Letter from the Executive Director

Friends,

In 2015, I had the opportunity to meet with civilians, security forces, and civil society groups trying to survive, fight, and protect themselves while waiting for an often elusive peace.

Our advocacy and campaigning are working; more security actors are becoming aware of their responsibilities to protect civilians and are looking to us for help doing it.

In Turkey, I had conversations with leaders of Syrian armed groups who wanted to better protect civilians but didn’t know how to—until CIVIC proposed some basic training tools to do just that. In Nigeria, I witnessed the overwhelming support of government, military, and civil society groups for CIVIC’s proposal to adopt a pragmatic civilian protection lens in the fight against Boko Haram. In Ghana, I joined senior military leaders at the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Centre to lend CIVIC’s expertise to the training of peacekeepers to be deployed across Africa.

2015 marked a turning point in the history of CIVIC. Our successes have earned us respect from governments around the world—and with it, opportunities to grow. To respond to a greater demand, we have expanded our existing programs, opened new ones, doubled our team size, established new partnerships, strengthened our board, and considerably increased our operational budget.

While we continue working with multinational actors such as the United Nations, the African Union and NATO, we are increasingly turning our focus to working with local governments, national security forces, local communities and civil society, to build local capacities and sustain our impact in the long-term. While we will continue advocating for civilians in Washington, New York, and Brussels, in 2016 you will find us increasingly working with local partners in Abuja, Erbil, Kabul, and Juba.

While our programming, toolbox and geographic focus have expanded and adapted to changing times, I am proud that our core mission and philosophy have stayed the same—we offer concrete solutions to some of the world’s worst problems and have built a reputation as a credible and trustworthy voice for those harmed by conflict.

With your support, we intend to continue doing just that in 2016.

Sincerely,

[federico-borello-signature]

Federico Borello
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Center for Civilians in Conflict
Letter from the Chairman of the Board

Friends,

The past year has been one of growth for CIVIC. Our annual operating budget in 2015 was up 33%; our team going into 2016, is nearly double the size it was a year ago.

These numbers, however, don’t capture what is really important about CIVIC’s recent progress – our increased impact on behalf of the civilians caught in conflict across the globe.

In 2015, we were able to work in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria. In addition to country-specific work, we worked with the United Nations, NATO, the African Union and the U.S. Government. We’ve trained armed groups on harm mitigation. We provided guidance on how to track and assess patterns of civilian harm, we helped shape policy that saves civilian lives, and we ensured that the voice of civilians reaches the ears of policy makers.

When we change policies, practices, and mind-sets, we save civilian lives. That’s what matters.

Last year, we created a vision statement setting forth our plan for improving the protections afforded to civilians across the world and developing a global standard for civilian harm mitigation over the next three years. As we begin year two of this journey, I am proud to say that we exceeded our own goals for 2015 and are well on our way to do so again in 2016.

All of this is thanks to you. You make CIVIC’s work possible.

With gratitude and respect,

Anil Soni
BOARD PRESIDENT
Center for Civilians in Conflict
CIVIC published *Fending for Ourselves: The Civilian Impact of Mali’s Three-Year Conflict*, a locally-informed narrative of civilians’ experiences in the ongoing conflict in northern Mali and put forward policy recommendations to help address the desires and expectations that civilians have regarding security and protection issues.

CIVIC met with civilians, Congolese armed forces, local and international NGOs, and several foreign embassies during a preliminary in-country assessment of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC’s civilian protection policies, practices, and tools.

CIVIC co-authored *Protection of Civilians by the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan*, a briefing paper with concrete recommendations for the peacekeeping mission. Although improvements are still needed, the UN mission has made some progress in providing more protection away from its bases, including implementing some of our recommendations.

This year the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) officially stood up their civilian harm tracking cell to gather, analyze, and appropriately respond to civilian harm. We continue to provide the cell and its staff with ongoing technical advice and support.

We conducted an assessment and published a report exploring the experiences of civilians and armed actors in northeastern Nigeria. We call for reform within the Nigerian military, arguing that the most effective way to restore security and effectively combat violent extremism is to put the protection of civilians at the heart of Nigeria’s military operations.
AFGHANISTAN
In collaboration with the Afghan government, CIVIC developed an implementation plan for a Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team (CCMT) and provided policy recommendations on reporting and acknowledging civilian harm – many of which are already being implemented.

IRAQ
We spoke with civilians, government and military stakeholders, and members of local and international society groups to assess the situation for civilians living in areas retaken from ISIS and used this information to develop and pilot a training module for Peshmerga fighters to better protect civilians during military operations.

SYRIA
Our research on the self-protection strategies of Syrian civilians revealed the emergence of a highly localized system of survival strategies that needs urgent support to be more effective including the further development of early warning systems and assistance to local rescue and aid teams.
OUR WORK

Our Mission

Our mission is to improve protection for civilians caught in conflicts around the world. We call on and advise international organizations, governments, militaries, and armed non-state actors to adopt and implement policies to prevent civilian harm. When civilians are harmed we advocate the provision of amends and post-harm assistance. We bring the voices of civilians themselves to those making decisions affecting their lives.

Our Vision

A future where parties involved in conflict go above and beyond their legal obligations to minimize harm to civilians in conflict.

Our Activities are Four-Fold:

- Documenting the toll of armed conflict on civilians, through interviews with civilians themselves, humanitarians, and the military actors.

- Advocating with decision makers in world capitals and international and regional institutions to change mindsets and develop policies and practices that protect civilians and dignify their losses.

- Engaging directly with military actors to provide them with practical solutions to minimize civilian harm.

- Amplifying civilian’s voices by highlighting both their plight and our solutions to lessen their suffering.
Mali

The ongoing violence and instability in Mali have killed hundreds and forced tens of thousands of civilians to flee their homes since 2012, some across international borders. Despite the June 2015 peace agreement, violence by armed opposition and extremist groups remains a very real threat to civilians. As communities struggle to return to normal, CIVIC has listened to many Malians express their fear about the continued insecurity destabilizing the northern part of the country and spreading southward.

In 2015, CIVIC published *Fending for Ourselves: The Civilian Impact of Mali’s Three-Year Conflict*. This report, based on nearly a year of in-country research, presents a locally-informed narrative of civilians’ experiences in the ongoing conflict and puts forward policy recommendations to address the security needs of civilians. The report was widely disseminated in English and French through roundtable discussions with security forces, UN peacekeepers, and international stakeholders, and was credited with raising awareness of important civilian protection concerns in the northern regions. The report’s findings have also been instrumental in strengthening civilian protection training for MINUSMA peacekeepers.

— CIVIC interview, Timbuktu Region, March 2015

*Fending for Ourselves: The Civilian Impact of Mali’s Three-Year Long Conflict*
As CIVIC works to shift the mindset of armed actors during conflict, we have increasingly focused our research and advocacy on local civil society groups to better understand patterns of harm and to increase awareness of civilian protection issues in affected communities.

In Nigeria, CIVIC has engaged with dozens of civil society groups across the northeast to share our findings and work with communities directly affected by Boko Haram’s insurgency, strengthening their ability to protect themselves from security threats.

Going forward, CIVIC will build a network of civil society groups across the Lake Chad Basin with the goal of elevating protection concerns, helping rebuild civil-military relations, and improving self-protection strategies.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

In addition to the ongoing conflict in eastern Congo, dozens of people were killed across the country in January 2015 during protests against proposed changes to electoral law. As violence continues in the East and tensions continue to rise across the country, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) is more important than ever.

In February of 2015 CIVIC conducted a preliminary in-country assessment of MONUSCO's civilian protection policies, practices, and tools. CIVIC also interviewed civilians, Congolese armed forces, local and international NGOs, and several foreign embassies.

CIVIC is now preparing for an in-depth assessment of MONUSCO civilian protection capabilities during 2016. Based on the results, we will make targeted recommendations to MONUSCO, the UN, and to the DRC’s national armed forces, which conduct joint operations against armed groups.

Issue Spotlight: Civil Society and Capacity Building

As CIVIC works to shift the mindset of armed actors during conflict, we have increasingly focused our research and advocacy on local civil society groups to better understand patterns of harm and to increase awareness of civilian protection issues in affected communities.

In Nigeria, CIVIC has engaged with dozens of civil society groups across the northeast to share our findings and work with communities directly affected by Boko Haram’s insurgency, strengthening their ability to protect themselves from security threats.

Going forward, CIVIC will build a network of civil society groups across the Lake Chad Basin with the goal of elevating protection concerns, helping rebuild civil-military relations, and improving self-protection strategies.

This Muslim Fulani man’s compound was attacked and burned in Attakar, Nigeria in March 2013. Image by Ed Kashi/VII
Nigeria

Violent extremism and counterinsurgency military operations have fueled violence in northeast Nigeria since 2009, claiming over 30,000 lives and displacing millions. The scale of violence against civilians by Boko Haram is among the highest of any armed group in Africa.

In response, CIVIC began planning for a major program in Nigeria over the next three years, beginning with an assessment and followed by the publication of *When We Can’t See the Enemy, Civilians Become the Enemy: Living Through Nigeria’s Six-year Insurgency*. This report explores the experiences of civilians and armed actors in northeastern Nigeria. It calls for reform within the Nigerian military, arguing that the most effective way to restore security and effectively combat violent extremism is to put the protection of civilians at the heart of Nigeria’s military operations.

CIVIC is now preparing to launch a multi-year regional project to support the mainstreaming of civilian protection across government, military, and civil society in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region.

A fifteen-year-old bears the scars of a Boko Haram suicide attack on St. Rita Catholic church in Kaduna on October 28, 2012, where 4 people died and 192 were injured. *Image by Ed Kashi/VII*
We had to [move the bodies for burial]. Dead bodies would lead to disease in the streets, so I did this to protect my neighborhood. Some people would fear a stray bullet… but as a peacemaker, you are between the bullets and the bullet holes.

— CIVIC interview, Somali civilian, March 2014

The People’s Perspective: Civilian Involvement in Armed Conflict

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT: PROTECTION AND PEACEKEEPING

In many conflicts in Africa, national militaries and armed non-state actors directly target civilians. In these cases, more robust and proactive peacekeeping is the most effective—and sometimes only—way to minimize harm to civilians.

In 2015, CIVIC continued its engagement with key United Nations offices pressing for the adoption of policies and practices related to civilian protection and harm mitigation. We also provided key protection recommendations that were influential in mandate renewals for several peacekeeping operations.

Training of peacekeepers is also key to success. CIVIC led a training on civilian harm mitigation and proactive protection at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) in Accra, Ghana. This module was part of an annual 10-day course for 35 peacekeepers representing missions across Africa. In September, CIVIC presented our research findings and recommendations from the Nigeria assessment at a high-level side event of the UN General Assembly on Security in the Lake Chad Basin Region.

Going forward, CIVIC will develop more robust training capabilities in Africa, including courses for peacekeeper training schools, troop contributing countries (TCCs), and civil society groups.
South Sudan

Just two years after gaining independence, South Sudan descended into a devastating armed conflict. Civilians have borne the brunt of the violence, as armed groups have deliberately targeted them through killings, sexual violence, the destruction of property, and the looting of cattle.

In 2015, CIVIC conducted an in-depth assessment of the civilian experience of the conflict as well as their needs and expectations regarding protection and post-harm assistance – both of which will be critical if the country is to break free from cycles of violence and revenge. We interviewed more than 130 civilians who have fled the conflict and live in internally displaced persons’ (IDP) camps, in addition to meeting with government and military leaders, high-level UN representatives, and leading civil society activists. CIVIC documented widespread targeting of civilians and civilian property by government forces and, to a lesser extent, the armed opposition.

CIVIC produced *Within and Beyond the Gates: The Protection of Civilians by the UN Mission in South Sudan*, a report looking at the UN mission’s successes and challenges in proactively protecting civilians from harm. Working with our colleagues at the Stimson Center and the Better World Campaign, CIVIC also produced *Protection of Civilians by the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan*, a briefing paper with concrete recommendations for the peacekeeping mission. Although improvements are still needed, the UN mission has made some progress in providing more protection away from its bases, including armed escorts for women collecting firewood and improved medical attention for peacekeepers.
Afghanistan

CIVIC’s work in Afghanistan is as urgent as it has ever been. The number of civilian casualties in 2015 was the highest since systematic recordkeeping began. Armed opposition groups, including the Taliban, have engaged in an unprecedented level of attacks since NATO ended its mission in Afghanistan in December 2014. With NATO keeping only a skeleton force, it is now the responsibility of the Afghan security forces to take the lead in protecting civilians from attacks by armed opposition groups and during their own operations.

In 2015, the Afghan government and NATO commissioned CIVIC to develop an implementation plan for a Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team (CCMT). This will make it possible for the Afghan government to accurately track incidents of civilian harm, analyze their causes and acknowledge them publicly. We are happy to report that many of our recommendations in *Addressing Civilian Casualties: An Implementation Plan for a Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team* are being implemented, but more work remains. CIVIC has also provided extensive recommendations on a new civilian casualty mitigation policy being written by the government.

Following the bombing of the Kunduz hospital in October by US forces, CIVIC sent a letter to President Obama and the Secretary of Defense raising concerns and joined a collective advocacy effort to ensure stronger adherence to policies to minimize harm.

AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT

CIVIC is particularly pleased by the growth of the Civilian Protection Working Group (CPWG) in Kabul over the past year. The CPWG, which CIVIC helped refocus and expand, coordinates and amplifies the voices of Afghan civil society actors regarding civilian protection. It is the first Afghan civil society group focused on civilian protection, and its 17 member organizations come from across the country and include women community leaders. Building the capacity of local organizations to advocate with their government and armed actors on civilian protection is a sustainable way for ideas on protection to take hold.

With CIVIC’s support, the CPWG conducted a four-day capacity-building training for all members in September 2015. The training began with introductions to both international humanitarian law and Islamic law and then continued to explore investigation, advocacy, and harm mitigation.

In late October 2015, the CPWG, in collaboration with United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), held a roundtable in Kabul on civilian protection concerns in Kunduz province. More than 50 people, including university students and civil society activists, attended.
Iraq

Conditions for the civilian population in northern Iraq continue to deteriorate as fighting for control of the region continues. During 2015, CIVIC assessed the situation for civilians living in areas retaken by Iraqi and Kurdish forces. We interviewed civilians, local government officials, Kurdish Peshmerga officials and soldiers, members of local and international civil society groups, the ICRC, and members of the anti-ISIS coalition. We found that forces in the region lacked specialized training on civilian protection, had little capacity to assess the impact of their own operations, had difficulty distinguishing between combatants and civilians, and lacked clear processes to engage with civilians suffering harm. This is, in turn, causing tensions among military forces and communities, which risk jeopardizing stabilization efforts in the area.

Based on this research, CIVIC developed and piloted a training module for 100 Peshmerga fighters to build their capacity to protect civilians during military operations. The trainees were enthusiastic about learning techniques to avoid accidentally harming civilians or their property, and national and international stakeholders asked CIVIC to scale up its training efforts.

In 2016, CIVIC will conduct train-the-trainer sessions with the Peshmerga to ensure a complete understanding of the module. We will also develop a monitoring program to evaluate the impact and refine the training. CIVIC is exploring the option of adapting the training so that it can be used by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).
Anti-ISIS Coalition

CIVIC has been engaging with the US military on its operations in Syria and Iraq since they began in 2014. We have provided detailed recommendations on civilian casualty tracking, post harm investigations, and amends (acknowledgement and condolence payments) processes. Many of our recommendations have been implemented, including funding being earmarked for civilians harmed in conflict. We continue to press for more rapid and transparent investigations and greater acknowledgment of civilian harm.

Syria

The conflict in Syria, which is entering its fifth year, continues to devastate the country. In late 2015, CIVIC conducted research into current self-protection strategies adopted by Syrian civilians, focusing on opposition-held areas where civilians endure constant bombardment. Despite the mounting civilian casualties over the years, the international community has not been able to develop a coherent and effective strategy to better protect civilians from this threat.

We interviewed civilians in Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria, local and international NGOs, UN agencies, journalists, activists, educators, members of the medical profession, and others. Our research revealed the emergence of a highly localized system of survival strategies that needs urgent support to be more effective. This includes the development of early warning systems, better protection of educational and medical facilities, local rescue and aid teams, efforts to mark and dispose of unexploded ordnance (UXO), and the creation of a secure platform to share protection strategies.

Our report, *Waiting for No One: Civilian Survival Strategies* will be published in early 2016, and includes recommendations tailored to NGOs, concerned governments, and multinational organizations about ways to better support and further develop self-protection measures.

CIVIC also undertook interviews with 15 armed groups operating in Syria to assess their knowledge of civilian protection, to identify protection gaps, and to find additional areas for improvement. These interviews resulted in recommendations to coalition countries supporting some of those groups.

“There are two centers for Syrian Civil Defense [White Helmets] in our region that have simple equipment. They help people trapped under the rubble and transfer unexploded weapons from the streets and homes. They appear quickly after a bombing to assist in the evacuation of the wounded and fire fighting. They also implement some mine risk awareness in schools and neighborhoods campaigns.”

— CIVIC interview with Syrian civilian from Deraa (name withheld) via Skype December 2015
Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

CIVIC has continued to raise awareness about the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA). We participated in roundtables in Oslo and at the UN, and presented on good protection practices used by NATO forces in Afghanistan and by AMISOM in Somalia. CIVIC continues to work on documenting best practices for reducing harm from EWIPA.

Women in Gao, Mali, examine a poster explaining what they should do when they discover unexploded ordinance left behind by the war, April 2013.

*Image by Thomas Martinez*
NATO

Six years ago CIVIC began urging the NATO Operations team in Brussels to institutionalize key lessons on civilian harm mitigation through the creation of a permanent office at NATO responsible for embedding these practices in future NATO operations. In a major victory for CIVIC and for civilians around the world, this office was created and became functional in 2015.

In 2015, NATO also undertook a lessons learned review of its work in Afghanistan focusing on civilian harm from its operations. Many of CIVIC's recommendations for this review were included, such as calling for Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and a doctrine of civilian casualty mitigation. NATO has requested our input on the development of NATO procedures and policies, and indicated that they hope to incorporate CIVIC into training exercises.

In November 2015, CIVIC co-authored the article “Operationalizing Protection of Civilians in NATO Operations”, which argues that military planners need a more formal structure to conceptualize physical protection, and outlines CIVIC's signature concept, the “Protection Ladder”, as a tool for military planners and leaders to explain the legal obligations and additional operational capabilities necessary for civilian protection. The article offers practical suggestions on how civilian protection can be effectively addressed before, during, and after military operations.

In 2016, CIVIC will continue our work pressing NATO for standing policy, doctrine, and training on civilian protection.

United States

CIVIC continues to work with a coalition of NGOs to advocate for greater transparency in the use of weaponized drones by the US government and to encourage the government to improve processes to track and acknowledge civilian harm. We also advocate for the provision of post-harm assistance to civilians, and for an independent assessment on the use of drones in counterterrorism operations and the implications of drone use for civilians.

In April 2015, President Obama admitted that drone strikes in Pakistan mistakenly killed two hostages, an American and an Italian citizen. The president subsequently ordered an investigation into the attack and authorized compensation to the victims’ families. CIVIC, along with several other NGOs, sent a letter encouraging the president to acknowledge all civilians harmed by drone strikes and urged both compensation and increased transparency.

For many years CIVIC has been working to encourage the US government to adopt standing policies that would allow US forces to track, analyze, investigate and publicly acknowledge incidents of civilian harm each and every time the US enters a conflict. We have also been advocating to ensure that training on civilian protection becomes a standard part of US security force assistance to other nations. To further these goals, in 2015 CIVIC held high level meetings with the Obama administration and convened a closed-door roundtable with officials.

CIVIC is investing significantly in our US programming in 2016, focusing on drone operations and also on pushing for a standing policy on civilian protection in counterterrorism operations outside defined areas of hostilities. For the first time, CIVIC currently has a full-time staff person dedicated to the program.
The Voices of Civilians

The laws of war prohibit the intentional targeting of civilians. However, this immunity is not absolute: civilians are immune from being targeted unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities. Thus, a civilian may be lawfully targeted while directly participating in hostilities.

Military commanders, government officials, lawyers, humanitarians, and academics have engaged in a heated debate over how this rule should be implemented. In this debate, however, the views of one group have been largely unheard: civilians in conflict-affected countries. For these civilians, the issues of participation and protection during war are not abstract problems but matters of life and death.

As a step toward addressing this gap in the discourse, CIVIC conducted a study over several years on civilian involvement in armed conflict, based on 250 interviews with individuals who have lived through conflict in Bosnia, Libya, Gaza, and Somalia. By shedding light on their perspectives and experiences, this study endeavors to inject civilian voices into this conversation about “the civilian”—and to ensure that this critical debate about warfare in the 21st century is inclusive of those most likely to be affected by its outcomes. People’s Perspectives: Civilian Involvement in Armed Conflict, published in May 2015, is one of the first reports to highlight civilians’ voices regarding harm to civilians in conflict.
Statement of Financial Position Fiscal Year 2015

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<th>ASSETS</th>
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<th>December 31, 2014</th>
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Statement of Activities

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* CIVIC adheres to generally accepted accounting principles and uses the accrual method of accounting, recognizing income as it is pledged. In the previous two years, CIVIC received multiple year grant awards which were recorded in full in the year they were pledged. Funds were earmarked for expenditure in years stipulated in the grant agreements.
## Statement of Activities

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<td>Repairs &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>699</td>
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<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>4,929</td>
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<td>Supplies</td>
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<td>Telephone</td>
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<td>1,582</td>
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<td>Travel</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>2,860</td>
<td>139,337</td>
<td>143,022</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENSE</strong></td>
<td><strong>$85,530</strong></td>
<td><strong>$190,646</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,094,119</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,370,295</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of Total Expenditure:
- Management 6.2%
- Development 13.9%
- Country Operations 79.8%

*CIVIC 2015 financial reports were independently audited and copies of the full audit are on file and available by request.*
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Open Society Foundations (US)
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CORPORATE SUPPORT
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craigslist Charitable Fund

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CIVIC extends special thanks to the many civilians who spoke with us, even in the midst of personal tragedies. We also thank our consultants, who provided valuable services and contributions to our work around the world.

Center for Civilians in Conflict was founded as Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC) in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who recognized the need for an organization focused on the plight of civilians in war. Following Marla’s death from a suicide bomb in Baghdad in April 2005, her colleagues, friends, and family knew that she had created a unique space in the advocacy community that should not be left vacant. CIVIC continues to grow, building on Marla’s foundation.
Children return to Zumar in Nineveh governorate, Iraq, finding destroyed homes after Zumar was retaken from ISIS by the Peshmerga, February 2015.

Image by Sahr Muhammedally

THE COVER
The Madrassa Tarbiyyatul Aulad koranic school teaches both almajiris, or street kids, and locals from this impoverished area of Sokoto, Nigeria, April 2013.

Photo by Ed Kashi/VII.
About Center for Civilians in Conflict

Our mission is to improve protection for civilians caught in conflicts around the world. We call on and advise international organizations, governments, militaries, and armed non-state actors to adopt and implement policies to prevent civilian harm. When civilians are harmed we advocate for the provision of amends and post-harm assistance. We bring the voices of civilians themselves to those making decisions affecting their lives.

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