



P.O. Box 334
1211 Geneva 4 - Switzerland
Tel + 41 22 879 10 50 - Fax + 41 22 879 10 51
info@genevacall.org - www.genevacall.org

PSIO PROGRAM FOR THE STUDY OF
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION(S)

Rue de Lausanne 132
1202 Geneva - Switzerland
Tel +41 22 908 57 47 - Fax +41 22 908 57 10
psio@hei.unige.ch - www.hei.unige.ch/psio

CALL FOR PAPERS

Exploring Criteria and Conditions for Engaging Armed Non-State Actors to Respect Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law

Geneva, Switzerland

4-5 June 2007

1. Introduction

Geneva Call and the Program for the Study of International Organisation(s) (PSIO) of the Graduate Institute of International Studies – Geneva (IUHEI) will organise a two-day conference to explore criteria and conditions for engaging armed non-State actors (NSAs) to respect International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. You are invited to submit a discussion paper for this conference.

2. Background

The majority of contemporary conflicts occur within States, involving at least one or more NSAs. Whether such actors can be considered as illegitimate in the State-centred international system, they are a reality in internal armed conflicts.

The increasing number of conflicts within States and the concerns for national and human security that accompany this trend are heightening attention on NSAs. The overall lack of an articulated and universal legal foundation related to NSAs has meant that the relationship between Governments and/or international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with NSAs has primarily relied on cease-fire agreements and peace treaties. Nevertheless, the need to engage NSAs to desist from using anti-personal landmines has been increasingly addressed, mainly by NGOs.

After 9/11, some States, especially in North America and in Europe, felt more concerned by their internal security or the security of their interests abroad. Thus, they started naming indiscriminately armed movements or groups as terrorists or of collaborating with terrorists. At the same time, NGOs and other humanitarian organisations involved in conflict areas are being accused of collaborating with armed groups or supporting terrorists. The consequences of these allegations could be the refusal of some donors to support humanitarian organisations or could make their activities in the field more difficult.

The *Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups, A Manual for Practitioners*, as well as the *Guidelines on Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups*, both from OCHA (2006) present an important starting point for wider debate among practitioners. Humanitarian principles, international law and humanitarian policies should offer guidelines for all negotiations with NSAs.

3. Overview of the conference

In Geneva Call's work as well as in the understanding of the PSIO, it has been clear that controlling territory, having a clear command structure, operating independently, claiming to have political goals are some of the prerequisites for a NSA to be considered as potential partner for any discussion about signing the Deed of Commitment. In these processes, priorities have been given to groups that use landmines and/or control mine/unexploded ordnance-territory. For the time being, Geneva Call does not enter into negotiation with any paramilitary group, since they can be considered as being under the control of the State.

This conference will cover a wide range of perspectives relating to the challenges faced in the process of engagement. Debates will be organised around the following set of questions:

- a) **Who to engage?** Which NSAs should humanitarian NGOs negotiate with? Under the labels "armed groups" or "armed non-State actors" can be found an array of different organisations. Are there certain lines that should not be crossed? Can all armed groups be engaged? Should the humanitarian imperative prevail or should groups be engaged as access and opportunities arise? Should so-called "terrorist" organisations be engaged? How can NGOs define the concept of "terrorism"?

- b) **Who engages?** The process of engagement with armed groups has tended to put NGOs and low-profile United Nations (UN) agencies at the forefront. What are the special characteristics of these actors? What can and should be the role of States, associations, institutions, UN agencies, etc. in the negotiation process?
- c) **When to engage?** What are the conditions, criteria and strategies to adopt in order to enter into dialogue with a NSA? Should humanitarian engagement happen within a wider political engagement such as a peace process? Should these two types of engagement remain unconnected? Should humanitarian engagement be preventive? How is the engagement process inscribed in the conflict dynamic?
- d) **Why and on what issues to engage?** Should humanitarian engagement be limited to securing humanitarian access? Should it include human rights? Should it take into account wider humanitarian norms? Should the humanitarian community provide training on humanitarian norms to these groups?
- e) **How to engage?** Should we engage through the government, through direct contacts, through local population or civil society? Should we engage with incentives? Does engaging armed group by humanitarian actors in negotiation encourage or facilitate it in its convictions to continue fighting?
- f) **What are the main challenges (both practical and ethical) and consequences of engagement?** What are the relationships to political processes and conflict dynamic? What kind of monitoring should be put into action? What happens if a State objects?

4. Objectives and expected outcomes

This conference aims at broadening the debate on, and advocating for, the engagement of NSAs in Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law by targeting a wide audience from UN agencies, international NGOs, States and NSAs. It aims not only at making a case for engagement and coming together to draw on the lessons of engagements, but most importantly at reflecting on policies for humanitarian organisations and for decisions makers.

Theoretical and practical innovative research is welcome. Discussion papers for the conference should explore and confront differences, similarities, and difficulties in engaging NSAs in humanitarian negotiations.

5. Duration, languages and location

The working meeting will last two days and take place in June 2007. English will be the working language. The conference will take place in Geneva and details on the venue will be sent to participants when known.

6. Forms of communication:

Oral presentations (PowerPoint if desired)

Abstracts (in word or rtf, Arial 11, simple space) should be sent by email to Geneva Call at info@genevacall.org in an attached document. Surname and first name of author and the form of communication will be adopted to title the abstract's file (e.g. white-dany.doc).

By sending the abstract, the author should mention:

Surname:

First name:

Institution:

Status:

Email address:

Mail Address:

Phone number:

Title of communication:

Maximum length of an abstract is **200 words**.

- Proposals that give attention to engaging non-State actors within relevant academic fields and institutions that have professional experience will be welcome;
- **Deadline for sending abstracts is 30 March 2007;**
- Final decisions on the abstracts will be made at the end of March and selected authors will be notified in early April;
- Authors of selected abstracts will be asked to prepare their discussion papers and the costs of their participation will be covered;
- The discussion papers are to stimulate discussion;
- The final papers for the workshop should be 10-12 pages and should be submitted by the end of May and will be distributed to all participants;
- A publication will follow the conference containing the papers and proceedings. The authors will have sufficient time to rework their discussion papers for the publication.