

FORUM: Humanitarian, Cultural, and Social Committee (GA3)

QUESTION OF: Humanitarian corridors as a means of protecting civilians during armed conflict

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POSITION: Chair

INTRODUCTION

The existence of humanitarian corridors provides an escape for people trapped in conflict zones, as they are able to get any essential aid and be provided with ways to escape a warzone to seek refuge in another country. Establishing such corridors is vital in protecting civilians during armed conflict. As a conflict intensifies and by consequence the number of civilians displaced increases, the need for effective humanitarian corridors becomes apparent. Such corridors aim to reduce the suffering of civilians and to address the brunt of hostilities which is often taken upon by civilians.

Humanitarian corridors not only provide a way for necessary aid, rather they symbolize keeping human dignity when faced with conflicts. Allowing humanitarian organizations to operate within conflict, they provide within the corridor any necessary aid be it food, medical assistance or other vital resources to those who need them, thus ensuring the protection of their human rights even during times of war. Furthermore, humanitarian corridors can often create opportunities for dialogue between the conflicting parties, sometimes leading to ceasefires. However, their establishment requires a high amount of negotiations that often lead to disagreements between the conflicting parties. Often, the parties may even decide to stop honoring the agreements or allow safe passage, hence rendering humanitarian corridors near impossible to implement.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Armed Conflict

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, armed conflict can be separated into two categories. An International Armed Conflict exists “when there is an armed confrontation between the armed forces of States” and Non-International Armed

Conflicts are those that occur “between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State”¹

Ceasefire

A ceasefire is “a suspension of fighting agreed upon by the parties to a conflict, typically as part of a political process. It is intended to be long-term and often covers the entire geographic area of the conflict. Its aim is usually to allow parties to engage in dialogue, including the possibility of reaching a permanent political settlement.”²

Civilians

“Civilian means, in an international armed conflict, any person who does not belong to the armed forces and does not take part in a “levée en masse”³ and is protected from attacks against them due to their status. “In case of doubt whether a person is a civilian or not, that person must be considered to be a civilian. “Civilian” means, in a non-international armed conflict, all persons who are neither members of state armed forces nor members of an organized armed group.”⁴

Demilitarized Zone

“A demilitarized zone is an area, agreed upon between the parties to an armed conflict, which cannot be occupied or used for military purposes by any party to the conflict. Demilitarized zones can be established by a verbal or written agreement in times of peace or during an armed conflict.”⁵

Humanitarian Corridor

“Humanitarian corridors or safe passages are essentially agreements between parties to the armed conflict to allow for safe passage for a limited time in a specific

¹ International Committee of the Red Cross. "Glossary | Terms used in the EHL." *ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross*, Jan. 2009, www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/files/ehl/ehl-english-glossary.pdf.

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "Glossary of Terms: Pauses During Conflict." *OCHA*, June 2011, www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/dms/Documents/AccessMechanisms.pdf.

³ “Civilian Population | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook.” *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/civilian-population.

⁴ “Civilian Population | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook.” *Casebook.icrc.org*, casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/civilian-population.

⁵ "Demilitarized Zones." *How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook*, International Committee of the Red Cross, casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/demilitarized-zones.

geographic area. They can allow civilians to leave, humanitarian assistance to come in or allow for the evacuation of the wounded, sick or dead.”⁶

International Humanitarian Law

“International humanitarian law is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict. It protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. International humanitarian law is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict. It is part of international law and applies to armed conflicts. It does not regulate whether a State may actually use force.”⁷

Neutral Parties

A party in a dispute who has no (or fully disclosed) conflicts of interest and is expected to act impartially.

Safe Zone

Safe Zones “broadly refer to specifically designated areas that aim to afford a form of heightened physical and humanitarian protection to the displaced civilian population in an ongoing armed conflict.”⁸

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical development of Humanitarian Corridors

The concept of humanitarian corridors gained traction after the second World War, especially due to the adoption of the Geneva Convention in 1949 that has since laid the foundation for international humanitarian law. Said convention emphasized on protecting

⁶ "How Humanitarian Corridors Work to Help People in Conflict Zones." *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 22 Apr. 2024, www.icrc.org/en/document/how-humanitarian-corridors-work.

⁷ ADVISORY SERVICE *What Is International Humanitarian Law?* www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/what-is-ihl-factsheet.pdf.

⁸ Macey, Harriet. “‘Safe Zones’: A Protective Alternative to Flight or a Tool of Refugee Containment? Clarifying the International Legal Framework Governing Access to Refugee Protection against the Backdrop of ‘Safe Zones’ in Conflict-Affected Contexts.” *International Review of the Red Cross*, Mar. 2022, pp. 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1816383122000078>.

civilians and treating them humanely, thus the need for safe passage for them and aid in times of conflict became apparent. One of the earliest uses of humanitarian corridors encountered is in the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, where the United Nations (UN) and other non-governmental organizations negotiated corridors to provide safe passage for civilians and deliver essential supplies particularly in Bosnian cities which while being under siege lacked access to necessities such as food and medical aid. Humanitarian corridors have since been used in a multitude of conflicts such as the second Chechen War, where they were often undermined, and the Syrian Civil War of 2011 which although having many humanitarian corridors negotiated between the conflicting parties, on many occasions they ended up being violated. In the civil war in Yemen where fighting has led to grave humanitarian catastrophe, these corridors facilitated the transfer of vital assistance all across places which are otherwise cut off due to war. Similarly and more recently in the war in Ukraine humanitarian corridors have played a vital role evacuating civilians from blockaded urban centers and providing aid. However, most conflicts which have seen the use of humanitarian corridors have underlined the significant need for bolstering the protections offered to civilians.

Legal basis under International Law

The reasoning behind Humanitarian Corridors in zones of war is founded on great standards articulated in the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which aim at lessening the impact of conflict on human beings and their belongings. The basis of IHL are the Geneva Conventions as well as their extra rules directed towards giving safety to the unarmed persons, war prisoners as well as sick or injured ones during an armed dispute. At its adoption in 1977, Additional Protocol I clarified that humanitarian corridors were to be founded on unimpeded delivery of aid meant for non-combatants in need.

The operation of Humanitarian Corridors can also be supported by provisions made within Customary IHL, which are the rules that come from "a general practice accepted as law" and exist independent of treaty law⁹. Some of the rules under customary IHL include freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel and respecting them and any objects used by them in humanitarian relief operations.

⁹ "Customary IHL | ICRC." *Www.icrc.org*, 28 July 2014, www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/customary-ihl.

Reason for the establishment of Humanitarian Corridors

Humanitarian corridors are mainly established for multiple reasons such as the protection of civilians during armed conflict, the effective delivery of humanitarian aid and mainly to provide safe passages for those fleeing the conflict. Given that civilians are caught in the crossfire of most conflicts or are deliberately targeted, it is imperative that routes for their evacuation are created. As such the creation of humanitarian corridors enables the escape of civilians from besieged areas and helps them seek refuge from hostilities. Therefore, the existence of these corridors protects lives, but also reduces the number of displaced people.

Additionally, the use of humanitarian corridors facilitates the delivery of vital supplies, such as temporary shelters, medical aid provided by doctors, food and water. Given that such supplies are often severely restricted within the conflict zones, they can often serve as the only lifeline for those caught up in the conflict. Often, the corridors serve as the only way for humanitarian organizations to access the vulnerable populations within conflict areas, given that other routes may either be blocked or dangerous.

Mechanisms used in the establishment of Humanitarian Corridors

A plethora of mechanisms is used to establish Humanitarian Corridors. The first and most major out of the mechanisms used are negotiations and treaties between the parties involved in the conflict. Such negotiations often use the help of third-party neutral organizations such as the United Nations or the International Committee of the Red Cross to facilitate any necessary dialogue between the conflicting parties. Such agreements work by setting the area of the corridor, how long it will operate for, and which conditions it can be used for either by civilians or humanitarian aid workers. Furthermore, any provisions made under IHL can be used to ensure the principles under which humanitarian corridors are established. Establishing a humanitarian corridor demands a lot of coordination and planning including safety evaluations, logistical planning as well as outreach campaigns to create awareness among civilians living in that area. Various treaties related to setting up humanitarian corridors include monitoring and verification systems to guarantee adherence to the accord. Such mechanisms may include the use of neutral parties or humanitarian workers to oversee the use of the corridor and report any violations that may occur.

Challenges in Implementation

The establishment of a humanitarian corridor can face a number of challenges. Firstly, the very nature of armed conflict poses a challenge in their establishment given the instability and unpredictability occurring, and as such corridors could be exposed to armed violence and hostilities nevertheless. Furthermore, even when humanitarian corridors are properly established there may be instances of either one or more of the parties violating what was agreed upon, with combatants using the corridor for military purposes or aid not being let through by one of the parties. Another issue are the logistical risks that can be faced in every step of their creation, such as providing security to those passing through and coordinating the passage of civilians along with damaged infrastructure. Those using the corridor may face violence either deliberate or not and the threat of unexploded ordinance and mines left over from the conflict. Lastly, humanitarian corridors are often instrumentalized by their parties given that they may be used by combatants to move military equipment and personnel or for the forceful evacuation of civilians by regimes.

Case Study: Humanitarian Corridors in the Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War began in 2011 and has been one of the conflicts with the most uses of humanitarian corridors to date. One of the most notable uses of them in Syria was that in the city of Aleppo. The corridor was established in 2016 after government forces besieged some parts of the city that were occupied by rebels, with the UN and other humanitarian organizations negotiating the establishment of corridors to allow the evacuation of civilians and delivery of aid. However, the corridors faced many issues like attacks on convoys carrying aid, parties not maintaining proper compliance and being instrumentalized for political advantage. The year was 2018 when humanitarian corridors were established for this other area known as the Eastern Ghouta which is located in Damascus. Unfortunately, these corridors were often used for evacuating civilians against their will and delivery of aid was always delayed or even obstructed by some parties involved in the conflict. In recent years, we have seen such corridors created as those of Idlib Province during 2020 when the government launched an attack on some areas controlled by opposition forces. Their existence was seen as controversial since there were many extremists present and they were overwhelmed by the number of people who wanted to use them.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been one of the countries with the most challenges when it comes to establishing and maintaining humanitarian corridors during the current and past conflicts with the Taliban. Firstly, the lack of working infrastructure along with the rugged terrain of the country make an already hard process even harder. Afghanistan has seen the mobilization of several humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and World Food Program (WFP) in order to provide assistance to civilians through the use of humanitarian corridors. However, attacks on aid convoys and civilians using said corridors are quite common. In some instances aid has been intentionally aimed at, whereas other times there have been shooting incidents between combatants due to absence of a distinct truce that imperils civilians. For that reason, it is exceedingly hard to guarantee secure and stable provision of food, emergency kits and evacuation for those who require them most.

South Sudan

South Sudan is another country with lots of history in the use of humanitarian corridors for delivering aid and evacuating civilians. A major humanitarian corridor was established in 2017 by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in order for aid convoys to safely pass through famished and violence affected areas. The corridor ran all the way from Uganda to South Sudan, however it faced challenges due to the presence of armed groups within the area.

Ukraine

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine gives us another chance to observe the importance of humanitarian corridors in the protection of civilians. Ever since Russia invaded the country in 2022, both countries have agreed to establish humanitarian corridors, however the implementation of their agreements has not been effective due to many violations of ceasefires, attacks made on civilians and the corridors being instrumentalized for political and militaristic gains. Many humanitarian organizations like the ICRC, have helped in

negotiations between the two states, but their effectiveness has been undermined by the previously mentioned issues and the general volatility of the conflict.

Yemen

In Yemen humanitarian corridors have also been widely used, especially since the civil war that started in 2014. The ongoing conflict has left many civilians without necessary aid items and has led to them fleeing their houses, leaving thousands of displaced people. There have been a plethora of efforts surrounding the establishment of humanitarian corridors, but there have also been many issues plaguing the implementation of corridors within the country. Some of those issues include the presence of armed groups within those areas, targeting of humanitarian workers and parties to the conflict blocking deliveries of aid. Organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP) have been instrumental in providing assistance to those affected even through these issues.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The International Committee of the Red Cross was founded in 1863, with its main principles being neutrality, impartiality, and most importantly independence and as such is able to access most conflict zones. Its work is essential in protecting the rights of all individuals affected by armed conflict and by extension is pivotal in establishing humanitarian corridors. It usually acts as a neutral intermediary in order to allow for civilians to safely escape or aid be delivered to them through the use of negotiations between the parties involved. Furthermore, the ICRC monitors the implementation of humanitarian corridors, ensuring their safe operation and any violations by the parties to the agreement.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

The Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), or Doctors Without Borders, which was founded in 1971, is a humanitarian organization aiming to provide medical care to those in need across disadvantaged and war-torn countries. The organization has played a significant role in the use of humanitarian corridors across the world, especially for the transfer of medical supplies and personnel. They often jointly negotiate with other humanitarian organizations for the establishment of humanitarian corridors. They also play a big part in raising awareness for issues faced in conflict areas and often publicly advocate for the creation of humanitarian corridors. The MSF also documents human rights violations

committed in warzones and as such brings awareness and reduces the risk of them happening again.

World Food Programme (WFP)

The WFP is the branch of the United Nations dedicated to providing food to those in need. It is the largest humanitarian organization focused on food and eliminating hunger. The WFP aims to establish humanitarian corridors in order to move and deliver food to those in need. They operate alongside other non-governmental organizations to ensure the safe delivery of food supplies to communities. However, the effectiveness of the WFP's campaigns heavily depends on reliable humanitarian corridors and as such the organization advocates for the protection of humanitarian corridors and respect of International Humanitarian Law to ensure the safe delivery of food and aid to populations.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International was established in 1961 and is an organization aimed at upholding human rights. It mainly works as a watchdog, holding governments and other entities accountable for any human rights abuses that may occur. They have played a crucial role in advocating for the creation of humanitarian corridors. They also publish reports on human rights violations, thus raising awareness for the need of humanitarian corridors.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date | Description of Event |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 12 th August, 1949 | Adoption of the Geneva Conventions |
| 8 th June, 1977 | Adoption of the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions |
| 1990s | Use of Humanitarian Corridors across the Yugoslav Wars |
| 1999 | Establishment of Humanitarian Corridors in the Second Chechen War |
| 2011 | The Syrian Civil War begun |
| 2016 | Humanitarian Corridors were used in Aleppo, Syria |
| 2018 | Humanitarian Corridors were used in Eastern Ghouta, Syria |
| 2020 | Use of Humanitarian Corridors in Idlib, Syria |

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| 2022 | Humanitarian Corridors are established in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict |
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UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Geneva Conventions (1949)

The Geneva Conventions were adopted in August 1949 with the purpose of establishing international legal standards for humanitarian treatment during war. They emphasize the protection of civilians and non-combatants, medical personnel, and the wounded and sick in armed conflict. They are the backbone of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), consist of 4 treaties and require parties to them to protect non-combatants.

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC)

The Rome Statute of the ICC was adopted in July 1998, became active since 2002 and is essentially the founding document of the ICC, which prosecutes individuals that have committed war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity in general. It works on the principle of complementarity, given that it acts only when national courts are not able or willing to act. The statute obligates states to work with the court whenever needed. While the court does not mandate the creation of humanitarian corridors, it often helps with their establishment and proper protection, since it deters violations of International Humanitarian Law and promotes compliance of treaties established between nations. The accountability promoted by the ICC also raises awareness on humanitarian issues, and pressures parties to a conflict to establish and maintain humanitarian corridors.

UN Security Council Resolution 2175 (2014)

UNSC Resolution 2175 which was adopted unanimously on the 29th of August 2014, requests the protection of all humanitarian workers and the need of quick and safe access to humanitarian assistance for those in need, while it reiterates the obligation of all parties to a conflict to comply with International Humanitarian Law. It also emphasizes that humanitarian workers can operate properly without being obstructed or threatened with violence. Lastly, it calls upon all member states to properly ensure the protection of humanitarian workers and ensure their unhindered access to render aid to those in need.

Customary International Humanitarian Law

Customary International Humanitarian Law consists of unwritten rules that are derived either from the constant practice of them by states or the belief that they are required by law. Furthermore, it governs the actions that can be taken during armed conflict and protects individuals not participating in the conflict, such as civilians and prisoners of war. It mainly works by complimenting treaty law like the Geneva Conventions by filling any gaps they may have. It plays a crucial role in ensuring compliance with humanitarian standards, while providing a framework for accountability by all actors to a conflict. Lastly, its recognition by international courts and tribunals further solidifies its legitimacy and importance in protecting human rights.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Humanitarian Corridors Act

The Humanitarian Corridors Act is an act proposed in congress that aims to reinforce the establishment of Humanitarian Corridors in the United States (US). It aims to provide with a legal framework on the transfer of civilians within conflict zones and provision of humanitarian assistance through such corridors. Furthermore, it provides a legal basis for humanitarian assistance by the US and emphasizes the importance of keeping humanitarian workers safe.

Save the children

Save the children is an NGO that has frequently advocated for the use of humanitarian corridors in order to protect children. It has launched multiple campaigns aimed to raise awareness on what happens to children during conflict. It has successfully managed to negotiate access to besieged areas in order to deliver essential supplies both medical and not to children who are in dire need of it. It is advantaged due to its grassroots nature; however it often encounters resistance during conflict from armed groups.

OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM)

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has established a Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine. The SMM is mandated to facilitate

negotiations between the parties of the conflict, monitor the situation, and help establish humanitarian corridors across the country to deliver the proper assistance to those in need. However, it has faced issues in its work, such as restrictions to accessing certain areas and to the safety of its personnel.

EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM)

The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was established in 2008 following the conflict between Georgia and Russia. Its aims, similar to the SMM are to monitor the status of the situation and facilitate humanitarian assistance. Its efforts have often included advocating for the creation of humanitarian corridors and has often served as a platform for dialogue and getting engagement with the local communities.

African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was established in 2007, with the aim of supporting the Somali government in its efforts to stabilize the country and address the ongoing humanitarian crisis. It has helped significantly in providing access to humanitarian assistance through the provision of security guards for aid workers and advocating for the establishment of humanitarian corridors. Its longstanding presence in the country helps to ease the burden of negotiations and to gain the best deal when needed.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Enhancing monitoring with the use of technology

One of the most critical solutions that need to be implemented for the future of humanitarian corridors is enhancing monitoring through technology. Given the rapid advancement of technology these last decades we are offered with a plethora of tools to use in order to achieve this. For example, the use of satellite imagery can provide us with up-to-date security briefings on each location pertinent to a humanitarian corridor. In addition, military UAVs or even commercial drones should be deployed to monitor the corridor and ensure the routes followed by civilians and humanitarian aid workers are clear of danger. Lastly, the use of mobile messaging apps can increase the flexibility of convoys and workers alike along with the fact that communications can be easily encrypted with the use

of specific messaging apps so as for bad actors not being able to gain access to sensitive information.

Neutral Diplomatic and Humanitarian Mediation

Another technique that can be used to either establish corridors or resolve any issues around them is that of diplomacy or mediation. In order for the mediator to be unbiased and honest, they're usually members of a neutral NGO such as the ICRC. By using a neutral mediator parties can build trust amongst themselves and facilitate communications between parties that would otherwise be unwilling to do so directly. This mediation could take many forms including but not limited to direct negotiations, shuttle diplomacy or establishing joint committees with a supervisory capacity. Lastly, mediators can help insert more humanitarian considerations in a potential agreement.

Use of Alternative methods to land Corridors

Given that land corridors may be dangerous or blocked, it is imperative that we consider other forms of transportation, such as air or sea. While land corridors are simple and easier to implement, they may not always be available, either due to safety reasons or due to blockages. As such alternative modes of transportation such as air and sea provide a safer and more reliable way to transfer aid and civilians through conflict zones. Furthermore, even if a plane or helicopter is unable to land at its intended destination, an airdrop can be used to deliver all necessary assistance without losing time. Additionally, by establishing maritime corridors, we are able to provide humanitarian assistance to coastal communities that formerly were not accessible by land either because of the terrain or because existing routes were compromised. Lastly, it is easier to perform cross-border humanitarian assistance when using airplanes or ships given their flexibility.

Strengthening International Legal Frameworks

One of the most crucial solutions to cement the use of humanitarian corridors is by strengthening the frameworks that allow their use. While existing legal frameworks such as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols provide a solid foundation for the creation of humanitarian corridors, gaps and ambiguities exist surrounding the use of the corridors. In order to address those issues, it is of high importance that we ask for clearer definitions and guidelines surrounding the establishment and use of humanitarian corridors.

A solution to this could be the creation of a treaty or convention governing the use of humanitarian corridors. Such treaties should include provisions on the safety that should be ensured within the corridor and especially to humanitarian workers. Furthermore, provisions should be made to ensure compliance from all parties with the agreement and fines should be requested for every violation.

Encouraging ceasefire agreements

The final but arguably most important solution to this issue is encouraging ceasefire agreements among the parties to an armed conflict. With a ceasefire, humanitarian assistance can pass freely along with any civilians wishing to move out of a conflict zone without the need for a humanitarian corridor. Even then a ceasefire agreement if temporary should include provisions on the creation of humanitarian corridors upon its lapse. Furthermore, humanitarian pauses could be negotiated between the parties to allow for humanitarian aid to be delivered to those who need it. Lastly, a neutral monitor should be created from members of several NGOs to verify that the conditions of the ceasefire/humanitarian pause are kept and that no violations occur and go unreported.

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