic and international climate change and sustainable development issues, stability and security, clean and inclusive growth, resilience, nutrition and health, and agriculture and food security underscores growing recognition that international public policy increasingly requires expertise, technologies and approaches to be shared and coordinated between departments and their respective stakeholder groups. The Government's commitment to delivering long-lasting impact across a range of global public goods amid prevailing budgetary constraints only reinforces this need. Coordination between humanitarian organizations, the Department of National Defence and Global Affairs Canada in responding to emergencies is critical for ensuring that policies and programs are cohesive and mutually reinforcing.

***The Government of Canada should invest in disaster risk reduction and resilience-building programs in line with commitments made under the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Climate Change Agreement.***

**// RECOMMENDATION 3: Given the possible role assumed by military forces in response to natural disasters and conflict, civil-military relations should be part of in-country emergency preparedness plans. The invitation of humanitarian agencies to present at the CIMIC operators course is a great example of practical emergency preparedness and civil-military coordination.**

It is not enough to respond only after a disaster has struck. By investing in measures to reduce the risk and impact of disasters before they occur, lives can be saved and post-crisis responses can be made less costly, allowing more resources to be directed towards crisis and conflicts whose impacts are less easily mitigated. Increasingly, evidence proves that early action to help people before the effects of drought are fully felt can help avert famine. Investment in disaster risk reduction can mitigate the effects and damages caused by earthquakes and cyclones. Every \$1 invested in disaster risk reduction saves at least \$7 in relief at a later stage. For vulnerable populations, this means reduced loss of life and suffering, increased security, and greater ability to hold on to their assets.

***The Government of Canada should support initiatives that promote women-led social enterprises involved in the production and sale of safe, sustainable and affordable fuel energy units.***

**// RECOMMENDATION 4: The Government of Canada should ensure that all humanitarian operations are gender sensitive, underpinned by strong gender analysis as well as the systematic gathering of sex and age- disaggregated data.**

Canada is internationally renowned as an advocate for women and girls in emergencies, and for its support of feminist gender-sensitive policies and programs that ensure the protection of women and children. Still, gender analysis and responding to gender-related needs are too often regarded as an ‘add-on’ and secondary to other urgent matters. Gender analysis must be integrated at the very outset of any humanitarian operations to ensure that women, men, boys and girls are receiving appropriate and equal access to services that respond to their specific needs, and that women and girls in crisis-affected communities are empowered to participate in decision-making on humanitarian policies and programs that affect their wellbeing.

### **Conclusion**

The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 was one of many international efforts to address urgent needs for new ways of working, in order to respond more effectively to crises that are stretching the humanitarian system beyond capacity. Within this context, the Department of National Defence represents a critical component of Canada’s capacity for supporting rapid response and stabilization efforts, protecting civilians and humanitarian space. The policy reviews recently conducted by the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie present an opportunity to strengthen coherence between their respective departments, improve civil-military coordination, and to foster real change in the way humanitarian assistance is

delivered. This must include a recommitment to the humanitarian principles, international human rights and other frameworks for protecting the most vulnerable in conflict. CARE Canada looks forward to the Government's launch of a more integrated and effective humanitarian policy, within which Canadian civil society and relevant Federal Departments can better fulfill their shared but differentiated responsibility toward vulnerable communities in fragile contexts around the world.