

# **The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and protection of civilians : @PKO Now! No. 56**

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Tomoko Matsuzawa  
Program Advisor  
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One of the mandates given to many of multidimensional United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) is protection of civilians<sup>1</sup>. While there are several different definitions on protection of civilians proposed by international organizations and NGOs<sup>2</sup>, this column identifies what is protection of civilians in the context of UNPKO and then introduces how UNPKO is expected to implement protection of civilians mandate in the field.

## **Three approaches of protection of civilian**

The definition of protection of civilians in the context of UNPKO is composed of three interpretations and approaches of protection, namely (1) rights based approach, (2) stabilization and peace building as durable forms of protection, and (3) physical protection from harm<sup>3</sup>. This means that protection of civilians is not only physical protection in the context of UNPKO , but also includes protection of individual rights in accordance with international human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law, as well as creation of a secure and peaceful environment for civilians to live in.

Since these three approaches are expected to be mutually reinforcing and therefore must be pursued simultaneously<sup>4</sup>, the need and importance of taking an integrated approach by both civilian and military components within the UNPKO mission in its activities on protection of civilians has been emphasized.

### **Three approaches of protection of civilian**

The United Nations has a position that the host government always holds the primary responsibility for protecting its own civilians within its borders, and UN peacekeepers are responsible for undertaking protection activities in support of government actors<sup>5</sup>. However, if the host government has no intention or capability to protect its own citizens, and if there is the imminent threat of violence against civilians, the UN peacekeepers operating with a protection of civilian mandate are authorized to take all necessary actions to protect the civilians<sup>6</sup>. Meanwhile, the most effective form of protection of civilian activities of UNPKO is considered to be prevention. When the level of threat escalates or where preventive activities, such as patrolling and human rights monitoring, are no longer enough or failed, pre-emptive activities, such as intensified political pressure as well as enhanced presence of military and police of UNPKO, should be taken. UNPKO should take responsive activities by taking necessary actions only in the case that a threat of physical violence becomes apparent and pre-emptive activities have failed or been insufficient<sup>7</sup>.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The first protection of civilians mandate was given to the peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone (UNAMISIL) in 1999. Refer the details at: United Nations Peacekeeping. "Protection of civilians," United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/issues/civilian.shtml> (accessed August 15 2013). For detailed background and evolution of the protection of civilians mandate, refer: @ PKO Now! "Protection of civilians in armed conflict", Secretariat of the International Peace Cooperation Headquarters, [https://www.cao.go.jp/pko/\\_E/organization/researcher/atpkonow/article014.html](https://www.cao.go.jp/pko/_E/organization/researcher/atpkonow/article014.html). accessed August 15 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Refer definitions of protection of civilians proposed by the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "GLOSSARY OF HUMANITARIAN TERMS In relation to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict" <http://un-interpreters.org/glossaries/ocha%20glossary.pdf>, as well as definition of protection by International Committee of the Red Cross ( ICRC ), International Review of the Red Cross, " ICRC Protection Policy", Volume 90 November 871 September 2008.

<sup>3</sup> This definition is taken from the United Nations Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. The same definition is applied in "Specialized Training Materials on Protection of Civilians and Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence" produced by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 2011 as well as the E-learning module on "Protection of civilians in peace operations" produced by United Nations Institute for Training and Research ( UNITAR ) in 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Refer: Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Module 1: Overview of the Protection of Civilians", Specialized Training Materials on Protection of Civilians and Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence, <http://peacekeepingresourcehub.unlb.org/PBPS/Library/Module%201%20Overview%20of%20the%20Protection%20of%20Civilians.pdf>. (accessed August 15 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Refer: Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Module 2: International Legal Dimensions of the Protection of Civilians", Specialized Training Materials on Protection of Civilians and Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence, <http://peacekeepingresourcehub.unlb.org/PBPS/Library/Module%202%20International%20Legal%20Dimensions%20of%20the%20Protection%20of%20Civilians.pdf> (accessed August 15 2013).

<sup>6</sup> In the case that the protection of civilians mandate is given to UNPKO under Chapter VII of

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the United Nations Charter by the United Nations Security Council resolution. In general, authorization to the UNPKO mission is given with a sentence such as "to use all necessary means, within the limits of its capacity and in the areas where its units are deployed, to carry out its protection mandate (S/RES/1996, 2011)" in the mission establishing Security Council resolution.

<sup>7</sup> Refer: Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Module 3: Protection of Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations", Specialized Training Materials on Protection of Civilians and Prevention and Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence, [http://peacekeepingresourcehub.unlb.org/PBPS/Library/Module%203%20Protection%20of%20Civilians%20Concept%20in%20the%20context%20of%20UN %20Peacekeeping%20Operations.pdf](http://peacekeepingresourcehub.unlb.org/PBPS/Library/Module%203%20Protection%20of%20Civilians%20Concept%20in%20the%20context%20of%20UN%20Peacekeeping%20Operations.pdf), (accessed August 15 2013).