For a Safer Tomorrow

Protecting civilians
in a multipolar world

Oxfam
International

Summary

One night in March 2007, soldiers arrived in the village of Buramba in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). By the time they left at least 15 people were dead. 'At 5.30 in the morning', one survivor said, 'I saw the soldiers coming to our house...They kicked down the door, and killed eight people inside. Only my four grandchildren survived. [They] continued firing in the village. I fled into the bush. I returned three days later to see the bodies of my children and my mother. The bodies were in latrines; I could see the feet of my mother sticking out.'

The point about this story is not that it is shocking, but that in many parts of the world it is unexceptional. In the DRC, the violence that has increased since that incident has forced even more people to flee from their homes, and led to the deaths of almost 1,500 people a day. Though no other conflict causes that kind of death rate, Oxfam's workers hear similar stories of murder, rape, and displacement from men and women from Colombia to Sudan every day. Sixty years after the main Geneva Conventions enshrined civilians' rights to protection, they are violated in every current conflict. Many people sympathise with those who suffer these atrocities, but feel impotent to do anything about it. Many governments feel the same. They think that there is little that can be done. That is wrong.

Lynsey Addario/Corbis

The village of Tama in Darfur continues to burn, more than a week after it was attacked in November 2005.

Some states and non-state actors choose to kill civilians, or pursue strategies in which civilians are too likely to die. Some governments choose to protect their citizens: to keep them safe. Some do not protect all of them, or not well enough. There are, however, successful examples of protecting civilians that show what governments and others can do when they choose to. They have an interest in protecting civilians, because mass atrocities fuel the conflicts that, in an interdependent world, create security threats that cannot be contained. And an increasing number of governments have a 'moral interest' too, because their electorates expect them to help prevent, not just condemn, the atrocities they see beamed around the world through modern information technology.

Governments and others can reduce the mass atrocities that blight the world in the early twenty-first century. To do so, they need to make four changes. They need to:

- make the protection of civilians the overriding priority in the response to conflicts everywhere – actively working to protect civilians, and upholding the Responsibility to Protect civilians from mass atrocities, agreed at the 2005 UN World Summit, as a cornerstone of policy;
- adopt zero tolerance of war crimes – whether in counter-terrorism or elsewhere – applying the same standard of international opprobrium to war crimes committed by friends or foes alike;
- act much more quickly to tackle the trends that threaten new or prolonged conflicts – including poverty and inequality, climate change, and arms proliferation – so that we can be better at preventing as well as reacting to conflicts;
- join up effective action at every level, from local communities to the UN Security Council – so that international action works in conjunction with what works on the ground. To help achieve this, the way the UN Security Council works should be urgently reformed with greater transparency and accountability, in which the Council's members have to account for their performance in pursuing international peace and security, including their Responsibility to Protect civilians from mass atrocities. All permanent members of the Security Council should renounce the use of their veto when the Council is discussing situations of actual or incipient war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.

Killing civilians

In 2006, it was estimated that the wars in the DRC, Darfur, and Iraq were killing around three-quarters of a million people a year. This is 30 times the annual death toll from global terrorism, but represents only a fraction of those killed and raped today in the world's 31 major conflicts, most of them unreported outside their own countries. Indeed, the great majority of these are internal conflicts, often fought for decades, and largely forgotten by the outside world, like those in Colombia or Sri Lanka.

Some things, however, *do* change. Since 2001, the global 'war on terror' has had its effect on most of the world's conflicts. In 2006, 63 per cent of the world's new refugees were from the two countries on its main front lines, Iraq and Afghanistan. Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia that year, condoned by the West as part of the 'war on terror', contributed to the country's new level of humanitarian crisis that continues to this day. In 2007, for the second year running, more Iraqis sought asylum in industrialised countries than any other nationality.

Terrorism by its very nature is a crime against civilians, and the global 'war on terror' has been fought in the name of protecting civilians from it. Every government has a responsibility to defeat terrorism, and protect its citizens from atrocities of all kinds. Yet in the fight against terrorism, some governments have lost sight of this purpose and allowed too many civilians to die. In 2006, Israeli air strikes killed about a thousand Lebanese civilians in a failed attempt to defeat the threat from Hizbullah. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in 2007, these strikes exemplified a wider and lethal 'tendency to balance civilian casualties against military advantages that are hardly perceptible' – in other words, to justify a large number of dead civilians for a relatively small victory in the 'war on terror'.

Shaista Aziz/Oxfam

After an Israeli air strike on southern Beirut in 2006, Ashbal-el-sahel School was unsafe for children to study in.

That tendency is one of the reasons that thus far the 'war on terror' is failing to defeat terrorism worldwide. 9/11 has not been repeated, but global terrorism, and the number of attacks in the Middle East and Europe, has significantly increased. In part, this has been fuelled by anger against the invasion of Iraq and the international conduct of the 'war on terror' itself. Too much of that conduct has been counter-productive. Insurgents have found no difficulty in exploiting the hostility that Abu Ghraib and other abuses have created; as one Afghan man said in 2007:

> *The Taliban killed two members of my family. The invading forces killed 16.*
> *You work out what side I'm on.*

From 2009, the new US president will not have been responsible for the conduct of the 'war on terror' before that. Indeed, the new US administration has an unrivalled potential to lead international action towards the better protection of civilians worldwide. It has the chance to re-establish international confidence in the wisdom of US leadership. In doing so, a new US commitment to the protection of civilians, and to upholding international humanitarian law, would be a profound signal that the USA wants to work with international opinion, to lead from a position of moral strength.

To date, the 'war on terror' has overshadowed those crises like the DRC that have killed far more people than global terrorism has. With a death toll more than twice that of Iraq, the DRC has lost 8 per cent of its people to conflict and the deadly hunger and disease that it has unleashed. If the USA lost a similar proportion of civilians, 25 million people, more than the population of Texas, would have died. In China, that figure would be 110 million people, more than the population of the Yangtze Delta. Yet the catastrophe in the DRC has gone largely unreported around the world.

Real and future danger

It has nevertheless become fashionable to celebrate the decline in the number of conflicts since the end of the Cold War. This is a dangerous half-truth. The number of conflicts has fallen substantially, but there is little evidence to suggest that that trend will continue. The threat of new wars, the failure of precarious peace deals, the political exploitation of poverty and inequality, and the destabilising impact of climate change all cast doubt on a continued decline in the number of conflicts.

In 2007 one report estimated that 46 countries with a total population of 2.7 billion will face 'a high risk of violent conflict' because of the 'double-headed risk' when climate change exacerbates traditional security threats, like the gross inequality between different groups that can be so easily exploited by extremists. All those countries must adapt to climate change by reducing inequalities, not increasing them. If a fraction of them fail, we may see a significant increase in the number of armed conflicts in the decades ahead. Even more urgently, the world's *current* failure to reduce poverty and inequality means that, in the five years to 2013, any of the poorest countries in the world has been estimated to have a one in six chance of civil war.

Beyond these, there is a wide range of additional threats of major violence of global significance between now and 2020. In 2008 a survey of government officials and academics from more than 20 countries identified those that, while not being probable, are certainly possible, including the terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction, a nuclear exchange between two countries, and the collapse of countries such as Pakistan.

In short, the threat of conflict, and the killing of civilians that comes almost inevitably with it, is as great as ever – unless the world takes substantially more effective action to reduce it. Oxfam argues both that we can and we should.

Protect civilians? Why?

Civilians should be protected because it is the right thing to do, *and* because it is in almost everyone's interest.

First, the moral argument is simple. Every person has the right to be protected from murder, rape, and displacement. Sixty years ago, in December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promised everyone the right to 'life, liberty and security', to live free from fear and from want. But in 2008 for millions of people, that promise remains unfulfilled.

Also 60 years ago, the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, were agreed. That law did not just prohibit deliberate violence against civilians. It also outlawed any violence that had an impact on civilians which was disproportionate to the warring parties' legitimate military ends.

Then in 2005, at the UN World Summit, governments made the most important reaffirmation of those basic principles. Almost every government in the world agreed their 'Responsibility to Protect' their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and agreed that the international community also has a responsibility to help. The world's governments had said 'never again' after the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Srebrenica. After large-scale civilian suffering in the first years of war in Iraq and Darfur, it was time to try again.

An interest in rights

Tragically, it is not enough for governments to agree international law for it to make a difference in people's lives; unless governments see that the law can support their own interests, it is unlikely to be enforced. That is why it is so important to recognise that almost everyone has an *interest* in protection and peace, not atrocities and conflict. The only people that do not are war criminals and those, such as irresponsible arms exporters and dealers, who profit from war. In security as in everything else, the world is increasingly interdependent.

On the one hand, three-quarters of conflicts are fuelled by foreign arms or one form or another of international intervention. On the other, no country in the world is immune to the insecurity and threats that come from conflicts thousands of kilometres away. Terrorists trained in one continent strike in another. Ninety-five per cent of the world's hard drugs come from countries at war. From Afghanistan to Colombia, conflicts create refugees who reach Europe, Australia, and North America. Conflicts anywhere can have a major impact on the global economy. According to Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, the Iraq war may come to cost the global economy up to $6 trillion, twice the cost to the USA alone. Already, according to Oxford University Professor of Economics, Paul Collier, the economic cost of conflicts is roughly twice as much as the world has spent on international aid in recent decades. According to Oxfam's own research, armed conflict cost Africa, between 1990 and 2005, an average $18bn a year, with all too clear human consequences; compared with peaceful countries, African countries in conflict have 50 per cent more infant deaths.

In 2008, crises in Kenya and Tibet attracted attention precisely because they may have continental or global consequences. And there are no conflicts of which we truly know nothing, thanks to global media, the

Internet, and the 3G phones of street protestors in Rangoon. Electorates may therefore expect their governments to prevent, not just to condemn, the atrocities that information technology beams around the world. Traditional political 'realism', in which ethics in international relations can be disregarded, and which focuses solely on power and narrow self-interest, is simply no longer an acceptable option. In the twenty-first century, as the European Union's Director-General for External Affairs wrote in 2003, 'realistic' foreign policy is just no longer realistic.

For this reason, even the richest governments in the world have moral *interests*, alongside their economic and political interests, as the UK's foreign minister put it in 2007. How big that moral interest is depends on how much pressure citizens place on their governments to protect people in their own countries – and around the world. From Colombia to Uganda, that pressure exists, from local communities and civil society; campaigns against the Iraq war, for peace in Darfur, and to control the arms-trade show a solidarity with people suffering in conflicts. Sometimes these efforts succeed, and sometimes they do not. Sometimes, people have a moral concern that 'something must be done' but ask themselves what to press their governments to do. The full report is one contribution to answer that question.

The challenge now is to unite and expand all that action into a global movement for civilians' rights – so that governments' moral interest to protect grows stronger, and they wake up to the reality that, in a world where security threats are global, upholding the Responsibility to Protect is the rational choice. But how can it be done?

Examples to learn from at every level

We *can* protect civilians, and there are examples and lessons we can learn from. Those examples include the successes as well as the failures of the international community, governments developing better strategies to protect their own citizens, and the unsung achievements of civilians themselves.

Local action

Many people in conflicts not only have stories to tell of death and displacement; they also do something about it, taking often desperate measures because those responsible to protect them are doing so little to

Aubrey Wade/Oxfam

help. They flee violence, and become refugees or internally displaced, because their governments and others are not willing or capable of providing the security they deserve. Sometimes, civilians can do more, challenging the impunity that war criminals too often enjoy, or developing strategies to protect themselves and their families. In Darfur and the DRC, women organise themselves into groups when leaving their villages or camps for the dangerous activity of collecting firewood. Success is never easy and seldom complete, but there are examples in different crises of civilians achieving real results.

Local campaigning against sexual violence in West Point in Monrovia, Liberia (2007).

 In Mindanao in the Philippines, local Christian and Muslim groups together negotiated with both soldiers and rebels to spare their villages, and to ensure people displaced from their homes got humanitarian assistance. In Kenya, a national organisation, PeaceNet, played a vital role in saving lives during the violence that swept the country in early 2008. It ran an 'SMS Nerve Centre', collecting information about potential attacks via text messages, and immediately warning local Peace and Security Committees who, in some circumstances at least, rapidly intervened to prevent them. After the murder of a member of parliament in Nairobi in January 2008, for instance, a team intercepted a gang of youths heading to attack another community, and was able to persuade them to disperse.

In many countries, there is evidence that women are particularly good at such vital local peacebuilding. In Burundi, both Tutsi and Hutu women formed the *Habamahoro* group to confront the violence from young men of both communities. In Uganda, women 'peace animators' trained others to manage conflict between and within communities.

National responsibility

Civilians and such civil-society groups certainly cannot do everything themselves. States have the primary Responsibility to Protect their citizens. But here too there is good practice, when governments choose to protect. In 2006 Uganda changed its strategy; it agreed a ceasefire with the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), rather than continuing the futile attempt to defeat it by force. It realised that far more conflicts are now resolved peacefully than by force – around the world more than four times as many between 2000 and 2005. In the ceasefire's first 12 months, LRA attacks fell to only five a month, and 900,000 displaced people were able to return at least part way towards their homes.

Other governments too have started to pursue policies that give the protection of civilians a higher priority – with encouraging results. Liberia used to have the worst record of sexual violence in the world; 74 per cent of women and girls were raped in the conflict that ended in 2003. But under a new president, Africa's first elected woman leader, Liberia's government is now taking action to crack down on sexual violence, with a new law on rape, and a National Action Plan on gender-based violence that includes reforms to the legal and health systems, psychosocial support for survivors, and economic and social programmes for women and girls.

Regional solidarity

When Liberia's President Johnson-Sirleaf came to power, she found only $1m in the country's budget. The under-resourced governments of developing countries cannot do everything themselves. At the same time, almost every current conflict crosses national borders, as the regional dimensions of conflicts from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Darfur and Chad show only too well. The flight of refugees to neighbouring countries, as from Colombia to Venezuela and Ecuador, can strain regional stability. That is why regional leaders and organisations have both an interest and an added value in resolving apparently internal conflicts.

In 2008, when Kofi Annan helped secure the deal between Kenya's rival political leaders, he was working in a successful tradition of recent African mediation, including Nelson Mandela and South Africa's Deputy President Jacob Zuma in Burundi in 1999 and 2003 respectively, and ECOWAS (West Africa's regional organisation) in 2004 in Togo and 2007 in Guinea. Between 2003 and 2007, the European Union (EU) deployed 16 missions to help governments and other regional organisations

(like the Association of South East Asian Nations) from Indonesia to Palestine, Macedonia to Afghanistan. In Darfur, it provided funds, if not more difficult contributions like helicopters, to the African Union (AU) mission before the hybrid UN–AU force belatedly arrived in 2008. Neither the AU mission nor the EU's support were as effective as they should have been, but together they did something at least to ease the harrowing plight of Darfuris. In 2008–10, the AU and EU are co-operating on their first Action Plan to build Africa's own capacities for early warning, mediation, and peacekeeping, so that Africa can do more itself, and depend on more reliable support from rich countries.

International support

Like the AU and EU, the UN's performance is certainly mixed – and the UN Security Council remains deeply compromised by one powerful member after another blocking effective action against their allies and interests. But thousands of miles from those stalemates in New York, UN peacekeeping missions – 60 years after the first in Palestine in 1948 – are focusing more on protecting civilians than ever before. In 2006, the Security Council determined that all UN peacekeeping missions should be mandated to protect civilians in imminent danger. The Council finally recognised that peacekeepers must do more than keep the peace between opposing parties or monitor a fragile peace. They must protect civilians from murder and rape, including implementing Security Council resolution 1325, which called on UN peacekeepers to tackle the specific threats faced by women. They must now be given the mandate and resources that they need to succeed. And crucially, they must be supported by the sustained political engagement necessary to address the underlying causes of conflict.

Eric Canalstein/UN Photo

The Indian contingent of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), consisting mostly of women, arrives in Monrovia to begin its tour of duty (2007).

Many of the international initiatives of recent years have had substantial effects. In 1997 some people dismissed the Ottawa treaty banning landmines as a token gesture by civil

society and celebrities, but in its first ten years, it may have reduced the toll of death and injury from landmines by more than two-thirds. Much more must be done to rid the world of mines and equally indiscriminate weapons such as cluster munitions (which more than 100 governments agreed to ban in May 2008), but the practical success of the landmines treaty has helped give momentum to more wide-reaching initiatives to control the arms trade. For the first time ever, there is now the prospect of global legally binding controls on all conventional weapons. One hundred and fifty-three governments voted in 2006 to begin work on an international Arms Trade Treaty, and by the end of 2008 the UN General Assembly should have taken another vital step nearer that aim.

Current wars of course are waged in a world in which actors other than governments and intergovernmental bodies are important. In some countries at least, private corporations are taking effective steps to reduce local conflicts (while others, including many arms manufacturers and private military companies are not). And humanitarian agencies, traditionally confined to providing physical relief, have woken up to the fact that their beneficiaries are asking for safety, as well as for water, food, and shelter. Within their limited ability, humanitarians increasingly try to provide that safety. In Darfur and Chad, Oxfam trains women in making fuel-efficient stoves that have reduced the times they have to risk attack as they venture out of their camps to collect firewood.

Fuel-efficient stoves in Kebkabiya (North Darfur) have cut the number of trips women have to make to collect firewood, during which they were at the greatest risk of attack (2005).

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Getting it wrong

So what has gone wrong? If peace and protection are in most people's interest, and there are good examples to learn from, why does the crisis in Darfur or the DRC continue? If governments, the EU, AU, and UN can get it right sometimes, why do they sometimes get it so wrong?

The simple answer is that they have seldom chosen to give protection the priority it deserves. Whether it is on decisions to speak out against war crimes, to impose sanctions on abusers, or to properly fund peacekeeping, the policy that prioritises the safety of civilians is too often trumped by narrow, often short-term, political interests.

Altogether, the current world order – with the USA as the world's sole superpower, and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council – has done a poor job protecting people facing genocide and war crimes. The number of conflicts has been reduced, but the promise of the early 1990s that civilians would be fundamentally safer than during the Cold War or before, has not been fulfilled. The UN Security Council – or more fairly its powerful members – has failed more often than not to meet its objective of upholding international peace and security. Time and again when dealing with the world's conflicts, it has failed to address them (for example, Colombia), ducked the hard decisions (for example, Chad), or failed to act effectively at all (for example, Darfur), because one leading member of the Security Council after another prioritises its narrow interests and alliances over its Responsibility to Protect.

New world order

But the old world order is changing. The UN Security Council is under pressure to include new permanent members, including India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan. Russia has regained its confidence. Regional organisations are maturing, and the partnership between the EU and the AU is becoming more concrete than ever before. Perhaps most importantly of all, the world faces 'a profound shift in the distribution of global power', in the words of the US journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2008, as China increases its influence, and it becomes clear that the USA's post-Cold War position as the world's only superpower will not last forever.

As the world enters the third decade since the Cold War, that shift may begin to take place. Both the speed and impact of that shift remain far

from certain, but possibly as soon as 2020 China may join the USA as the leading powers of a new 'multipolar' world, in which India, the EU, Brazil, and others too have global, not just regional, significance. The USA may remain the single most powerful country, but, as Joseph Nye, Harvard's Professor of International Relations, put it: 'being Number One is not going to be what it used to be.'

The question is: will this 'new world order' be better at protecting civilians than the old? The answer is not yet clear. The USA, China, and others will be tested by their responses to future crises. But they will also be tested by the leadership they show in efforts to build a more effective international system, in which governments agree and abide by rules to uphold the rights of people worldwide. The post-Kyoto treaty on climate change is one obvious example. The International Criminal Court is another. But in the field of peace and security, the glaring example is the Arms Trade Treaty already being discussed. That treaty is more than an international convention to control arms transfers. It will be the clearest test of whether the world's great powers can work with the majority of world opinion to agree global rules that meet all their interests. That is their choice.

Choosing the future

Sixty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions it is time for more effective action to uphold them. We do *not* need to reinvent international law, or the Responsibility to Protect that tried to put renewed political commitment behind it in the face of the worst atrocities. The Geneva Conventions are and remain the bedrock of humanity's attempt to limit the brutal cost of war. What is needed now is consistent and vigorous application of them.

Governments must do all they can to protect civilians, to halt the world's worst atrocities once they have started, *and* to prevent them and the conflicts that make them possible. That requires much more than military action or diplomatic initiatives reacting to events that have already happened. It requires a new level of investment in building 'human security', a comprehensive approach to protect people from all their threats – extreme poverty, deadly diseases, environmental degradation – as well as from immediate violence. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948, people have a right to be free from want, as well as free from fear.

Every government shares the Responsibility to Protect civilians from war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. That means putting the protection of civilians at the heart of policy, not treating it as a half-remembered commitment to be upheld when other interests allow. For more than anyone else, this is the responsibility of the UN Security Council because, as the UN Charter says, it has the primary responsibility for international peace and security. For that reason, the way that the Security Council works must be urgently reformed. If it is not, it is unlikely that its performance will improve.

Performance-related power

In 2008, the unreformed Security Council is effectively accountable to no one. In a world where almost every other public and private organisation is judged by its performance, the Council is never effectively held to account, as shown only too well in the failure after five years to bring an end to the suffering in Darfur.

The Security Council should not be reformed only by adding a few more major powers. It *should* be urgently reformed with greater transparency and accountability, in which all of the Council's members have to account for their performance in pursuing international peace and security, including their Responsibility to Protect.

German section of Amnesty International and Oxfam Germany campaigning for an international Arms Trade Treaty in Berlin, June 2006.

Mathias John/Amnesty International

Key recommendations: an agenda for a multipolar world

There is no single solution to the horrors of genocide and war crimes. Effective protection and peacebuilding comes neither from implementing international agreements nor local efforts – but from both and more; from action at every level from local communities to the UN Security Council.

From the bottom up:

Local action

- Invest in local capacity:
  - local communities to mediate, negotiate, and resolve local conflicts
  - local businesses to provide 'peaceful livelihoods' in different communities
  - local government to provide equal access to essential services, and to land, for all communities, and reduce inequalities between them.
- Include women in all peace negotiations, from the community level up.

National responsibility

- Give the protection of civilians the highest priority in every military strategy, with zero tolerance of abuse (including sexual abuse) by security forces.
- Incorporate the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into national legislation, and vigorously implement them.
- Reduce the risks of renewed or future conflict by:
  - creating 'peaceful livelihoods' for demobilised fighters, and those most vulnerable to local or global economic shocks, as a vital part of a poverty-reduction strategy
  - providing equal access for all communities to essential services including health, education, water and sanitation
  - creating confidence that those guilty of violence, including sexual violence, will be held to account, by building up the judicial system and accountable civilian police
  - managing measures to adapt to climate change so that they reduce rather than increase inequalities and tensions between different groups.

Regional solidarity

For the AU and other regional organisations, to:

- develop the capacity and will to quickly deploy mediation and diplomatic teams to intervene at the earliest stage of a foreseeable crisis
- develop the capacity and will to use sanctions targeted on political and military leaders, as well as incentives, legal instruments and, in exceptional cases, military force to protect civilians
- ratify and vigorously enforce regional arms-control agreements to prevent irresponsible arms transfers leading to violations of humanitarian law or human rights, or to the undermining of sustainable development.

For the EU and the AU, to:

- implement all the actions on peace and security under the African–EU Strategic Partnership's first Action Plan by 2010.

For the international community, to:

- provide an increased, reliable, and predictable funding basis to support regional organisations, including the UN mandating assessed contributions for UN-authorised but regionally operated peacekeeping missions (or an alternative arrangement that guarantees full and reliable funding, together with transparency, accountability, and professional standards to ensure the effective use of the resources).

International support

For the UN Security Council, to:

- demonstrate its capacity and willingness to quickly deploy mediation and diplomatic teams to intervene at the earliest stage of a foreseeable crisis
- demonstrate a greater willingness to protect civilians in new and neglected crises, with the timely imposition of sanctions targeted on political and military leaders – asset bans, travel bans, etc. – to prevent and end war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, and to enforce co-operation with the International Criminal Court
- ensure the continued improvement of UN and other peacekeeping operations to proactively protect civilians, including from sexual violence. This would include building the UN's doctrine of civilian protection into peacekeeping training modules, with a detailed breakdown of the specific actions to be taken

- ask the Secretary-General to provide much more systematic and timely information about the threats faced by civilians – including sexual and gender-based violence and the denial of the right to assistance
- ensure that all civilian and military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions are trained on sexual violence, culturally specific gender roles, and unequal power relations between men and women, and between peacekeepers and local people. Every UN mission should give the Security Council comprehensive information on the threat of sexual violence and its record in reducing it
- set out the steps it has taken to uphold its Responsibility to Protect, in its annual reports to the General Assembly. Individual Council members should encourage this increased accountability by including their specific contributions to upholding their Responsibility to Protect in their annual statements to the General Assembly. Permanent members should renounce the use of their veto in situations of actual or incipient war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity
- travel much more frequently to regions where civilians are under the greatest threat, and as a matter of course convene private briefings with representatives of the communities most affected and those working to support their rights to protection and assistance; and also as a matter of course convene open meetings in New York on all situations of actual or incipient war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity.

For *all* governments, the priorities must be to:
- work to protect civilians, as a cornerstone of every government's foreign policy
- build national diplomatic and military capacities to enable effective implementation of the Responsibility to Protect
- challenge abuses of humanitarian law and human rights, including sexual violence, and including those committed by allies
- implement international humanitarian law, preventing any military action that is likely to have an impact on civilians disproportionate to the benefit of *that specific military action*. The long-term and uncertain benefits of a military campaign do *not* justify the killing or grave suffering of civilians
- press for an effective Arms Trade Treaty to be agreed and rigorously implemented as soon as possible, to prevent irresponsible arms transfers which fuel conflict, poverty, or serious human-rights abuses

- aim for global emissions targets to keep global warming as far as possible below 2ºC, and within the current UN negotiations, press for an effective post-2012 agreement to cut global CO_2 emissions by more than 50 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050
- prioritise the most vulnerable groups in national strategies to adapt to climate change. Governments most responsible for causing climate change and most capable of assisting should provide at least $50bn to help vulnerable developing countries, including those affected by conflict, to adapt. National adaptation strategies must consider how to reduce the risks of conflict, by building communities' resilience and ensuring that climate change does not increase dangerous inequalities between different groups
- meet the Millennium Development Goals, and specifically increase sustained international assistance for post-conflict reconstruction
- engage with domestic and multinational businesses, to ensure they follow Conflict Sensitive Business Practices.

Humanitarian and development agencies

- Systematically mainstream 'safe programming' (in which all programmes are carefully tested with the active participation of beneficiaries to avoid increasing threats to beneficiaries, and where possible reduce them).
- Vigorously follow the guidelines set down by the UN Inter Agency Standing Committee to prevent and respond to sexual violence.

For a Safer Tomorrow

Protecting civilians in a multipolar world

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of armed conflicts in the world has fallen. But is this trend now about to be reversed? Climate change, poverty and inequality, and the wider availability of weapons all add to the risk of conflicts increasing.

In 1949, the Geneva Conventions enshrined people's rights to be protected from atrocities in conflict. Yet civilians are still killed, raped, and forced to flee their homes, 60 years on. In 2005, almost every government in the world agreed its Responsibility to Protect civilians. Many have failed to keep this promise. Governments must now make new efforts to take up the challenge in a rapidly changing 'multipolar' world, where China and the USA will be the 'superpowers', and where India, the European Union, Brazil, and others are gaining new global influence.

Many people feel that there is little that can be done to prevent the brutal targeting of civilians that characterises modern warfare. They are wrong. This report, based on Oxfam International's experience in most of the world's conflicts, sets out an ambitious agenda to protect civilians through combining local, national, and regional action with far more consistent international support.

Eric Canalstein/UN Photo

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