



OUR SHARED HUMANITY

Geneva Call | Annual Report 2023





Cover photo:

This photo taken on December 10, 2023 shows female members of the Mandalay People's Defense Forces (MDY-PDF) heading to the frontline amid clashes with the Myanmar military in northern Shan State. In the hills of northern Myanmar young women fly combat drones, treat wounded comrades and patrol the frontlines, new roles in the battle to overthrow the military junta.

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Foreword

As we look back over the past year, it is evident that heightened geopolitical tensions threatened the global peace and security landscape nearly everywhere.

History is full of conflicts, but we find the escalating use of violence to resolve differences profoundly disheartening. The boundless violence and apparent widespread disregard for the rules of modern warfare are among our greatest concerns.

This Annual Report reflects the volatility that characterized many of the environments in which Geneva Call operated in 2023.

In the face of such grim realities, we maintain a steadfast commitment to preserving human dignity. Our commitment is undiminished even by the complications of operating in the most remote regions, where countless lives are directly affected by armed groups and *de facto* authorities (AGDAs). From its inception, Geneva Call has always recognized International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as a vital tool to uphold and respect human dignity everywhere. From our vantage point, IHL remains a universally accepted language, efficiently protecting civilians, despite its frequent challenges. We are dedicated to promoting its wider understanding and application by all parties involved in conflict. Our aim in this report is to shed light on our efforts to integrate IHL with customary, religious, or traditional beliefs and to establish the obligation to comply with it for those bearing arms.

At Geneva Call, we firmly believe that humanity can be found even in actors whose behavior elicits significant concern. We are confident that even small progress can yield substantial improvements for the affected civilians.

Children, being among the most vulnerable, bear the brunt of the actions of armed groups and *de facto* authorities. In this year's report, we take pride in highlighting our progress in enhancing child protection, through constant and open dialogue with AGDAs.

The progress we have made, as documented in this report, is a testament to the unwavering commitment of our global team, our partners, and our supporters, all of whom invest greatly appreciated trust and resources in our mission. It also reflects the efforts of the civilians and AGDAs who have agreed to engage in a necessary, albeit often challenging, humanitarian dialogue.

To honor this trust, and to be accountable to those we serve, it is crucial for our organization to demonstrate robust governance through an effective set of systems and policies. This report also showcases how we accomplished that again in the past year.

As the Chair of the Board of Trustees and Director General of the organization, we are immensely proud of the work accomplished by our team but also humbled by the enormity of the challenges in front of us.

Thank you for your continued support.

Jean Keller
Chairman of the Board

Alain Délétroz
Director General

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Addressing humanitarian protection in a fragmented world

In today's fragmented world, with conflicts, climate emergencies, and economic disparities intertwining, establishing a common reference point for addressing humanitarian protection needs is imperative.

In 2023, 363 million people worldwide were in need of humanitarian assistance, a figure expected to remain high in 2024 due to climate-related disasters, economic inequalities, and armed conflicts.¹

Geopolitical shifts and security challenges further complicate humanitarian efforts on the ground.

In the hottest year on record, civilians globally faced severe repercussions from escalating climate-linked catastrophes and extreme weather events. Droughts, floods, and cyclones persistently endanger lives and livelihoods, exemplified by recent events in Libya, the Horn of Africa, and Afghanistan. Earthquakes in Türkiye, Syria,

and Morocco further exacerbated the desperate situation of vulnerable populations, claiming tens of thousands of lives.

Climate change coincides with a surge in man-made crises, particularly armed conflicts. In many of Geneva Call's areas of operations, like Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Iraq, climate-induced

resource struggles contributed to conflict outbreaks or escalation. Conversely, armed conflicts worsen climate-related crises, hindering mitigation efforts and destroying vital food sources. Deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, including water supply systems and agricultural infrastructure, violate IHL and undermine climate resilience and food security.

Armed conflict also remains a main driver of displacement, as underscored by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with millions of people fleeing their homes to escape insecurity and persecution. From Ukraine to Afghanistan, and from Sudan to Myanmar, armed conflicts continue to trigger mass displacement within countries and across borders.

On the political landscape of 2023, heightened polarization was evident, as illustrated by the BRICS group's expansion with six additional countries following the expressed interest from 40 nations. This polarization partly stems from the rejection of so-called 'Western narratives' with which the concept of rule-based international order, universal values, or rights are often associated.



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¹ Global Humanitarian Overview 2024. OCHA. 8 December 2023.



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Another concerning trend is the erosion of trust in global humanitarian networks. This trend may be traced back to two primary factors. Firstly, the decline of multilateralism, particularly within the United Nations Security Council, has resulted in a state of paralysis, hindering concerted action. Secondly, the effectiveness of IHL stands and falls with its universality. Any double standards in applying humanitarian norms or even the perception thereof significantly undermine IHL's core principles,

reducing opportunities for meaningful engagement with all conflict parties, including AGDAs.

As armed conflicts become increasingly fragmented, AGDAs continue to have a significant influence on civilian life. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the number of non-state armed groups has nearly doubled in the past five years.² Simultaneously, the International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that 195 million individuals have lived under AGDA control in 2023³

– a notable 11% increase from 2022. This underscores the pivotal role of humanitarian efforts, including direct engagement with these groups, in the protection of civilians.

The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that **195 million individuals** have lived under AGDA control in 2023.

² ACLED Conflict Severity Index - A New Measure of the Complexities of Conflict. ACLED. 19 January 2023.

³ ICRC engagement with armed groups in 2023. Humanitarian Law & Policy (ICRC blog). 10 October 2023.

The involvement of AGDAs in armed conflict significantly impacts the nature of the hostilities. ACLED data shows that most deliberate attacks against civilian populations or infrastructure can be attributed to non-state armed actors. Moreover, AGDA involvement may add to the fragmentation of armed conflicts, as it not only leads to clashes between state forces and AGDAs but also gives ground to hostilities among multiple AGDAs with contrasting ideologies and aspirations. As a result, the affected civilian population takes a heavy toll, and, combined with the fact that many armed actors are supported by larger domestic or foreign entities, complexity is added to conflicts that have already been difficult to resolve. AGDA involvement has also been shown to significantly impact children in armed conflict. This is why Geneva Call puts special emphasis on this topic as one of its areas of expertise. In 2023, Geneva Call intensified its engagement with AGDAs on the protection of children and education during armed conflicts and proactively shaped the humanitarian and political dialogue in this field.

The considerable number of armed conflicts and related humanitarian crises that were ongoing or erupted in 2023 highlights the pressing need to address the root causes of these conflicts which is a fundamental requirement for a more sustainable peace. Yet, among countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Myanmar, to name a few, there seems to be little to no capacity, space, or willingness to address these root causes.

Geneva Call intensified its engagement with AGDAs on the **protection of children and education** during armed conflicts and proactively shaped the humanitarian and political dialogue in this field.

This contributes to a situation where protracted conflicts and long-term humanitarian dependency become the norm.

The attack of Hamas on Israel on October 7th and Israel's military response led to a horrific surge of civilian suffering. This had strong regional repercussions with a surge in AGDAs' activity in countries like Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq, and put IHL in the spotlight of the public eye. In such instances, it is imperative that the

international community reflects on the universality of humanitarian norms and standards and upholds their compliance.

In 2023, Geneva Call continued its efforts to strengthen civilian protections by prodding armed groups and *de facto* authorities to uphold humanitarian norms and standards. This year was also marked by the development of the organization's new strategic plan for 2024-2027, which includes our enhanced "Theory of Change." This new strategic plan is intended to trigger long-lasting behavioral change in AGDAs. As such, it recognizes the importance of engaging with a wide array of stakeholders, including community leaders, civilians, and policymakers at local, national, and international levels.

While we face political, security, and financial challenges, Geneva Call has adopted an approach that allows for slow but steady progress. Over time, it should serve as a solid stepping-stone to the preservation of human dignity everywhere.



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AGENCE NIGÉRIENNE DE SÉCURITÉ
AÉRIENNE (ANSA) ET DE
SAUVEGARDE AÉRIENNE (ANSA)

AÉRODROME DE FADA N'GOURMA



2023 in review

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

In 2023, Geneva Call continued its humanitarian engagement with AGDAs across conflict-affected regions, employing a robust, sustained, and proactive approach to addressing the protection needs of vulnerable communities, particularly of women and children. Our efforts aimed to align with the organization's strategic objectives to foster lasting behavioral change, ultimately enhancing civilian protection. These included providing humanitarian access, facilitating the return of IDPs, and the evacuation of school buildings occupied by AGDAs among others. Moreover, we secured commitments from AGDAs to uphold international humanitarian norms, utilizing various engagement tools such

as the *Deed of Commitment* and Unilateral Declarations, promoting bilateral and multilateral dialogues between AGDAs and humanitarian actors, and reviewing AGDAs' internal policies and regulations. Due to our ongoing and long-term engagement, we have seen positive behavioral changes among AGDAs, especially among those who have signed commitments and demonstrated their willingness to comply with humanitarian norms.

Facilitating Access and Expanding Outreach

In South Sudan, Geneva Call strengthened relationships and expanded its engagement to Upper Nile by engaging with the senior leadership of AGDAs,

including Sudan People's Liberation Army in-Opposition (SPLA-IO), and SPLA-IO/Kitwang Faction - Agwelek Forces, and community-based armed actors such as the White Armies to positively influence their behavior regarding civilian protection.

In Sudan, despite a massive surge in armed conflict and implementation challenges, Geneva Call managed to keep engaging both AGDAs and state security actors on the importance of IHL compliance. In addition to the relocation of our main office to Port Sudan, we maintained a presence in key, hard-to-reach areas such as Damazeen (Blue Nile) and El Fasher (Darfur). IHL training and advocacy to hundreds of AGDA members and community stakeholders have been conducted. In parallel, a strategic engagement with state security forces has allowed Geneva Call to negotiate access for other humanitarian actors.

Our efforts aimed to align with the organization's strategic objectives to foster **lasting behavioral change**, ultimately enhancing civilian protection.





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In Burkina Faso, Geneva Call has maintained access to the Sahel province and other turbulent locations, continuing its engagement with armed actors and community stakeholders to respect child protection and education, as well as access to food security. In Ukraine, Geneva Call's growing profile led to increased involvement in specialized processes, such as organizing thematic workshops at national, regional, and international levels. These engagements focused on critical topics like national legal frameworks concerning "collaboration," ensuring the dissemination of relevant and timely knowledge. In Yemen, Geneva Call expanded operations into new areas by gaining trust and extending engagement with the Security Belt and the Internationally Recognized Government forces in Abyan Governorate. Additionally, Geneva Call initiated engagement with Yafe Security Belt and Southern Ground Brigade in Lahj and Al Dhalae. In Iraq, Geneva Call facilitated the return of IDPs in coordination with local tribal authorities, community leaders, and armed groups, and prevented the eruption of communal violence between Yazidi and Sunni communities through an engagement with religious leaders.

Continuing Efforts to Secure Commitments from AGDAs

In Afghanistan, Geneva Call's engagement with police headquarters resulted in the launch of a "Training-of-Trainer" program focusing on law enforcement and checkpoint procedures with emphasis on appropriate civilian interactions, professionalism, and the restrained use of force. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Geneva Call facilitated the signing of three Unilateral Declarations on sexual and gender-based violence by three AGDAs (NDC-R, Mai-Mai UHURU, and APCLS), and initiated the process of signing two *Deeds of Commitment*, which took place in March 2024.

In Libya, Geneva Call successfully negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Defense of the Government of National Unity to facilitate engagement with various stakeholders including armed brigades in the West. In Myanmar the *Deed of Commitment* on the protection of children was reaffirmed through a countersigning with the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), demonstrating their commitment to compliance. In South Sudan, Geneva Call secured commitments from key stakeholders who endorsed

Unilateral Declarations to safeguard civilians and abstain from violence. Similarly, armed groups in Syria's Northwest showed they were committed to facilitating humanitarian access and reducing aid diversion, showcasing Geneva Call's success in influencing internal practices and aligning training modules with humanitarian obligations.

Geneva Call monitors the implementation of signed *Deeds of Commitment* through various means such as self-reporting by the signatory AGDAs themselves, information sharing by other organizations and actors with Geneva Call, incident reporting, and follow-up on reported incidents.

Additionally, Geneva Call conducts direct evaluations and follows up on the measures to be taken by each signatory under the implementation plan accompanying each *Deed of Commitment*, including through field visits. For instance, in 2023, Geneva Call conducted a *Deed of Commitment* evaluation for the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) in Thailand and organized a workshop on *Deed of Commitment* compliance focusing on child protection for the signatory AGDAs in Myanmar.

Observing and Documenting Positive Behavioral Changes of AGDAs

Geneva Call's interventions to fostering behavioral change by AGDAs through long-term, sustained engagement with a wide variety of community stakeholders, have led to positive behavioral changes across conflict-affected regions.

In Afghanistan, communities have reported an improvement in professionalism and respect for individual rights at checkpoints managed by trained IEA police officers. In Burkina Faso, Geneva Call achieved the evacuation by armed actors of over a dozen schools, allowing thousands of children to continue their education, and enabled access to farming in conflict locations for thousands of farmers, enhancing food security. In Myanmar, findings from an external evaluation suggested evidence that AGDAs which Geneva Call engaged have visibly increased compliance with IHL and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). This includes relocating AGDA camps away from civilian areas, being more selective in their choice of military targets, and protecting religious buildings and schools during operations.

In the Philippines, the codification of norms among targeted communities has contributed to conflict resolution and influenced armed group policies, resulting in a decrease in civilians wearing military attire and carrying firearms. In South Sudan, improved behavior among armed groups, such as refraining from harassing women and demilitarizing civilian residential areas, has enhanced protection for thousands of people. Additionally, Geneva Call's active role in facilitating humanitarian access and negotiations with armed groups has fostered principled engagement and increased access in Sudan. The restitution of occupied civilian properties and educational centers in Syria and Iraq was the result of extensive engagement and policy reinforcement. Finally, IHL training initiatives

in Yemen led to the prompt release of detained aid vehicles at a military checkpoint.

Geneva Call's Strategic Approach and Objectives for 2024-2027

2023 was a year of transition marked by the conclusion of our 2020-2023 strategic plan and the development of a new four-year plan for 2024-2027.

Geneva Call has identified key challenges in civilian protection during armed conflict through consultations with various stakeholders. These challenges encompass shifts in conflict dynamics and obstacles to compliance with IHL. In response, Geneva Call will address these challenges through four general strategic objectives that aim to (1) champion the application of international humanitarian law;



(2) prioritize the protection of civilians in armed conflict, particularly women, children, and marginalized groups most at risk; (3) cultivate the universality of humanitarian norms and principles; and (4) respond to growing operational imperatives with a balanced, strategic approach and secured resources. Geneva Call remains committed to engaging with armed groups and *de facto* authorities to induce behavioral change, enhance compliance with humanitarian norms, and improve civilian protection in conflict situations and related crises, thus contributing to a safer environment for all affected populations.

Geneva Call has identified **key challenges in civilian protection during armed conflict** through consultations with various stakeholders.

Gender and Intersectionality

Conflict aggravates existing gender inequalities and increases the risk of sexual and gender-based violence affecting women, girls, men, and boys differently. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by violence, with their rights, freedoms, bodies, and dignity at risk. Sexual violence is used as a tactic of war, despite international humanitarian law prohibitions. Systemic gender discrimination contributes



to sexual and gender-based violence, impacting victims, families, communities, and society, hindering progress toward peace and security. Other intersectional factors, such as age, class, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, further influence the unique risks and challenges faced by marginalized groups and their ability to access essential services. To ensure that our interventions address the different risks and harms to which women, children, and other marginalized groups are exposed, Geneva Call applies a gender-mainstreamed, intersectional, and conflict-sensitive approach in its activities. As a further commitment, Geneva Call has created the position of Gender Advisor in 2023 to further the operational and institutional approach to the engagement of AGDAs, affected communities, and other stakeholders.

Geneva Call pays specific attention to the vital role that women play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, and humanitarian access, fully in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security [S/RES/1325(2000)]. To support women's vital roles, Geneva Call organized a series of national and regional workshops for women leaders to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices on how to address gendered protection risks and advocate for international humanitarian norms to support civilian protection, social cohesion, and conflict resolution. Such seminars were held at both regional and national levels, for example, with women leaders from Thailand and neighboring nations, in Iraq, and Afghanistan.

To further support women affected by conflict, Geneva Call seeks to promote equal participation of men and women in its activities, with tangible results in Iraq, the Philippines, Burkina Faso, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Geneva Call also prioritizes involving women in the development of its activities. For example, in the Philippines, Geneva Call asked women to participate in a survey on norms relevant to clan feuds known as *rido*.

Women's experiences with armed conflict are complex, and they can also play an active part as AGDA members. To the greatest extent possible, Geneva Call engages women members of AGDAs, for example in Yemen with specialized trainings on checkpoints.

As part of its thematic engagement on sexual violence and gender discrimination, Geneva Call organized dissemination campaigns in South Sudan, the Philippines, and Ukraine,

as well as community and AGDA trainings in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These interventions have yielded tangible outcomes. For example, in South Sudan, community members stated that AGDAs had stopped harassing women in markets. Similarly, community members stated that women were treated more respectfully at checkpoints in Afghanistan after Geneva Call's trainings. AGDAs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan have also committed to preventing and ending sexual and gender-based violence by adopting Unilateral Declarations in 2023.

INSTITUTIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Accountability and Financial Performance

In 2023, Geneva Call continued its efforts to enhance accountability and financial management across the organization. Pursuing this not only acknowledges our responsibility towards

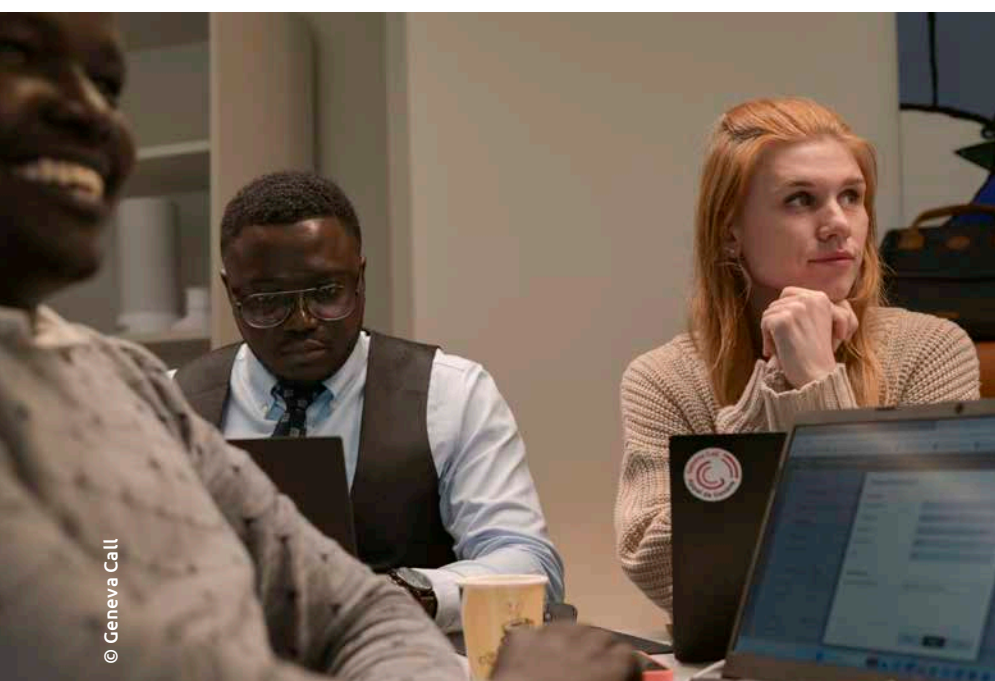
our partners and donors but also ensures we continually enhance our performance transparently and with integrity.

Our rigorous financial management allowed us to consolidate our reserves even further in 2023 meeting the targets we set and in line with good governance practices. We enhanced our procurement oversight and management, achieving effective cost management, while also revising our travel service delivery, and improving reporting on key cost drivers.

Geneva Call's focus on accountability, trust, and transparency was affirmed by being awarded the Zewo quality seal, a standard bearer for Swiss charities, in December 2023. It results from a thorough due diligence process and recognizes Geneva Call's adherence to standards of excellence across governance, management, and internal control systems.

Human Resources

In 2023, Geneva Call strengthened its performance management processes and culture throughout the organization, with a focus on individual development and engagement. All managers were trained in setting "SMART" objectives, assessing performance, providing feedback, and coaching employees. As a result, employees had an individual performance plan with set objectives and regular one-on-one reviews with their line manager. Geneva Call also prioritized the duty of care and a positive work environment. We conducted a campaign on burnout prevention and stress management, which included



a mandatory workshop for all managers with the objective of raising awareness, fostering mental health, and encouraging well-being in the workplace.

Two major organization-wide projects also advanced during 2023. The Digital Transformation project ensured the implementation of a system that meets the highest and most modern standards in human resources management. Recruitment, absence management, and payroll modules have been developed as part of the changes in the new system rollout. Moreover, Geneva Call reviewed its recruitment process and policy to increase efficiency, and to promote greater diversity and equality.

Relations with our Donors and Partners

Thanks to the generous and continued support of our donors, we achieved our targets with a fully funded CHF 20 million budget in 2023. We are most grateful to our valued partners for not only increasing our funding in 2023 but also expanding our portfolio of multi-year, long-term partnerships which more than doubled from 13 in the previous year to 27 in 2023.

In November 2023, Geneva Call held its annual pledging conference, welcoming 28 high-level representatives from institutional donors and partners, who have voiced their support to Geneva Call's objectives for the upcoming year. The opening of the event included the presence of EU Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič.



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The closing was presided over by Swiss Ambassador Simon Geissbühler, Head of the Peace and Human Rights Division within Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). Supporters praised Geneva Call's efforts to promote IHL and connect the needs of populations with the work of policymakers.

Information Technology and Digitalization

Our Digital Transformation project revolutionized our organizational processes through automation, standardization, and enhanced data management. With a focus on real-time information accessibility and filing, the project streamlined operational processes across the organization, introduced new data systems and services, and established robust standards for data management.

Significant milestones included the establishment of project governance, a change in IT partnership to enhance user support, and the standardization of an IT infrastructure with migration to Microsoft 365.

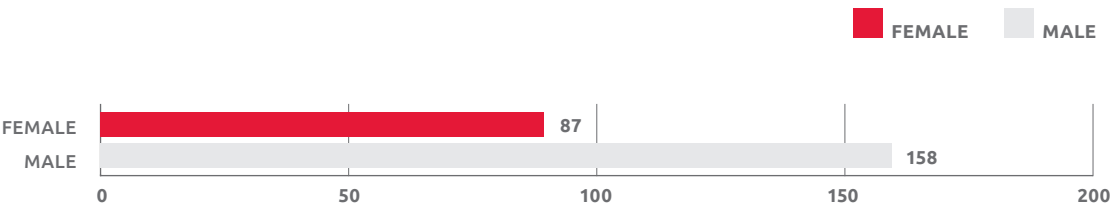
Moreover, the project encompassed the implementation of an Enterprise Social Network and File Management System, the adoption of an integrated ERP system, redesigning the financial structure and processes, improved donor and grants management, digitization of travel management, and the launch of a digital HR management interface.

These efforts culminated in a comprehensive digital overhaul that is adding momentum to the organization's efforts through enhanced efficiency, collaboration, reporting, and data-driven decision-making capabilities.

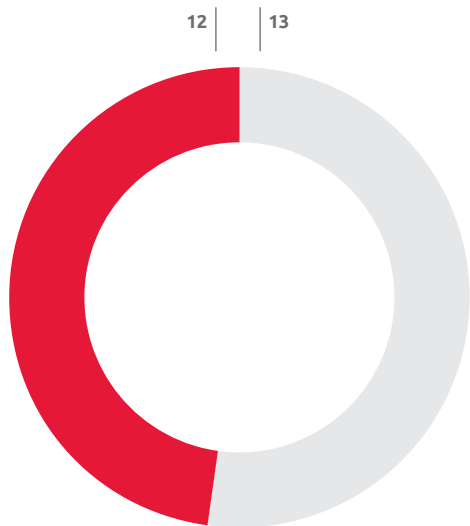
Thanks to the generous and continued support of our donors, we achieved our targets with a fully funded **CHF 20 million** budget in 2023.

Note: As of December 31, 2023

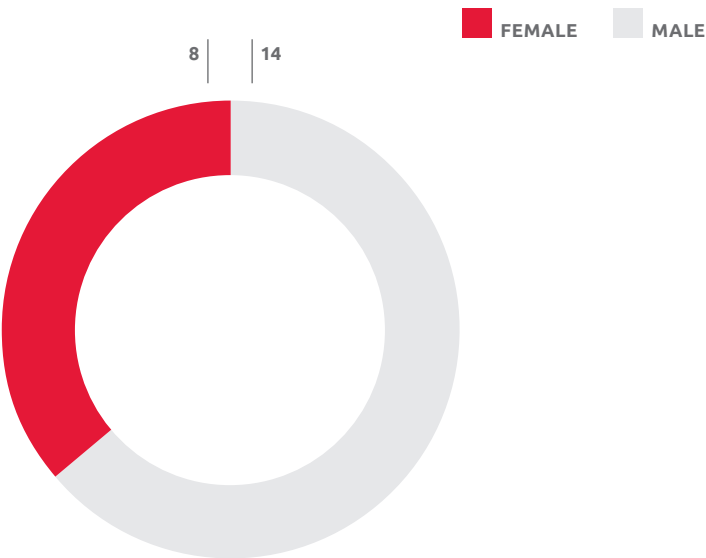
Overall gender distribution



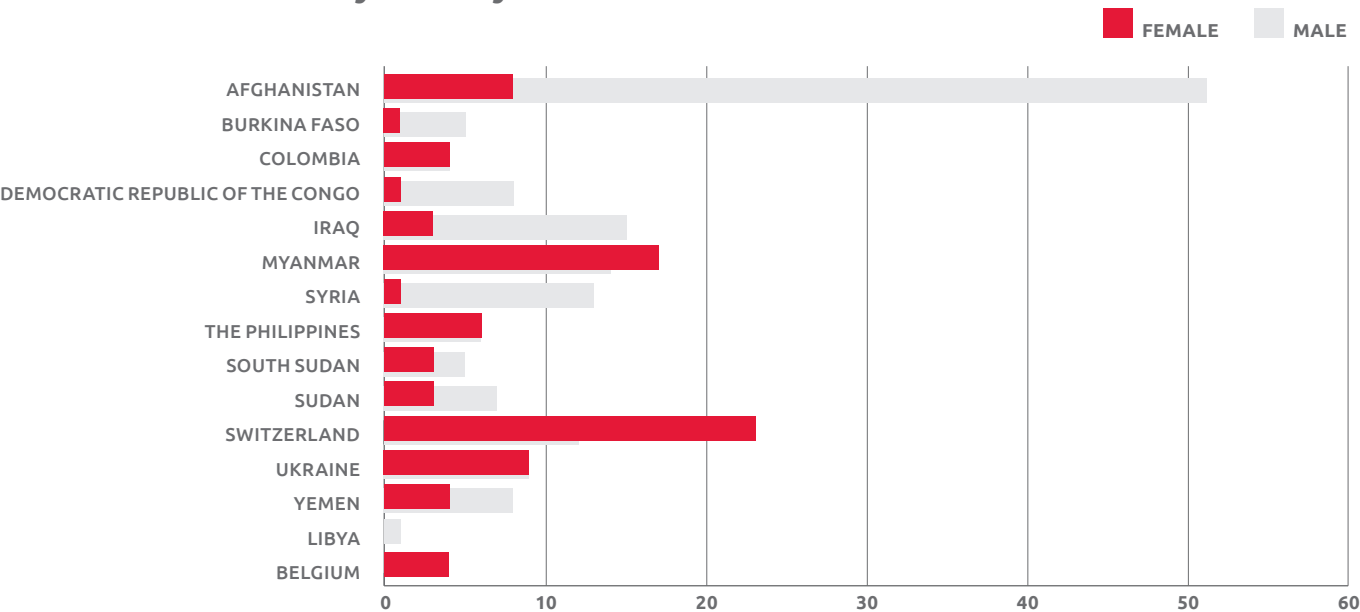
Applicants hired by gender in 2023



Leadership roles by gender



Gender distribution by country





Countries of operation 2023





COLOMBIA

Context

Humanitarian protection concerns remained high in Colombia as tensions among some AGDAs and between AGDAs and the government increased. Adding to these concerns were the groups' alleged forced recruitment of underage children and illegal economies, notably in drugs and mining. Additionally, humanitarian access was severely restricted, with 75 blockages reported in the first half of 2023, leaving over 211,000 people lacking essential aid.

Intervention and Impact

Despite the direct impact of AGDAs' behavior on civilians, a strict national legal framework makes it unlawful to engage directly with armed groups and *de facto* authorities in Colombia. As a result, Geneva Call focuses on engaging key actors who can enhance their own protection or who already exert a positive influence on AGDAs. This includes vulnerable communities, women, indigenous people, healthcare personnel, teachers, and faith-based leaders in Arauca, Antioquia, and Norte de Santander.

The results of Geneva Call's activities are tangible, with numerous communities reporting changes in AGDAs' conduct, such as refraining from using civilian infrastructure for military

purposes and recognizing schools as safe spaces, which contributes to preventing the recruitment of children and making communities, including indigenous ones, safer places. Additionally, Geneva Call has been trying to ensure equal gender representation in its activities across the country and has developed innovative technological solutions to reach a wider audience through communication campaigns, online channels, and chatbots.

Challenges

Geneva Call keeps facing legal barriers in Colombia when it comes to engaging with AGDAs. The lack of government permits hinders the reach and effectiveness of humanitarian operations.

At the same time, human and financial resource constraints limit the organization's capacity to sustain and expand activities despite the growing demand from stakeholders to reach new communities and address emerging issues.

Geneva Call focuses on engaging **key actors** who can enhance their own protection or who already exert a positive influence on AGDAs.





BURKINA FASO



Context

As a result of an increase of 60% in attacks against civilians and their property between 2022 and 2023, thousands of civilians lost their lives or were injured by armed groups. At the same time, the humanitarian situation remained dire, with more than 6 million people requiring humanitarian assistance and 2 million people internally displaced due to violence and insecurity. As humanitarian needs escalate and large-scale attacks on civilians intensify, the geopolitical and political landscape remains unstable, volatile, and in constant flux, and humanitarian NGOs face increasing scrutiny regarding the nature of their activities and intervention methods.

Intervention and Impact

Throughout 2023, Geneva Call expanded its humanitarian engagement, particularly with

self-defense groups. This has resulted in substantial behavioral shifts including through the implementation of three Unilateral Declarations signed in 2022 on child protection and education. Thanks to the measures taken by the self-defense groups, including the adoption of age verification measures and the relocation of more than 15 of their military bases, 21 schools were able to reopen between 2022 and 2023, benefiting 1,200 students in the North, East, and Boucle du Mouhoun regions. Similarly, the self-defense group of the Kogleweogo instituted a specific protocol for the humane treatment of detained women and girls during hostilities. With regard to food security, the self-defense group of the Dozos created patrols to protect farmers during the growing season enabling them to safely cultivate and harvest. Parallel to enhancing food security and the protection of children and education, Geneva Call has strongly emphasized the importance of distinguishing civilians from combatants. As a result, some self-defense groups have acknowledged successfully reducing civilian casualties during combat.

Gender mainstreaming has also been a key aspect of the 2023 strategic approach, ensuring an equal representation of both men and women participants

in training sessions for civil society on international humanitarian standards. In addition, through the cooperation with civil society organizations, and three local radio stations, messages with humanitarian norms in local languages could reach millions of people, including those living in hard-to-reach areas under the influence of the so-called radical groups as well as in bordering areas of Mali and Niger. Finally, the establishment of a collaboration protocol with the Interministerial Committee on International Humanitarian Law facilitated impactful workshops and advocacy forums that fortified discussions on humanitarian access, international law, and collaboration with the transitional authorities.

Challenges

In Burkina Faso, the humanitarian community faces several complex challenges, including shrinking humanitarian space and funding, contested applicability of IHL and humanitarian principles, bureaucratic and administrative impediments, and the impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures. The evolving context calls for adaptive strategies to cope with changing dynamics and growing humanitarian demands and to foster resilience amid the uncertainties that define Burkina Faso's current landscape.



LIBYA

Context

The socio-political and security context in Libya remained volatile in 2023 with persistent turmoil and sporadic outbreaks of violence posing a threat to the country's stability. Confrontations between armed factions, particularly in the Western region, resulted in significant civilian casualties. On the political plan, the East-West divide was exacerbated by the strengthening of parallel institutions and the appointment of a new prime minister in the East. Moreover, the humanitarian situation was worsened by Hurricane Daniel and the unprecedented floods that struck

Eastern Libya. The devastation that ensued coupled with a range of access challenges emphasized the urgent need for improved strategies to effectively reach affected communities and deliver aid to those in need.

Intervention and Impact

In 2023, Geneva Call's activities were aimed at building trust and understanding with key stakeholders, spanning from AGDAs and security forces, CSOs, to community leaders. This included national and regional conferences to promote respect for international humanitarian and human rights law by bringing

together actors from the East and West. Joint statements issued after the conferences outlined key recommendations on matters related to improving respect for humanitarian norms.

In Western Libya, Geneva Call signed an MoU with the Ministry of Defense that allowed the organization to engage with a range of armed actors and deliver training sessions on IHL and IHRL. In the East, the engagement with the IHL committee of the Ministry of Defense and the Libyan National Army was instrumental in promoting understanding and respect for international humanitarian norms, in particular to improve the protection of civilian infrastructure, considering the devastating floods that hit the country.

Challenges

Geneva Call faced numerous operational challenges in Libya including limited financial resources, bureaucratic hurdles, and heightened security risks linked to the still volatile Libyan conflict environment. Even though this impacted some of its activities, Geneva Call was able to navigate these obstacles, while strengthening collaboration with key ministries in both the East and the West of Libya.





DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



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Context

In 2023, the Eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) witnessed a resurgence of conflict between the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC), the various armed actors grouped together within the Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (VDP), and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23). As a result, civilians continued to face persistent violence, leading to displacement and ongoing humanitarian crises. Already contested by members of the armed groups, the current Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Reintegration and Stabilization Program (P-DDRCS) seems to have a lack of acceptance from communities and the armed groups themselves, especially after the creation of a reserve brigade. This has increased violence perpetrated by armed groups as well as criminality often linked to their actions. In addition, limited humanitarian access exacerbated

by security incidents against aid workers posed significant challenges to relief efforts.

Intervention and Impact

Despite a violence upsurge in 2023, Geneva Call sustained its humanitarian dialogue with over twenty AGDAs and a wide range of stakeholders, including local communities, CSOs, and religious leaders to enhance their understanding of IHL. This engagement, which relied on a holistic approach, focused on the protection of medical missions, children, and education, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and conflict-related food insecurity, including through the release of 3 Unilateral Declarations on such topics by three AGDAs.

Additionally, the gender dimension was addressed in-depth and transversally through the topic of sexual and gender-based violence and by encouraging the participation

and involvement of women in all activities. This comprehensive approach had tangible results, including the release of humanitarian, medical, and educational personnel held in captivity, the liberation of four occupied schools, and the relocation of military positions away from civilian infrastructure. Geneva Call's advocacy and awareness efforts led to behavioral changes among armed actors, such as improved access to healthcare for war-wounded individuals and removal of tax barriers, thereby promoting humanitarian access and food security, and finally the transfer of alleged perpetrators of IHL violations to national authorities. Lastly, the engagement with communities allowed for the creation of roadmaps as self-protection mechanisms such as having AGDA collect taxes with better methods and using these to invest in public infrastructure.

Challenges

Geneva Call faced several challenges in the DRC in prioritizing and carrying out its humanitarian engagement due to widespread insecurity, the proliferation of armed groups and their internal divisions, and the ongoing military operations. In response to this, Geneva Call adapted its strategies, intensified its remote and digital engagement, and continued to advocate for the protection of civilians.



SUDAN

Context

Sudan experienced increased political turmoil between the civilian and military components of the transitional government in 2023. Following an intense period of sharp political and social polarization, this turmoil became a full-fledged armed confrontation between two military components on April 15, 2023. Since then, AGDAs' behavior severely impacted the rights of civilians in relation to gender-based violence, child recruitment, and food security. The increased number of armed groups, and fighters, as well as their control over larger territories, have intensified the exposure of civilians to the effects of armed conflict.

Intervention and Impact

Despite access and security constraints due to the intensity of the conflict, Geneva Call prioritized its strategy by encouraging broader acceptance of principled humanitarian action by all sides to the conflict. Such engagement has resulted in hundreds of combatants trained in IHL, IHRL, and the protection of civilians in different locations, mainly where Geneva Call has its different offices: Darfur, Blue Nile, Al Jazeera, and Port Sudan. Within these training sessions, particular emphasis was given to the importance of enhancing respect for civilians and civilian infrastructure during conflict,

"I will do my best to **respect and apply IHL** when casting military orders to my subordinates during fighting."

- AGDA member

and to the role of humanitarian actors and their guiding principles. As a result, several episodes of successful access negotiations were led by Geneva Call to facilitate humanitarian access for certain humanitarian actors in conflict areas such as Darfur or Al Jazeera State. Training and advocacy towards AGDA leaders contributed to protecting civilian infrastructure as was the case in Darfur, where markets and farmers were protected allowing the production and selling of food.

Geneva Call reinforced its engagement with communities, including Masalit youth and leaders, originally from West Darfur and having witnessed terrible massacres since the conflict started. Geneva Call also engaged Arab tribe leaders to gain influence on their AGDAs' commanders.

Geneva Call is also an active member of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led Humanitarian Access Working Group and integrates humanitarian operating

principles into its regular IHL training to sensitize conflict parties and decision-makers to their roles in facilitating humanitarian assistance.

Challenges

Geneva Call faced significant hurdles in Sudan during 2023, including delays in obtaining administrative permission as well as access constraints in Darfur. Nevertheless, Geneva Call successfully navigated these challenges by engaging a wide range of actors who participated in IHL trainings. Additionally, to overcome access constraints, Geneva Call carried out transborder activities to reach community leaders and armed groups in West Darfur.

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SOUTH SUDAN



Context

In South Sudan, more sub-national violence was observed in 2023. The ethno-political competition among elites over access to power and financial resources sparked clashes in Upper Nile State, the Abyei Administrative Area, Jonglei, and Equatoria among others. This led to civilian casualties and the disruption of humanitarian assistance. Despite peace initiatives, political stagnation hindered the implementation of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement, frustrating the signatories and fueling further instability.

The country also grappled with acute food insecurity. An estimated 46% of the population was at severe risk of running out of food.

Intervention and Impact

Since 2020, Geneva Call has been present in Western Equatoria, Warrap, and more recently in Upper Nile. Geneva Call's mission focuses on engaging armed groups, community and religious leaders, and civil society actors to enhance civilian protection through adherence to IHL and humanitarian norms.

Humanitarian dialogue involved groups such as the SPLA-IO, and the Kit Gwang/Agwelek forces, as well as community-based armed groups like the Gelweng (armed cattle keepers), fostering positive behavioral changes. It also facilitated the signing of three Unilateral Declarations by the Gelweng leaders, in three villages, on the protection of civilians and their objects, and on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, emphasizing the imperative of protecting children, women, and displaced people.

In 2023, Geneva Call further expanded its engagement into Upper Nile State addressing IHL training gaps and community empowerment needs in that region. Throughout its engagement, Geneva Call also ensured to take into account women's and girls' needs and experiences by organizing activities for such audiences led by female staff. Additionally, Geneva Call's interventions related to food insecurity in Upper Nile, the prevention of SGBV in Western

Equatoria, and the launch of media campaigns in local languages in Warrap, Upper Nile, and Western Equatoria States, underscored the comprehensive approach to mitigating conflicts' impact and protecting civilians in South Sudan. Finally, thanks to a partnership with a local organization, Passion for the Needy, it was possible to organize sessions gathering armed groups and the community in Western Equatoria leading to a substantial improvement in the relations between them and to the demilitarization of civilian residential areas, which had become an epicenter of military activities. This led to farmers, women, and children gaining safety and freedom of movement, and thus, market functioning and food security enhanced among other benefits.

Challenges

Geneva Call faced significant challenges while implementing its activities in South Sudan. The protraction of the 2018 Peace Agreement implementation complicated Geneva Call's humanitarian engagement with AGDAs continually splintering into subgroups and complexifying monitoring activities. At the same time, security challenges, as well as climate-related events, led to sudden postponement or cancellation of planned activities, especially if taking place in rural areas.



UKRAINE

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Context

In 2023, the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine unfolding from the large-scale escalation of hostilities of 2022 worsened even more, leaving 14.6 million Ukrainians in need of assistance. That included 3.3 million people in dire need of basic items such as water, food, shelter, and healthcare. Additionally, nearly 4 million people were internally displaced, including approximately 111,500 living in collective sites,⁴ and around 6.5 million sought refuge abroad.⁵ The situation was aggravated due to the attacks and destruction of civilian infrastructure, including the Kakhovka Dam, and increasing protection issues, with civilians, particularly children, facing grave violations and deepening inequalities heavily affecting women, girls, people with disabilities, and marginalized groups, including Roma and LGBTQI+ communities.

Intervention and Impact

Following the significant escalation of the conflict in February 2022, Geneva Call focused its intervention on engaging with a wide array of weapon bearers who had not received any or significant training in the basic norms and

principles of IHL, including newly integrated units in frontline oblasts. In addition, Geneva Call extended its presence in key Ukrainian oblasts such as Donetsk, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Luhansk, and Mykolaiv.

In 2023, Geneva Call carried out nearly 100 targeted and increasingly adapted training sessions for over 2,000 combatants on both sides of the front lines to enhance understanding and compliance with international humanitarian standards. Those sessions were based on an analysis of the IHL application gaps. The aim was to offer training programs focused on perceptions, attitudes, and practices rather than in-depth knowledge and technical expertise. A survey conducted after the training program revealed that 75% of the respondents felt the activity significantly influenced their combat decision-making. In addition to this, to reinforce its IHL dissemination activities, Geneva Call distributed various thematic materials and launched a digital campaign to increase

IHL awareness among the population named “Warriors of Light” that successfully reached a total of over 12 million views, 70% of which were men of military age. Moreover, Geneva Call’s collaboration with two combatants’ training centers in Dnipro and Kharkiv has been pivotal in integrating IHL awareness into their training programs and in contributing significantly to their understanding of humanitarian norms.

Challenges

Some units on the frontline remained hard to reach due to their active role in ongoing battles, preventing them from being fully exposed to IHL dissemination activities. Additionally, working in frontline regions means operating in an unpredictable and at times unsafe environment, with possible exposure to military attacks. Moreover, the increasing polarization of the conflict makes it challenging for principled humanitarian action to take place on both sides of the front line.

“IHL reminds you to **stay human even during the hardest and the darkest times**. It’s easier to follow known rules during stressful situations.”

- Frontline combatant training participant

⁴ Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024. OCHA. 3 Jan. 2024.

⁵ Ukraine Refugee Situation. Operational Data Portal. UNHCR. 15 February 2024.



SYRIA

Context

In 2023, Syria witnessed a significant upsurge in violence across the country. A lack of compliance with IHL by parties to the conflict continues to pose persistent protection risks for civilians, while also contributing to growing levels of tension within and between communities and local authorities. In the Northwest, the earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria in February 2023 aggravated pre-existing protection concerns, especially related to housing, land, and property. At the same time, because of internal protracted conflicts, humanitarian access remains challenging. In Northeast Syria, the most significant outbreak of violence seen in the governorate of Deir ez-Zor

since 2019 resulted in thousands of civilians displaced and critical infrastructure damaged. Across Northeast Syria, the humanitarian situation remains dire, especially for IDPs who face discriminatory freedom of movement restrictions imposed by local authorities, which significantly curtails their access to essential services and employment opportunities.

Intervention and Impact

In 2023, Geneva Call continued to undertake humanitarian engagement on IHL, IHRL, and humanitarian principled action with AGDAs. In Northwest Syria, Geneva Call has been focusing on the forced recruitment and association of children in armed groups, housing, land, and property rights violations, protection of civilian infrastructure, health services, and gender-based violence. Thanks to this engagement, several groups have introduced new recruitment procedures and age-verification policies, conducted monitoring spot-checks, strengthened Codes of Conduct, and returned 140 occupied civilian properties to their owners. Additionally, three major groups, collectively representing 24 AGDAs, issued Unilateral Declarations on facilitating humanitarian access and the protection of civilian infrastructure. By the end of 2023, all year-one targets of the Unilateral Declarations' action plans were successfully accomplished. These

included the introduction of codes of conduct, internal training, and monitoring processes. In Northeast Syria, Geneva Call continued to promote policy and practice-related behavioral change by the Internal Security Forces and other branches of the local authorities on issues like child protection, arbitrary arrest and detention, and displacement. Against this background, Geneva Call developed an internal evidence-based advocacy briefing paper to promote the reform of discriminatory movement restrictions on IDPs, the key recommendations of which have factored into a new draft law, pending approval. Geneva Call continued to partner with civil society organizations, prioritizing wherever possible support for women's and youth-led organizations, and legal, advocacy, and protection initiatives by community leaders.

Challenges

In addition to the earthquakes that struck Syria at the beginning of the year and the reduction in funding for aid to the country, Geneva Call's engagement with armed groups has faced serious challenges from the conflict in Gaza, which has led many of them to question the value and credibility of IHL. To tackle this, Geneva Call has further adapted its material stressing the alignment between IHL and Islamic Law.





IRAQ

Context

Throughout 2023, the dynamics of Iraq's political landscape remained tumultuous. Despite the formation of a new government, tensions surged among various parties and factions. Security concerns persisted, with armed groups launching attacks at populated areas and civilian objects in Kurdistan, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis for over 1.2 million IDPs. Numerous armed groups hindered return efforts, persisted in recruiting children, and obstructed humanitarian access to specific areas. The Israeli-Hamas war and climate change also challenged Iraq's stability and prosperity. Water scarcity and armed groups' exploitation of agricultural lands deprived locals of their cultivation rights and coerced them into sharing proceeds.

Intervention and Impact

Since it launched operations in Iraq in 2014, Geneva Call has engaged with key armed actors on humanitarian norms and the rule of law. The groups that Geneva Call has been involved with include Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), Peshmerga, Yazidi forces, Joint Operations Command, and other AGDAs, due to their significant presence and influence in large territories. Special attention was given to addressing violations,

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such as child recruitment and infrastructure occupation, particularly in areas like Sinjar.

Geneva Call strengthened its impact in Iraq by extending its dialogue and cooperation to CSOs, INGOs, IOs, local authorities, and institutions, including governmental and ministerial bodies.

Geneva Call's interventions brought about significant changes in Kirkuk and Anbar, where more than 200 families could return to their areas of origin after a positive engagement with armed groups. Geneva Call played a pivotal role in de-escalating communal tensions in Sinjar by involving religious leaders in televised appeals for social cohesion and adherence to IHL. Its efforts led to the resumption of education and the reopening of a primary health center in facilities previously occupied by armed groups.

A Memorandum of Cooperation was developed with the National IHL Commission, aiming to ensure the sustainability of IHL dissemination. Additionally, the signing of Unilateral Declarations by AGDAs furthered commitments to protect civilian infrastructure, facilitate humanitarian access, and address climate change. Empowerment sessions for women on their rights under UN Security Council resolution 1325 allowed for equal representation of women in all its activities with CSOs.

Challenges

Geneva Call faced diverse challenges in Iraq, from bureaucratic hurdles to armed groups questioning the relevance of IHL in light of the Gaza humanitarian crisis. Geneva Call navigated this by emphasizing IHL's compatibility with religious or traditional norms, facilitating workshops to enhance its understanding.



YEMEN



Context

Yemen is still experiencing a multifaceted crisis stemming from a protracted armed conflict between the Internationally Recognized Government and Ansar Allah since 2014, plunging the nation into a state of “no peace, no war.” Civilians bear the brunt of several years of conflict, facing casualties, loss of fundamental rights and freedoms, economic turmoil, and restriction of movement. The safety and protection of civilians have deteriorated, and in 2023 over 4 million displaced people lived in deplorable conditions in IDP sites across the country. At the same time, the lack of awareness, knowledge, and practice of basic humanitarian norms, fundamental freedoms, and

feedback and accountability mechanisms led to reduced community safety and protection.

Intervention and Impact

Since 2018, Geneva Call launched initiatives in Yemen to engage armed actors, community leaders, and civil society organizations in upholding IHL and safeguarding civilians. This commitment intensified in 2023, featuring strategic training initiatives spanning a three-phase approach focusing on IHL trainings, Training-of-Trainers sessions, and awareness-raising activities. In Aden, Lahj, Abyan, Al Dhale, Taiz, Hadramout, and other governorates, both male and female armed group members received specialized training on IHL compliance and civilian protection. Additionally,

workshops in Aden targeted women working in checkpoints to cover aid access, the safe passage of civilians, and GBV issues. Tangible results regarding work through a gender perspective were also included in training with civil society organizations and media professionals. Male and female trainees were selected in largely equal proportions in most governorates.

In addition, civil-military dialogues allowed communities to raise issues directly with armed groups. Among the main results was the creation of new accountability mechanisms in response to communities that requested help in strengthening their protection. Geneva Call’s activities also contributed to the release of a truck carrying humanitarian aid that had been detained for more than a week at a military checkpoint.

Challenges

Security risks related to the ongoing conflict remained one of the main challenges for Geneva Call and other humanitarian organizations operating in the country. Bureaucratic hurdles, including delays in permits and sub-agreements, hindered staff movement and project implementation. However, effective coordination with official bodies helped mitigate these challenges, ensuring the continuation of Geneva Call’s vital work.



AFGHANISTAN

Context

In 2023, Afghanistan continued to face a dire humanitarian situation with 29.2 million people, or 70% of the population, needing aid. Drought, poverty, and earthquakes compounded their prior vulnerabilities from sporadic clashes involving *de facto* authorities and other AGDAs. Two years after its takeover of the country, the Taliban, or Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), continued to exert control as *de facto* authorities governing the country and ruling over millions of Afghans. This included an almost complete renewal of police forces tasked to patrol cities and key roadways. Restrictions on the rights of women and girls remained in place, contributing to a dire protection situation. Afghans returning from Pakistan and Iran further undermined social cohesion in the country, sparking inter-communal and inter-ethnic violence.

specialized training for more than 5,000 members on humanitarian norms, law enforcement behavior, and gender-based violence.

Additionally, the organization of several multi-stakeholder workshops and conferences sought to promote social cohesion, meaningful access to education, and the dissemination of humanitarian messages by religious leaders. Those activities led to positive shifts in IEA behavior, and greater respect for the local population, especially women, particularly at checkpoints. The engagement with police headquarters resulted in an authorization for Geneva Call to establish a Training-of-Trainers program on law enforcement at checkpoints and in the creation of committees to monitor the behavior of police and checkpoint personnel.

Additionally, community empowerment initiatives were held to conduct IHL

training sessions and university collaborations advocating for IHL inclusion in their curricula. Contextualized messaging, using Islamic principles, fostered lasting behavioral change among AGDAs. This multi-stakeholder approach, engaging everyone from religious leaders and scholars to local citizens, fostered dialogue, thus reducing the risk of further conflict.

Challenges

In 2023, Geneva Call's work in Afghanistan faced a series of challenges including a continued ban on female staff – who could work only under strict conditions and exclusively with women's audiences – and a lack of formal agreements. That hindered project implementation. Despite this, Geneva Call managed to register its projects while also advocating for the resumption of complete female staff work.

Intervention and Impact

In 2023, Geneva Call's work in Afghanistan focused on enhancing compliance with international humanitarian norms among *de facto* authorities, while reducing harm to civilians and promoting inter-community relations. Some key interventions included direct engagement with the IEA entities and ministries to improve humanitarian access and protection of civilians, and





MYANMAR

Context

In 2023, Myanmar faced an intensification of armed conflict across the country between resistance forces and the State Administration Council, particularly in Karenni and Rakhine states. Against this backdrop, several resistance groups formed governments in their respective

states, while the National Unity Government established its administration in areas it controls. This surge in armed clashes resulted in civilian casualties exacerbated by airstrikes, shelling, and the use of explosive devices. Such an unstable security situation led more than 2.6 million people to be internally displaced as of the end of 2023.

Council of Shan State (RCSS), which reaffirmed its commitment to the protection of children and outlined action plans for future compliance.

Geneva Call engaged with communities and CSOs, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and strived to promote women's participation in advocating for compliance with IHL in Myanmar. Geneva Call's interventions contributed to increased compliance with IHL and the adoption of practical measures by AGDAs, such as the relocation of military camps away from civilian areas, respect for the principle of distinction between military and civilian targets, detention rather than execution of enemy combatants, and protection of religious buildings and schools during military operations.

Intervention and Impact

Since 2006, Geneva Call has been actively engaged in Myanmar, focusing primarily on Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) by promoting compliance with IHL to safeguard the civilian population and uphold a shared sense of humanity.

Geneva Call in 2023 prioritized its engagement with EROs/EAOs that had signed one or more *Deeds of Commitment (DoC)*, through which they publicly committed to the protection of civilians. Geneva Call's intervention with EROs focused on IHL, child protection, and the prevention of sexual violence. Geneva Call has engaged with such AGDAs in raising awareness of their obligations under the *DoC* and has provided legal analysis for the development of new policies, such as a child protection policy. Additionally, Geneva Call held a *DoC* countersigning ceremony with the Restoration

Challenges

Heightened risks to humanitarian workers, including threats of violence and arbitrary arrest, demanded reinforced security protocols and further impeded humanitarian access. To adapt to the volatile environment, Geneva Call implements flexible programming approaches, including remote modalities. Despite this, Geneva Call continued to build relationships with all parties to the conflict, while maintaining neutrality and impartiality.





THAILAND

Context

The deep south of Thailand remained marked by a high degree of militarization, exacerbating socio-economic and security risks for the population, coupled with the threat of improvised explosive devices. Additionally, due to the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, three provinces were affected in December 2023 by some of the worst flooding in decades, causing more than 90,000 families to suffer. Against this background, devastating emergency conditions limited humanitarian access.

Intervention and Impact

Geneva Call's humanitarian engagement remained pivotal in contributing to the protection of communities and a conducive environment for peace talks between the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) Melayu Patani and the Thai government.

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Amid geopolitical tensions and internal disturbances, Geneva Call's efforts in Thailand focused on the protection of children, including through the monitoring and implementation of the signed *DoC*. Throughout 2023, a reduction in civilian casualties, including children, and attacks against schools and their personnel was recorded. At the same time, Geneva Call explored

the topic of improvised explosive devices, due to their increased use and related humanitarian consequences. Specialized sessions prioritized the involvement of women in advocating for humanitarian norms and facilitating knowledge-sharing among women leaders from Thailand and neighboring countries. Relations with national authorities improved due to the impact of Geneva Call's work in the country's south.

"If we have the knowledge and understanding, **we dare to design preventative measures and activities** to prevent the negative impact on children and women in the future."

- A female civil society leader

Challenges

The political and security situation, and reduced funding, posed challenges to Geneva Call in Thailand. To address this, Geneva Call actively sought to diversify its donor portfolio for upcoming years.



THE PHILIPPINES

Context

In 2023, the Philippines continued to face insecurity due to two main conflict contexts. In the Bangsamoro context, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is leading a transition towards self-determination following a peace agreement with the government, while clan feuds known as *rido* and inter-communal conflicts are on the rise, involving AGDAs, groups outside of the peace agreement, and State security forces. At the same time, the conflict between the New People's Army (NPA) and State security forces is affecting wider parts of the country, with over 200 clashes recorded over 2023, including against civilians. This widespread violence had a disproportionate effect on underserved communities, including indigenous people, and resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Adding to the complexity, the Philippines is vulnerable to natural disasters, often hitting conflict-affected regions.

Intervention and Impact

With a humanitarian engagement dating back to 2000 – including awareness-raising sessions, thematic training, social media campaigns, and civilian engagement – Geneva Call reached almost 30,000 people in 2023 while ensuring the equal involvement of men and women.

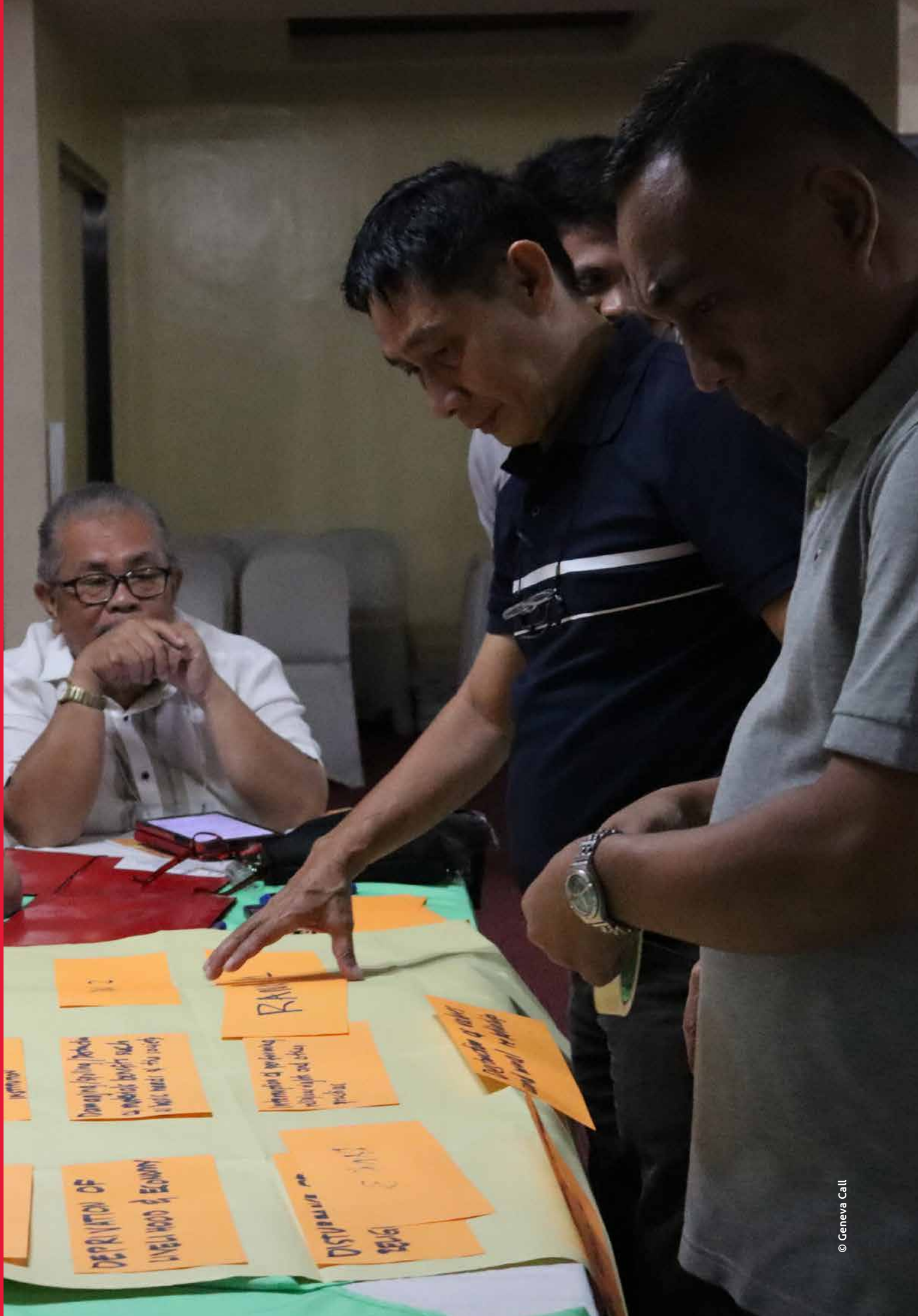
With regards to the gender dimension, Geneva Call tailored messages to address SGBV and protect women, and pushed for women's participation, including the role of women leaders, in promoting humanitarian norms within communities. The main areas of engagement were the protection of children and education coupled with contextualized approaches for norms to limit the harm to civilian populations caused by *rido*. This comprehensive approach, supported by local partner organizations and community and religious leaders, facilitated behavioral changes among AGDAs, such as avoiding setting up checkpoints near communities and disseminating humanitarian messages through internal training sessions and religious sermons in their communities. At the same time, AGDAs expressed their willingness to integrate codified

rido norms into their policies and codes of conduct. Similarly, Geneva Call's activities yielded positive results among civilians. Humanitarian messages were integrated into community and religious meetings, and civilians started to avoid wearing military or camouflage clothes and to stop carrying weapons, distinguishing themselves from fighters. As a result, two surveys highlighted that the majority of civilians reached felt more protected from the effects of conflict-related violence in 2023.

Challenges

In the Philippines, Geneva Call faced financial constraints leading to staff reductions. In addition, the forthcoming 2025 electoral period carries high risks for *rido*-related electoral violence and can undermine the ongoing peace process.





Humanitarian thematic in highlight – Protecting children and education



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continued at an alarming rate in 2023 with a reported increase in direct attacks on schools, students, and personnel and the use of schools for military purposes. Afghanistan, Myanmar, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the DRC are particularly affected by such attacks against education.

Both state armed forces and AGDAs have been involved in violence against children and attacks against education. According to the 2023 report of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, armed groups were responsible for 50% of the grave violations against children.

CONTEXT

In 2023, in line with the fact that the number of civilians affected by conflict reached a striking peak in history, it is estimated that 468 million children worldwide live in areas of armed conflict⁶. This is largely explained by the rising number of armed conflicts in the last two years, especially in Ukraine, the Sahel region, Sudan, and Gaza coupled with the exponential increase of armed groups and *de facto* authorities. In 2023, there were indeed more than 450 active

armed groups of humanitarian concern, a number that more than doubled in the last decade.

Armed conflicts disproportionately affect children, both boys and girls. Children face high risks during armed conflict: they may be recruited or otherwise used in hostilities and, in extreme cases, be killed. Many children in areas of armed conflict are traumatized. Even if children associated with an armed group are released, they are at risk of being rejected by their community and re-recruited. Attacks against education also

According to the 2023 report of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, **armed groups were responsible for 50% of the grave violations against children.**

⁶ Stop the War on Children, Save the Children, December 2023

OUR THEMATIC APPROACH

Against this background, Geneva Call strives to improve the protection of children and education in areas of conflict or violence. Geneva Call directly engages AGDAs on their responsibilities towards the protection of children and education during the conduct of hostilities and in areas under their influence more generally. In addition to this long-term engagement with AGDAs to change their behavior, Geneva Call works with civil society organizations and local communities to foster awareness of their rights with a view to empowering them to advocate for their own protection.

Moreover, civil society organizations and local communities, including local leaders, contribute to changes in the attitudes, policies, and practices of AGDAs.

Geneva Call seeks commitments from AGDAs to increase their respect and compliance with humanitarian norms specially designed to protect children and education. To date, 31 AGDAs have signed our *Deed of Commitment on the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflicts*, with signatories in Syria,

Yemen, Thailand, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan. Although the age limit for children to be recruited and participate in hostilities is 15 years under international humanitarian law, Geneva Call's *Deed of Commitment* provides for the protection of children under the age of 18. This contributes to the increasing universal recognition that all children under 18 must be protected. In other contexts, for example in Burkina Faso, AGDAs signed Unilateral Declarations on the protection of children.

Geneva Call offers technical guidance and support to the signatories to enable them to comply with their commitments and change their policies and practices. Ensuring concrete steps and tools for compliance is essential for making commitments meaningful, as AGDAs may lack the resources or knowledge to effectively protect children and education amidst conflict. This includes workshops and training-of-trainers on humanitarian norms that protect children and education, revising codes of conduct to ensure that relevant humanitarian norms are reflected, and support in drafting policies to better protect children and education.

In 2023, Geneva Call reinforced its thematic approach to protecting children and education. This entailed significant initiatives to provide programmatic guidance to country missions, coupled with operational support to key field activities, such as the development of unilateral declarations or sessions with civil society organizations. As part of its thematic approach, Geneva Call recognized the importance of integrating policy frameworks to foster compliance with humanitarian norms. This initiative also complemented the existing international humanitarian law expertise within the organization.

To date, **31 AGDAs** have signed our *Deed of Commitment on the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflicts*, with signatories in Syria, Yemen, Thailand, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan.



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As part of this focus on policy frameworks, Geneva Call initiated an operational and field-based study focusing on the Safe Schools Declaration and the Paris Principles, two international policy frameworks that strive to provide practical guidance for the operationalization of humanitarian norms. This innovative study explores how these frameworks, despite being tailored towards states, can enhance compliance by AGDAs, including through the adaptation of policies, processes, and procedures that support the implementation of the commitments outlined in the frameworks to AGDAs.

THEMATIC COORDINATION AND ADVOCACY

Geneva Call has strengthened coordination and cooperation with other stakeholders and leading organizations in the field of child protection and protection of education during armed conflict. A concerted action at different levels can most effectively address the needs of children in armed conflict and is, therefore, hugely beneficial to children and their best interests. Special attention is also given to the gaps remaining in addressing the protection of children associated with armed groups. To

achieve this, Geneva Call is actively working with the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks, the Paris Principles Steering Group, UNICEF, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and Save the Children, and frequently participates in advocacy events, such as the Oslo Conference on Protecting Children in Armed Conflict, the European Humanitarian Forum, and GCPEA trainings and regional workshops.

In 2023, in collaboration with peer organizations, Geneva Call contributed to the revision process of the EU guidelines on children and armed conflict, highlighting the need to consider the protection of children associated with AGDAs, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of the revised guidelines.

A concerted action at different levels can most effectively address the needs of children in armed conflict and is, therefore, **hugely beneficial to children** and their best interests.

Shaping humanitarian policies and practices

With the rise in humanitarian crises across the globe, the need for advocacy efforts has become more pressing than ever before. Geneva Call recognizes this urgency and strengthened its global advocacy initiatives in 2023.

One of our key strengths as an organization is our extensive field presence in 14 conflict-affected contexts, which allows us to offer unique perspectives on ways to reinforce the protection of civilians. Additionally, our expertise in thematic areas such as child protection, gender, humanitarian access, and food insecurity enables us to contribute valuable insights to international policy discussions.

In 2023, Geneva Call actively participated in high-level global policy forums, advocating for principled humanitarian action while urging states and other actors to address the root causes of conflicts. We firmly believe that without addressing these underlying issues, sustainable peace and protection of civilians cannot be achieved.

Our partnership with the EU continued to be a vital aspect of our advocacy efforts in 2023. Through diplomatic meetings and public events in Brussels, we reinforced our role as a trusted partner with concrete recommendations for implementing IHL and prioritizing the protection of civilians in conflict contexts by the EU. For example, our participation in the EU Humanitarian Forum allowed us to provide actionable ways to enhance the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. We also had an opportunity to brief the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC), one of the most important high-level bodies of the EU.





Geneva Call's voice was heard in key international forums shaping today's humanitarian policies and practices. One notable achievement was the co-hosting of a high-level side event at the Munich Security Conference with the International Code of Conduct Association (ICoCA). This event shed light on the involvement of armed groups, *de facto* authorities, and private security actors in today's conflicts. We discussed strategies for engaging them.

We also actively engaged with high-level participants at the UN General Assembly, emphasizing the need to maintain our focus and resources on crises such as the conflict in Sudan. At the Paris Peace Forum, we co-hosted a well-attended event on preserving IHL as a universal framework of values and standards.

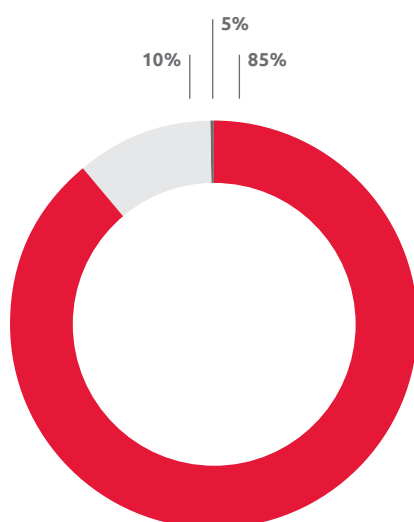
...our expertise in thematic areas such as child protection, gender, humanitarian access, and food insecurity **enables us to contribute valuable insights** to international policy discussions.

Financial report

Expenditure (CHF)

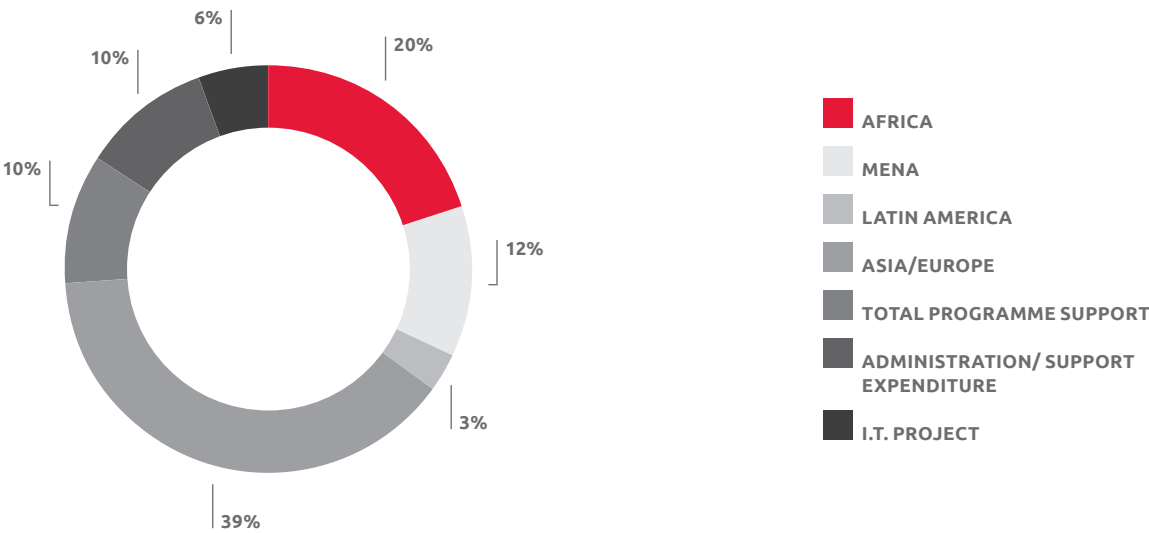
Geneva Call's full financial statements, including the auditors' report, can be found on www.genevacall.org/documents/.

Expenditure



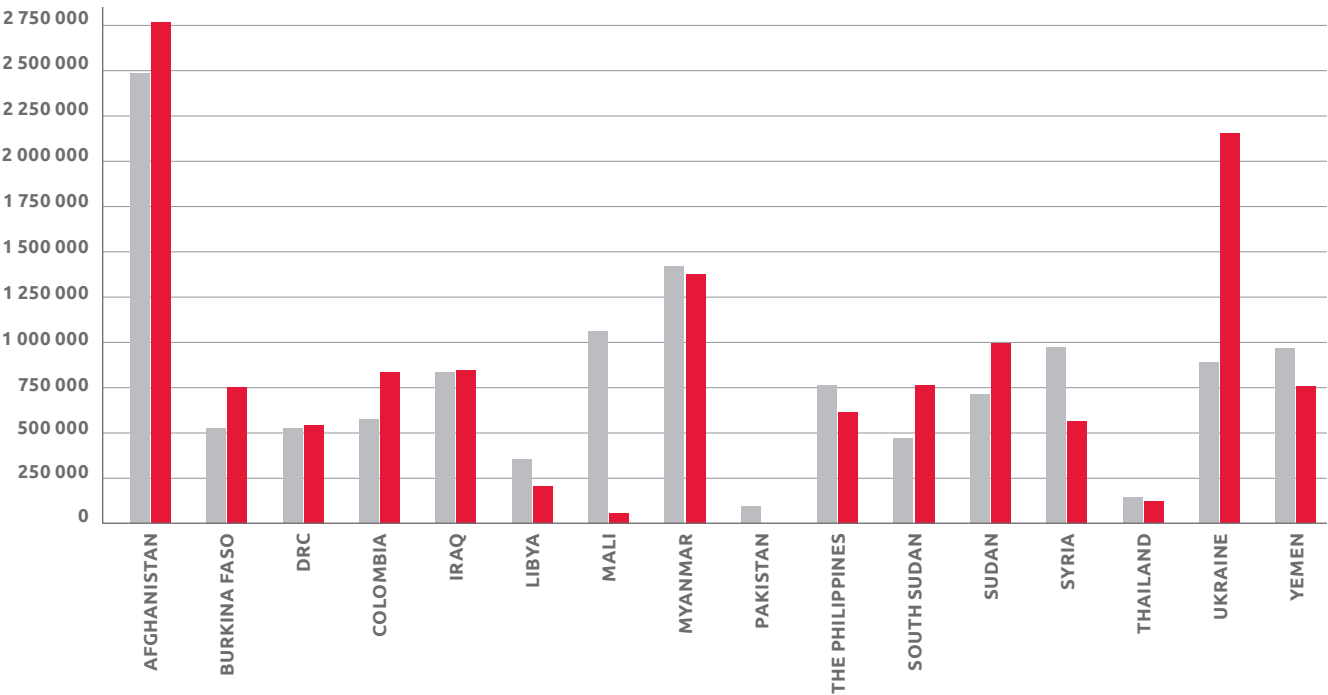
REGIONS	COUNTRIES	GRAND TOTAL
Africa Sahel	Burkina Faso	753,715
	Mali	59,210
	Total Africa Sahel	812,925
Africa Great Lakes & Horn of Africa	DRC	836,821
	South Sudan	764,866
	Sudan	996,478
	Libya	206,944
	Total Africa Great Lakes & Horn of Africa	2,805,108
	TOTAL AFRICA	3,618,033
MENA	Iraq	846,753
	Syria	563,238
	Yemen	756,678
	TOTAL MENA	2,166,669
Latin America	Colombia	543,555
	TOTAL LATIN AMERICA	543,555
Asia/Europe	Afghanistan	2,759,974
	Myanmar	1,374,751
	Philippines	616,845
	Thailand	123,665
	Ukraine	2,156,216
	TOTAL ASIA/EUROPE	7,031,451
Programme Support	OPERATIONS DIRECTION	1,102,214
	PLU	748,358
	TOTAL PROGRAMME SUPPORT	1,850,572
PROGRAMME EXPENDITURE		15,210,282
ADMINISTRATION/ SUPPORT EXPENDITURE		1,859,690
I.T. Project		983,040
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENDITURE		18,053,012

Operating Expenditure



Field Programme Expenditure Comparison 2022/2023

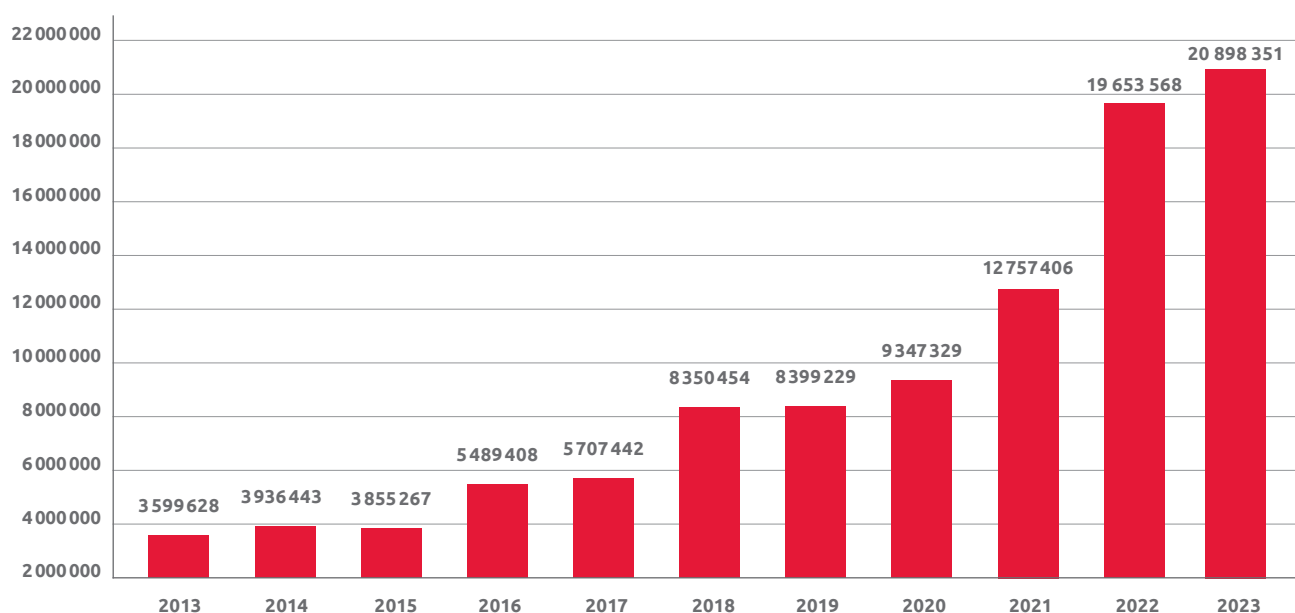
2022
2023



Balance sheet (CHF)

	2023	2022
Cash and cash equivalent	5 237 799	2 381 812
Current accounts	7 301	14 180
Receivables from donors	3 451 279	2 614 739
Other receivables	1 109 026	1 124 061
Prepayments and accrued income	407 795	1 069 007
CURRENT ASSETS	10 213 200	7 203 799
Fixed assets	-	-
NON-CURRENT ASSETS	-	-
TOTAL ASSETS	10 213 200	7 203 799
Payables due to suppliers of goods and services	368 610	152 597
Other liabilities	188 714	77
Accrued expenses	616 097	494 092
CURRENT LIABILITIES	1 173 421	646 766
OPERATING FUNDS	5 726 424	4 352 459
Organisational fund balances		
- Initial unrestricted funds	50 000	50 000
- Net surplus/(Deficit)	2 154 575	1 105 217
- Surplus/(Deficit) for the year	1 108 779	1 049 357
TOTAL ORGANISATIONAL FUND BALANCES	3 313 354	2 204 574
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL FUND BALANCES	10 213 200	7 203 799

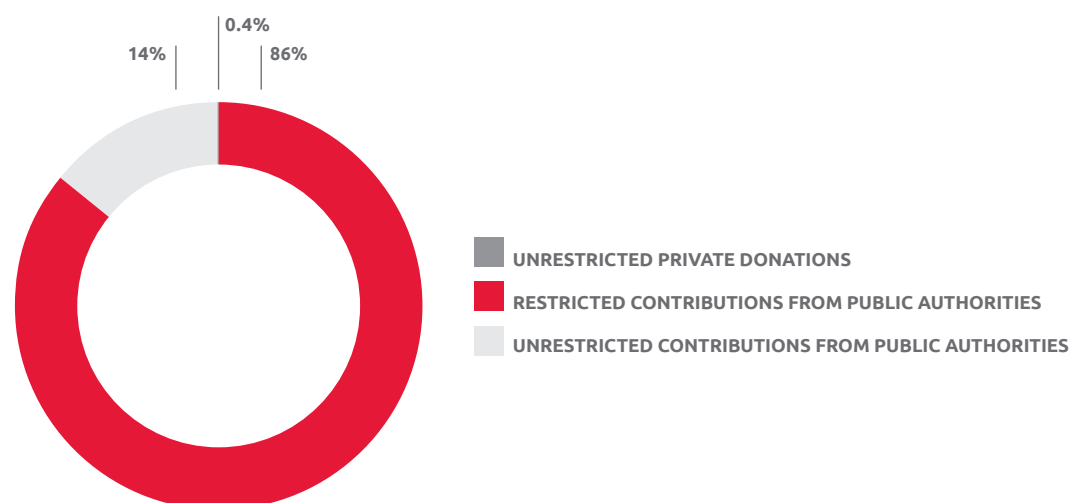
Evolution of Geneva Call income 2013 - 2023 (CHF)



Statement of operations (CHF)

	2023	2022
CONTRIBUTIONS		
Contributions received from private foundations/donors		
- restricted	-	-
- unrestricted	107 408	1 044 863
Contributions received from public authorities/ non-governmental organization		
- restricted (a)	16 776 979	14 386 352
- unrestricted (b)	2 913 097	3 199 194
Other contributions unrestricted	1 100 866	1 023 158
TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS	20 898 351	19 653 568
OPERATING EXPENDITURE	18 053 012	16 018 674
Project expenditure	15 185 149	14 167 645
Administrative expenditure	2 593 421	1 598 364
Fundraising expenditure	274 442	252 664
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENDITURE	18 053 012	16 018 674
ALLOCATION/USE OF FUNDS	1 373 966	1 754 288
OPERATING RESULT	1 471 373	1 880 606
FINANCIAL RESULT	349 097	851 342
Financial expenses	155 219	219 774
Financial income	-	17
Net exchange loss/(gain)	193 878	631 585
Exchange gain		
EXCEPTIONAL RESULT	-13 497	20 093
Prior years income	7 733	21 405
Prior years expenses	21 230	1 312
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	1 108 779	1 049 357

Sources of funding





УЧАСТЬ ЦИВІЛЬНОГО НАСЕЛЕННЯ В БОЙОВИХ ДІЯХ — Правовий аналіз та ключові положення

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Our donors and partners

Our impact is made possible by the trust and resources we receive from our wide array of donors and partners.

Unearmarked funding allows us to navigate highly volatile contexts, respond swiftly to emerging needs, and maintain essential functions. Earmarked global thematic funding enables us to address specific issues and challenges prevalent in conflict zones worldwide. This targeted support ensures that we can direct resources where they are most urgently needed, amplifying our impact on the ground.

We are grateful for the provision of both unearmarked and earmarked funding, which facilitates programmatic interventions tailored to both thematic priorities and geographical operations. This funding empowers us to implement initiatives that directly address the protection and well-being of civilians affected by armed conflict.

Geneva Call extends its sincere appreciation to the following donors and partners for their support:

FOR UNEARMARKED CONTRIBUTIONS

- The governments of Austria (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Ireland (Department of Foreign Affairs), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), Spain (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union & Cooperation), Switzerland (Peace and Human Rights Division), and the City of Geneva.

FOR EARMARKED REGIONAL AND THEMATIC CONTRIBUTIONS

- The governments of Canada (Global Affairs Canada), Germany (Federal Foreign Office – S08), Italy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation through the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining), Liechtenstein (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Luxembourg (Ministry of Foreign & European Affairs), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Peace and Human Rights Division), and the

European Commission (Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) via partnerships with Norwegian Refugee Council and Diakonia).

FOR EARMARKED (PROGRAMME/PROJECT) CONTRIBUTIONS

- The governments of Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Belgium (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade & Development Cooperation), Finland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), France (Crisis and Support Center), Germany (Federal Foreign Office – S03 & S09, and GIZ), Ireland (Department of Foreign Affairs), Luxembourg (Ministry of Foreign & European Affairs), New Zealand (Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office – including in consortium with Nonviolent Peaceforce International).
- The European Commission (Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), via partnerships



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with International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council, and Save the Children, and the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) including via a partnership with Berghof Foundation).

- The Republic and Canton of Geneva.

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Geneva Call is grateful to private foundations and/or individuals who have made generous donations to us.

SUPPORT US

If you are interested in supporting Geneva Call's mission and making a positive impact, we would

be delighted to hear from you. We rely on the generosity of both institutional and private donors to continue our work.

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the same time, the fact that the two groups of people are not the same is also a problem.

There are many reasons why the two groups of people are not the same. One reason is that the two groups of people are not the same in terms of their social and economic status.

Another reason is that the two groups of people are not the same in terms of their cultural and religious beliefs.

There are many other reasons why the two groups of people are not the same. The fact is that the two groups of people are not the same in many ways.

One of the main reasons why the two groups of people are not the same is that they have different interests and goals.

Another reason is that they have different values and beliefs. This is why it is so difficult to find common ground between the two groups.

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