GROWING OUR IMPACT: 2015 - 2017

Around the world, conflict and violence against civilians show no sign of abatement. Both the need and the demand for our work on behalf of civilians in conflict are, alas, steadily growing. The tools we helped develop and implement in countries and conflicts as diverse as Afghanistan and Somalia have been effective at preventing harm to civilians and addressing its consequences, proving we can adapt our work to myriad contexts and actors.

This document represents our plan to respond to the growing call for our expertise and sets out our overarching goal for the next three years: to improve the protections afforded to civilians in conflicts around the world, working toward the development of a global standard for civilian harm mitigation.
I didn’t know there was a gap in human rights work until Center for Civilians in Conflict came along to fill it.

—Aryeh Neier, President Emeritus, Open Society Foundations
OUR MISSION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) works to make warring parties more responsible to civilians before, during, and after armed conflict. We are advocates who believe no civilian caught in conflict should be ignored, and advisors who provide practical solutions to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

OUR VISION

For warring parties to recognize the imperative to prevent civilian harm, protect civilians caught on the battlefield, and make amends for the harm they do cause.

OUR VALUES

Civilian-focused: We believe all harm to civilians should be prevented to the greatest extent possible. Change should be rooted in the wants and needs of civilians caught in conflict. We bring their voices to those making decisions about conduct in conflict.

Pragmatic: We believe changes in the behavior of parties to a conflict will result from working directly with decision-makers, helping them understand the effects of their actions and providing them with practical policy solutions to limit and address civilian harm. By adopting a pragmatic approach based on policy rather than law, we are able to secure the cooperation of key actors and motivate them to adopt additional measures to ensure the safety of civilians.

Collaborative: We believe working in partnership to protect civilians is more effective than working alone. We work with civilians themselves as well as civil society, governments, military actors, international organizations, thought leaders, and the media as passionate advocates and pragmatic advisors.
OUR APPROACH

International humanitarian law (IHL) imposes a number of legal obligations on parties to a conflict that are intended to minimize human suffering during the conduct of hostilities. Yet, civilians still suffer. CIVIC works to encourage parties to armed conflicts to adopt of a set of tools, policies, and practices that go above and beyond what is legally required by IHL, thus raising the level of protection afforded to civilians before, during, and after conflict. Where prevention fails, harm must be appropriately addressed through the making of amends or provision of post harm assistance.

Our work takes us from the homes of civilians in active conflict zones to halls of power around the world—the very places where the decisions that impact civilian lives are being made. We document harm to civilians and analyze its causes. We also advise governments, their armed forces, and international and regional institutions on practical solutions for preventing and responding to civilian harm. We then offer our technical expertise to implement proposed solutions. We call the whole of our work “civilian harm mitigation,” a vitally important new field, which we have helped to create. Ultimately, we work toward the establishment of a new international standard on prevention and response to civilian harm. To this end, our efforts over the next three years must ensure that our work graduates from an innovative niche area to a mainstream field of work with developed theory and practice.

POST HARM AMENDS AND ASSISTANCE

Making amends is the practice of parties to conflict providing recognition and assistance to civilians they harm within the lawful parameters of their combat operations. Amends can take a variety of forms and include explanations, apologies, monetary payments, and other offerings in accordance with victims’ needs and preferences.
OUR IMPACT

In a decade of work, we have proved that more can and should be done to protect civilians in conflict. We are particularly proud of the following achievements:

- CIVIC’s research in Afghanistan and advocacy in Brussels directly led to NATO approving its first amends policy for Afghan war victims. CIVIC’s advocacy in 2008-2009 led directly to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) command emphasis on civilian harm mitigation and a significant shift in tactics to avoid civilian harm. According to UN reports, pro-government elements, (which includes ISAF and Afghan forces) accounted for 39% of civilian deaths in 2008. By 2010 that percentage dropped to 15%, and declined further by 2013 to 11%.

- We created an extensive framework for Afghan forces for tracking civilian harm and provided training materials for over 20,000 international and Afghan forces on how to respond to civilian casualties. The Afghan government has already implemented some of our recommendations, including an office dedicated to assessing civilian harm.

- We worked with the United States Congress to develop the first assistance programs for civilians harmed by combat operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. In Iraq, the program is named in honor of our founder: Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund. To date, we helped secure more than $200 million for these programs.

- We co-authored with a former British General a civilian protection policy for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), after which the number of civilian casualties caused by AMISOM decreased. With the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), we documented civilian losses in Somalia and published the first report on the topic. Over two years, we developed a civilian casualty tracking cell for African Union (AU) forces. Due to be implemented in 2015, it will be the first for an African force and only the second in the world.

- In Pakistan, we worked with local civil society organizations to draft a groundbreaking law to provide financial assistance to victims of terrorism in the province of Balochistan. Using the Balochistan law as a template, efforts are underway by Pakistani civil society to have similar laws passed in other provinces.

- In Syria, our field missions are producing unique analysis on the armed opposition’s civilian protection efforts and the expectations of civilians suffering losses. We organized a high-level roundtable of military, humanitarian, and legal experts and extensively analyzed—through a unique civilian protection lens—five military intervention options for Syria. Our work was used by policymakers in the UN, NATO, and US as they made decisions as to what actions to take.

- We produced the first in-depth analysis of the civilian impact of weaponized drones in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Our calls for greater transparency, for operations to shift from the CIA to the Department of Defense (now under consideration by the Obama Administration), and for amends for civilian losses (a concept noted by CIA director John Brennan during his confirmation hearing) are featured in Wired, The Christian Science Monitor, CNN, NPR, and BBC, among others. CIVIC served on the Council on Foreign Relation’s drone advisory board.
• We were on the ground in Libya within days of the start of the conflict, documenting civilian harm in reports that contributed to a front-page story for the New York Times, showing the world the tragedy of civilian casualties. We advised NATO on civilian harm mitigation best practices, and extensively assessed abandoned ordnance with Harvard International Human Rights Law Clinic, leading to pledges from both the US and Libyan governments to do more to secure left over weapons and munitions.

• Our recommendations to the United Nations on minimizing harm to civilians were noted in several Security Council Resolutions on Somalia from 2012 to 2014. The Security Council adopted our specific recommendation that peacekeeping forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo mitigate civilian harm before, during, and after operations—a first for a peacekeeping mandate. In addition, our concepts of ‘making amends’ and ‘civilian harm tracking’ are emerging themes at Protection of Civilians (PoC) discussions and documents at the United Nations.

• We worked with American military leaders on new civilian harm mitigation policy and guidance, including writing significant portions of the US Army doctrine on Civilian Casualty Mitigation and a chapter for an Army handbook on this topic. While more can and should be done, US forces have significantly shifted the way they understand and apply civilian harm mitigation principles, and we take great pride in our contribution.

**CIVILIAN HARM TRACKING**

An emerging practice in armed conflict, civilian harm tracking is an internal process by which an armed actor gathers data on civilian harm caused by its operations in order to analyze causes of harm and revise tactics to better protect civilians. Armed groups must understand where, when, and how their operations have harmed civilians in order to reduce civilian harm.

African Union soldiers man their positions in a house they have just taken from the control of Al Shabaab insurgents in the Sigaale District of Mogadishu, Somalia. 
*Photo by Kate Holt*
OUR THREE-YEAR GOAL

SUPPORTING OBJECTIVES

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SUPPORTING OBJECTIVE

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Our goal over the next three years is to improve the protections afforded to civilians in conflicts around the world, working toward the development of a global standard for civilian harm mitigation.

To achieve that goal, in the next three years we will pursue three programmatic objectives

Influence governments and armed actors in conflict to implement effective harm mitigation practices
Influence governments, international organizations, and coalitions involved in multinational operations to adopt standing policies on civilian protection and harm mitigation
Advance the field of civilian harm mitigation policy and practice

and one organizational objective

Expand our reach, influence, and impact by responsibly growing our organization
OUR OBJECTIVES

SUPPORTING OBJECTIVE ONE:
Influence governments and armed actors in conflict to implement effective harm mitigation practices

In most current conflicts, national militaries and armed non-state actors (ANSAs) are the primary actors engaged in fighting. Even where multinational forces are involved, their mandates are often limited to supporting local forces. There is a clear legal, ethical, and strategic imperative for security actors to avoid harming their own population. The same imperatives exist for international actors providing support to local forces.

Too many governments and armed actors, however, neglect civilian protection. Some even deliberately use violence against civilians as a weapon of war. International actors and multinational forces often find themselves ill-prepared to influence local actors to better prevent harm to civilians. CIVIC is perfectly placed to challenge the status quo and change these dynamics helping all actors strengthen their role in protecting civilians.

Our Work in Conflict Zones
Our engagement is specifically tailored to the context and environment of each conflict but always includes a combination of some or all of the following core elements of our work:

Research and Analysis of Civilian Harm:
First, we conduct a thorough assessment of the harm to civilians. We gain an understanding from victims and survivors as to how they were harmed, what protection gaps exist, their perceptions of security actors, and what victims want and expect in terms of recognition and assistance. We also engage with militaries to build an understanding of what civilian harm mitigation guidance—above and beyond what is already required by IHL—currently exists for use of force and what assessments are made before and after operations.

Empowering Civil Society:
Whenever possible, we partner with civil society groups to strengthen our research, elevate civilian voices, and build civil society’s capacity to engage governments or armed actors on civilian protection and harm mitigation. We believe effective advocacy with governments, militaries, or armed non-state actors depends also on local civil society having the knowledge and tools to press for better policies and practices to improve civilian protection.
Policy & Public Advocacy:
After we formulate our recommendations to address civilian harm issues in terms of prevention and response, we advocate for pragmatic solutions. While the primary target of our advocacy is the party responsible for the harm, we develop a detailed advocacy plan for every situation, targeting all parties who might influence the outcome we are seeking. In this context we also work with the media to raise public consciousness about the plight of civilians in a particular conflict—thereby creating a public demand for civilian protection and harm mitigation.

Policy Implementation:
Technical support to policy implementation is an integral part of our work and varies greatly from conflict to conflict. It can include: assisting in the technical drafting of policy frameworks for post harm assistance mechanisms; drafting military doctrine, policies, or directives; developing implementation plans for practical tools such as tracking cells; and, providing expert technical guidance on recruiting and staffing of specialized positions. We have extensive in-house expertise and deploy our senior staff and expert consultants to support implementation.

Training Engagements:
There is often a complementary need for the training of officers and civilians tasked with implementation of policies and of soldiers who must ultimately carry out harm mitigation tactics on the ground. Our methodology begins with an assessment of needs such as gaps in current training programs, and includes primary source information from our interviews with civilians. We conduct post-training assessments to gauge progress and identify further opportunities for education.

Evaluation and Lessons Learned:
Once policies and tools are implemented, it is a priority for CIVIC to evaluate how they perform. Evaluations are essential for three reasons: first, to ensure policies are aligned with country-specific priorities and that civilians are indeed better protected; second, to draw lessons to apply in other contexts and conflicts; and third, to better measure the long-term impact of CIVIC’s actions and ensure the effectiveness of our operations.

Women and Children in Conflict:
The majority of civilians in conflict are women and children, and we make every effort to amplify the voice and perspectives of women in our research, documentation and policy creation and implementation. In line with Security Council Resolution 1325, we promote women’s involvement as active participants in protection and as actors for policy change within communities.
Expanding Work to Engage Appropriate ANSAs

In order to ensure that more civilians are protected, it is imperative that we begin to engage with Armed Non-State Actors (ANSAs)—particularly those who have a genuine desire to better protect civilians. Working with ANSAs poses a number of legal, ethical, and policy questions that we must carefully evaluate both in principle and on a case-by-case basis. As we shape our efforts in this area, we will collaborate with other groups that have successfully built relevant programs. Our efforts will leverage our unique expertise to build on their efforts and avoid duplication.

Toward the Protection of Civilians (PoC)

IHL sets out the baseline legal requirements for the protection of civilians caught in conflict. Civilian harm mitigation comprises additional steps that military actors should take to further prevent their own combat operations from harming civilians. However, parties to a conflict are sometimes mandated to go even further—to proactively protect civilians from harm potentially caused by other parties some of whom may even harm civilians as a matter of policy. This field, which has been developed over the past 15 years in the context of UN peacekeeping operations, is known as “Protection of Civilians” (PoC).

We are enhancing our expertise in PoC by hiring expert staff and through our partnerships with organizations leading in this field. We intend to leverage our experience and contacts to design, advocate for, and implement proactive protection practices. Particularly with the AU and UN peacekeeping missions, there are often already solid policies in place but a general lack of capacity and expertise to successfully implement them. We believe our experience and approach will be very effective in this work.

Measures of impact: Governments and armed actors: 1) demonstrably lower the incidents of civilian harm; and 2) provide appropriate compensation in the event civilians are harmed.

Our current work is focused in our priority regions: the Middle East (Iraq and Syria), South Asia (Afghanistan), and Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Somalia, and South Sudan).

Over the next three years we will expand our efforts to other conflicts, which may include the Central African Republic, Israel/Gaza, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Yemen. Decisions will be made based on organizational capacity, opportunity for maximum impact, and a rigorous set of other internal selection criteria.
Women in Gao, Mali, examine poster explaining what they should do when they discover unexploded ordinance left behind by the war.

*Photo by Thomas Martinez*
**SUPPORTING OBJECTIVE TWO:**

_Influence governments, international organizations, and coalitions involved in multinational operations to adopt standing policies on civilian protection and harm mitigation_

Over the past ten years, and partly as a result of CIVIC’s efforts, the US military, the African Union, NATO, and the United Nations have adopted conflict-specific policies and directives that strengthened the protection afforded to civilians and/or established amends programs to support civilians harmed by their forces. However, we have seen that both NATO in Libya and the AU in the Central African Republic again faced some of the same challenges they successfully addressed in Afghanistan and Somalia respectively and were forced to cobble together new theatre-specific policies and practices. We see evidence that the US, NATO, and partner countries are carrying over some lessons learned in Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq to the operations against Islamic State, but it is clear that no standing policies and guidelines for civilian harm mitigation yet exist for any of these organizations.

It is simply not necessary to ‘reinvent the wheel’ each time a new conflict erupts. Lessons learned in recent conflicts must be captured and inculcated into policy, planning, and training for future conflicts.

With these emerging trends, it is clear that now is the time to create and implement standing policies on civilian protection and harm mitigation.

Over the next three years CIVIC will engage these actors with the following objectives:

**US Government:**

In 2014, Congress responded to CIVIC’s advocacy and passed legislation that created a funding stream for an amends program for the US military. However, to date the Department of Defense (DoD) has yet to create a standing program to make use of this funding. CIVIC is working to ensure that, regardless of where the US may cause harm to civilians, they have an immediately-available program to make amends.

The US and others are engaging in “lessons learned processes” that should inform policy and strategy in future conflicts. It is imperative that CIVIC shape and influence these efforts, so that lessons learned in specific theatres are consolidated and codified into standing policies and practices on civilian protection and harm mitigation.

CIVIC and its partners are also advocating for the appointment of a senior advisor on civilian protection and harm mitigation at the Pentagon. Implementing progressive best practices from Iraq and Afghanistan is a major step forward, but cannot alone create the institutional change necessary to avoid repeating missteps in future engagements.

We are also engaging the US government on aspects of its counterterrorism programs, including the use of weaponized drones inside and outside zones of armed conflict.
NATO:
CIVIC has contributed to NATO's official review of “lessons learned” from operations in Afghanistan and identified successes and challenges on harm mitigation. We are also engaging with NATO to ensure that it institutionalizes civilian harm mitigation policies and tools in doctrine, training, security force assistance missions and in future conflicts.

United Nations:
We will continue engaging the UN at the HQ level, where the concept of civilian harm mitigation is showing great momentum. We will also continue to develop our thinking on Protection of Civilians and how our unique approach can contribute to 'operationalizing PoC.' Further funding will enable us to work in the field with UN peacekeeping missions to develop innovative ways to enhance their capabilities in civilian protection and harm mitigation.

African Union:
We will support the full implementation of the Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis, and Response Cell (CCTARC) in Somalia. With increased resources we will strengthen our existing relationship with the AU to assist in their lessons learned process currently underway and consolidate standing policies and training procedures on both civilian protection and harm mitigation. We also aim to strengthen the AU’s capacity to address future crises by developing key policies and tools, conducting original research, providing relevant training for military commanders and troop-contributing countries, and supporting continuity of operations as AU missions transition to the UN (e.g. Mali and CAR).

European Union:
In recent years, the EU has increased its security force assistance efforts. We plan to seek a formal relationship with the EU to shape and influence their training curriculum and leader development programs, and provide feedback on the efficacy of their efforts. This will require research and assessments on the ground in order to identify gaps and opportunities in current and future training missions.

Troop Contributing Countries and Coalition Partners:
With additional resources, CIVIC aims to establish relationships with new military partners in the next three years, particularly those currently engaged in military operations in a third country as members of international coalition forces or peacekeeping operations. Our goal is to work toward the adoption of civilian harm mitigation policies and practices both in the theater where they are involved and at the institutional level.

Measures of impact: US and key international organizations and coalitions develop and implement policies, standard operating procedures, and training programs for civilian protection and harm mitigation practices that increasingly lower risk to civilians, and respond appropriately to any harm caused.
SUPPORTING OBJECTIVE THREE:  
*Advance the field of civilian harm mitigation policy and practice*

CIVIC has been at the forefront of the development of the field of civilian harm mitigation. Over the next three years we will continue refining the tools we have, and create new ones to respond to situations that arise. We must also promote a broader understanding of these concepts and clearly articulate their important role in the larger concept of civilian protection. While policy makers and military leaders are our primary advocacy targets, we need the active involvement of practitioners and partner organizations, such as human rights and humanitarian NGOs, the media, academia, and the general public.

We will do this in the following ways:

**Develop influential advocacy documents that combine diligent research with practical policy recommendations**: CIVIC aims to reinforce its position as the thought leader in the area of civilian harm mitigation. Some of our most important and formative work has involved the research and publication of one-of-a-kind reports and policy-oriented articles for journals and magazines.

Over the next three years we want to deepen our ability to do research, writing, advocacy, and public speaking on emerging issues in armed conflict. Those issues include engagement in new geographic areas, analyzing the use of new technologies in warfare and their impact on civilians, and developing recommendations for civilian harm mitigation in counterterrorism and peacekeeping operations. In-depth studies and field assessments will better position CIVIC to contribute original research, primary source information, and lessons learned, and will ensure our work is grounded in the voices and views of civilians.

**Cultivate partnerships and communities of action**: An important part of our organizational persona is that we are regarded as a cooperative and helpful partner. Since our early days we have sought out partnerships with like-minded civil society groups and academic institutions to enhance the theory, capacity, and reach of our work, in part through the co-publishing of reports and the co-hosting of events.

Over the next three years, we want to dedicate even more resources to new and existing partnerships in the policy, academic, and NGO communities. CIVIC will play an important role in building a community of interest and action to develop the field of civilian harm mitigation and to influence parties to conflict. One area of particular interest will be connecting military leaders in different countries facing similar challenges, to share lessons learned and develop new strategies. This will create valuable partnerships and mentoring opportunities where parties develop positive case studies.
Highlight organizations, governments and other actors who prioritize civilian protection: Drawing attention to best practices can promote constructive competition amongst groups toward improving civilian protection globally. In Afghanistan, for instance, ISAF and Afghan government efforts to improve civilian protection forced the Afghan Taliban to pay attention to the issue in their policy statements and guidance to commanders. As a result, they too have instituted a civilian casualty commission. While their efforts are not yet nearly sufficient, their statements show the power of shining a bright light on this issue. Over the next three years we intend to work with partner organizations to continue to evaluate and publicize the efficacy of civilian protection efforts among parties to conflict.

**Measures of impact:** CIVIC’s policy recommendations are implemented by key actors; CIVIC’s engagement is increasingly sought by governments, international organizations, actors in conflict zones, and advocacy groups.

“I think that very soon you will be able to look back at the last few years of engagement with AMISOM and know that you have changed the mission, even if it was not easy, and that a difference is being made in people’s lives. That’s what we are all here for in the end - to change things.”

—Senior African Union Official in Addis
SUPPORTING OBJECTIVE FOUR:
Expand our reach, influence, and impact by responsibly growing our organization

CIVIC has always operated on a shoestring budget and with a very small staff. Our successes and our ability to effect change at the institutional level has led many of our supporters and interlocutors to refer to us as an organization that ‘punches far above its weight.’ However, operating with our current budget and staff is not sustainable in the long-term. The next three years are a pivotal time for us to entrench and expand our work. With the right human, infrastructure, and financial resources, the organization will build our capacity to take on more work and bolster our impact on behalf of civilians around the world.

Our top priorities for growth include:

- Geographic areas in conflict: Africa (Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan), MENA (Libya, Yemen), Europe (Ukraine)
- International actor engagements: African Union, European Union, NATO, United Nations
- Thought leadership efforts: Development of key research and advocacy documents, building project partnerships with like-minded organizations

Our current budget for 2015 is $1.3 million and we have six staff. In order to achieve the vision set out in this document we must grow the organization to approximately $3.5 million and 19 staff over the course of the next four years. We see two phases for this growth.
Phase I: This first phase focuses on establishing much needed mid-level programmatic capacity including management and regional/thematic subject matter expertise.

- **Senior Program Manager for Military Engagement:** This is the initial hire in establishing a full military engagement program. We see this position functioning both as a manager for specific projects (training, security force assistance, protection in counterterrorism, etc.) and as an advisor to current regional programs.

- **Program Analysts:** In this phase we must also focus on building a deeper vertical programmatic, project management, and research and analysis capability for the organization. Program analysts—one for each of the two regional focus areas and one for the military engagement program—will support our operations in current conflicts and enable senior staff to focus on leveraging our experience in future conflicts.

- **External Relations Associate:** This position will bolster our capacity to disseminate our research and advocacy materials, push our ideas out more broadly, and help to support strong partnerships.

Phase I requires an annual expense budget of $2 million with 12 staff members. This necessitates a growth in yearly funding of $1 million (plus an additional $250k to build our financial reserves). We aim for Phase 1 to be completed by the end of Q2 2016.  

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1. While income for 2015 is currently at $1 million we have elected to use some of our unrestricted carryover funds to bolster growth in this first year. Therefore while the budget is $1.3 million the additional funds to be raised to get to $2 million are based on the 2015 income.

2. CIVIC holds a financial reserve of between three and four months of operating costs to protect from unforeseen fluctuations in funding and cash flow challenges. For our current budget we have $350k. For Phase I and II we will build that to $600k and $900,000 respectively.
Phase II: This phase focuses on building in-house program and advocacy capacity in the regions and themes on which we work, including:

- **Director of Programs**: A key growth position that will create additional senior subject matter expertise and a layer of management and accountability between the programmatic staff and the executive team.

- **Director of European Advocacy**: Senior-level advocate based in Europe with extensive contacts and a focus on advocacy with European regional organizations (EU, NATO, OSCE, etc.) and European capitals.

- **Senior Program Manager Asia and a Program Analyst**: New regional team to focus on establishing and growing our work in Asia.

- **Communications Manager**: Develop and execute a communications plan that will support CIVIC’s programmatic work and further develop our work and our voice in the media and with the public.

- **United Nations Advocate**: Consolidate and proactively plan advocacy efforts on institutional change at the United Nations and with country missions in NY.

- **Development Associate**: Support for the Development Director.

- **Administrative Assistant**: Support for Operations Manager and Directors.

Phase II requires an additional $1.5 million in yearly funding (plus an additional $300,000 to build our financial reserves) with 19 total staff bringing the yearly budget to $3.5 million. It is our goal to reach this level of funding and staffing by mid 2018.

CIVIC has grown from humble beginnings. In 2003, we were a one-person organization with a $25,000 annual budget and focused solely on US policy in Iraq. Today, we have a six-member staff, have worked in 13 conflict zones, and have an annual budget of $1.3 million. While that expansion is impressive, the need for our work far outstrips our ability to respond. This challenge has prompted us to think even harder about our investments and programs and to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, every partnership and intervention has a measurable impact on civilian harm mitigation.
WHERE WE WORK NOW

OUR NEXT STEPS
APPENDIX: OUR STORY

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) was founded as Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a courageous humanitarian killed by a suicide bomber in 2005 while advocating for Iraqi families. We officially changed our name in 2012 to more clearly capture the full nature of our work on behalf of civilians in conflict.

CIVIC’s initial efforts in 2003 aimed to ensure that the US government acknowledged and addressed civilian harm resulting from its combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Through expert policy briefs, we urged the US military to strengthen and standardize the way it made monetary payments to civilian victims—and it eventually did. In 2006, we published groundbreaking work on Afghan civilian perspectives of harm and what victims needed to rebuild their lives. We called upon the US government to create and implement the first USAID programs aimed at providing assistance to civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan who had been harmed during US combat operations. And, again, the government responded, creating the Marla Ruzicka Iraqi War Victims Fund and the Afghan Civilian Assistance Program specifically for this purpose.

In time, and due in part to our advocacy, the US and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) established policies and practices to address civilian harm. But we knew we could do more. We knew we could not just focus on what happened after civilians were harmed, just as we couldn’t limit our work to US policy.

We broadened our scope to analyze how we could ensure that civilians were not harmed in the first place. Building on binding obligations under IHL, we worked with the US military to develop the doctrine on civilian casualty mitigation. We also expanded our work beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, traveling to conflict zones in Sri Lanka, Israel/Lebanon, Nepal, and Pakistan, applying our experience and expertise in each of these countries.

2011 was a pivotal year, when our work began to have wider impact. In Turkey we convened a conference of high-level governmental and civil society leaders from Afghanistan and Pakistan to discuss existing approaches to mitigating civilian harm that occurred within their borders. Leaders from both countries committed themselves to creating post harm assistance programs. Since then, CIVIC has partnered with the Institute for Social and Policy Sciences—a Pakistani civil society organization—to draft legislation for a new assistance program for victims of terrorism, which the province of Balochistan adopted in 2013. In Afghanistan we partnered with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which is drafting a victims assistance policy framework that we expect Parliament to approve in 2015.

In 2011 in Somalia, we were invited by a retired British Major General, who was familiar with our work in Afghanistan, to help draft a comprehensive civilian protection policy for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). We focused on post harm assistance but also on developing better tools and training to avoid civilian harm. We proposed that AMISOM take several steps: implement an indirect fire policy and create a “tracking cell” to document harm to civilians, analyze resulting data, and make amends to civilians harmed. The cell would help AMISOM commanders understand the impact of their operations on civilians and respond appropriately. AMISOM implemented the proposal, changed its indirect fire use to reduce civilian harm and is currently setting up the tracking cell.
That same year, again because of our work with ISAF and our field research, we were invited to advise NATO on civilian harm mitigation in Operation Unified Protector in Libya. These two opportunities made it clear that our expertise and practical approach were transferable across conflicts and continents.

We also began to engage the United Nations on a thematic level, at first on the “making amends” aspect of our work but eventually encompassing civilian harm mitigation as a vital component of civilian protection policy and practice for peacekeeping operations. This work began in Mali in early 2013, where MINUSMA (the UN peacekeeping mission) created, partly thanks to our advocacy, the first ever position of “Civilian Risk Mitigation Advisor” in a UN Mission, to advise the Force Commander on all issues relating to the mitigation of risk to civilians from military operations. In 2014 we engaged with MISCA (the African Union mission in the Central African Republic, now the UN mission MINUSCA) to offer practical information and advice in the UN mandating process. We recommended that MISCA have a capacity to mitigate harm to civilians before, during, and after its operations. There is much more to do to translate lessons across theaters and now, with an Africa and peacekeeping expert on staff, we will continue this work in 2015 and beyond.

As violence and conflict continues to proliferate around the world, so too does the need for our work. From Africa to the Middle East and from South Asia to Europe, civilians continue to suffer either at the hands of armed actors or tragically caught in their crossfire. With the growth we have laid out in this document, CIVIC’s work, our unique voice, and effective approach can reach more conflicts and protect more civilians.

THE COVER

Civilians and fighters help each other climb the rubble to find others buried and trapped at the site of an aerial bombardment moments after four to five bombs landed in the Karm Homed neighborhood of Aleppo, Syria, on Monday, March 18, 2013.

Photo by Nicole Tung
Center for Civilians in Conflict works to make warring parties more responsible to civilians before, during, and after armed conflict. We are advocates who believe no civilian caught in conflict should be ignored, and advisors who provide practical solutions to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

About Center for Civilians in Conflict

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