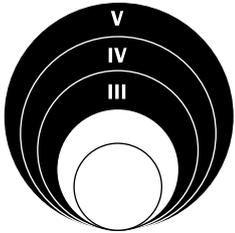


## §4.2.k Humanitarian Agencies



*Humanitarian POC* is the perspective on protection taken by humanitarian actors – including mandated organizations like the ICRC, UN agencies, and non-mandated agencies like Amnesty International and Oxfam. The humanitarian understanding of POC is one of the most flexible POC perspectives, reflective in particular of the different types of constraints regarding neutrality and impartiality the specific organization upholds.

*Humanitarian POC* has been in flux over the last decade, undergoing considerable and on-going development.<sup>140</sup> Throughout most of the latter half of the Twentieth Century, humanitarian protection was understood in two ways. First, “traditional protection” involved – through persuasion, reporting and sometimes (and more controversially) denunciation – advocating on behalf of vulnerable persons, aiding the development of legal instruments and protective policies, and getting states to ratify and act upon such instruments. Second, “relief-protection” provided sustenance to those in need of it, protecting people’s rights to these necessities of life, and by doing so making them less vulnerable to coercion and exploitation by others. Recently however, for some organizations the humanitarian understanding of POC has expanded. Confronted with such cases as the placard around the neck of an Iraqi child in 1991 – reading “We don’t need food.

140 On all the points raised in this paragraph, see David P. Forsythe, “Humanitarian Protection: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,” *International Review of the Red Cross*, 843 (2001): 675-97; Sorcha O’Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano, *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, HPG Report 26, December 2007; Andrew Bonwick, “Who Really Protects Civilians?” *Development in Practice* 16.3 (2006): 270-77; O’Callaghan and Pantuliano, *Protective Action*.

We need safety” – and the “well-fed dead” of Bosnia, many humanitarian actors have sought to expand and prioritize their protection activities.

### Mode III. Dedicated Protection Activities

These include:

- » advocacy and persuasion,
- » visitation,
- » humanitarian diplomacy, engaging with all parties to the conflict, at all levels of authority, aiming to persuade actors to temper violence against civilians and to locate and empower those individuals most amenable to doing so;
- » mobilizing third party pressure on violators,
- » condemnation and denunciation,
- » the creation and dissemination of *information*, especially regarding early warning, areas of safety or danger, conditions for return of refugees and IDPs, location of necessary resources, and so on;
- » the use of unarmed presence, including accompanying and housing vulnerable civilians; and,
- » hiding, moving or sheltering vulnerable civilians.

### Mode IV. Mainstreaming Protection

This mode includes:

- » Prioritizing the rule of “First, do no harm” – ensuring actions do not increase long term civilian vulnerability, for example by paying armed groups for “protection,” by publicly asking particular civilians about threats such that they can be identified for reprisal or silencing, or by legitimizing State policy towards a disenfranchised population.
- » Positively contributing to a protective environment by strategically distributing aid, designing camps so as to reduce everyday civilian vulnerabilities, well-digging, providing fuel-efficient stoves and so on.

Effective humanitarian protection activities are all, “based upon concepts that have been applied elsewhere: international presence, clear-eyed analysis of the perpetrators’ *modus operandi*, anticipation of vulnerability to abuse, issuance of clear instructions and guidelines, and education of vulnerable populations in self-protection and risk avoidance.”

Mark Frohardt, Diane Paul, and Larry Minear. *Protecting Human Rights: The Challenge to Humanitarian Organizations*, Occasional Papers 35. Providence: The Watson Institute, 1999.

### Mode V. Restorative Protection

This mode includes:

- » providing information to refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) about conditions for safe return,
- » providing humanitarian aid to the dispossessed, refugees and IDPs,
- » giving medical care and support to the injured or sick.

All actions undertaken by humanitarian actors, (a) require the consent of all parties to the conflict; (b) must be nonviolent; (c) must avoid superseding State protection activities; and, (d) must remain neutral and impartial (though different humanitarian agencies interpret the requirements of neutrality and impartiality differently).

Current operational challenges involve present limitations on knowledge (and knowledge sharing) regarding the best strategies for nonviolent civilian protection, the best approaches to the use of controversial measures like condemnation and calls for international action, and for coordination and complementarity among agencies who have (and should retain) a diversity of POC objectives and capacities.