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# NGO-Military Contact Group Conference 2011
# CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN NATURAL DISASTERS: New Developments from the Field

Jointly hosted by the British Red Cross and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Wednesday, 12 October 2011

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## Summary Note

### The NGO-Military Contact Group (NMCG)

1. The NMCG is a forum in the UK that aims to improve and strengthen communication between non-governmental aid organisations and the British Armed Forces and relevant government departments. The role of the Group is to facilitate information sharing, learning, and dialogue on relevant policy, technical, and operational issues concerning civil-military relations in humanitarian response. It is composed of representatives from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, the British Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence, Department for International Development, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and a number of independent practitioners. It is convened and chaired by the British Red Cross.

### Background to the Conference

2. Over the past two decades the scale and frequency of natural disasters has markedly increased. During the same period, the actual and perceived role of military actors in response to natural disasters has also grown. In the UK the development of the government's 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy' (BSOS), emphasizes an integrated approach across its civilian and military arms. At the same time, the BSOS pledges that the UK will ensure that its humanitarian aid is delivered on the basis of need alone and on the basis of humanitarian principles.

3. The greater involvement of the military in humanitarian relief efforts has increased interaction on the ground between military and civilian humanitarian actors. It has also contributed to concern by members of the humanitarian community about preserving the key principles of humanity, impartiality, and neutrality that guide their work; the integrity of these principles is felt to be put in jeopardy by too close an association with military actors. This is particularly true of conflict situations, but is also relevant in natural disasters. At the same time, there is recognition that military actors can play a vital role in humanitarian response, and especially during natural disasters. For military actors, their involvement has generated new operational challenges, particularly in terms of coordinating their actions with a diverse civilian humanitarian community. Consequently, the need to discuss issues related to civil-military cooperation and coordination and to address broader questions about the effectiveness of militarised humanitarian assistance during natural disasters has taken on renewed importance.

4. The NMCG Conference brought together about 100 representatives of various NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the UN, the EU, the British Armed Forces,

various UK government departments, and academia, as well as independent practitioners. In that respect, the Conference was unique both for the diversity of its participants and for being an uncommon gathering of expert civilian and military actors under one roof.

5. There is an enormous diversity in philosophies, working cultures, and working languages among the various actors involved in humanitarian relief. The Conference did not set out to change these; rather it aimed to create a space for sharing different perspectives based on experiences in the field in the hope that better understanding may help improve outcomes for those caught up in crises. Reflecting that spirit of dialogue, the Conference was conducted under the Chatham House Rule.[1]

6. The first panel session included expert presentations to provide an overview of current trends and developments in civil-military relations. The second and third sessions focused in-depth on the field-level responses to the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the 2010 Pakistan floods, respectively. Though they presented some unique challenges, both cases featured a strong and visible military presence and raised important questions about civil-military relations between humanitarian actors and military forces. Each panel included speakers with different perspectives about the response with a view towards sharing lessons learned in the field. The closing session was a roundtable, involving speakers from the earlier panels, who were asked to reflect on the issues that had been raised during the day. Rather than summarising each panel discussion, this conference note draws out some of the main themes and points of debate throughout the day.

**Different Vantage Points**

*What's new?*

7. There was general agreement that the theme of the Conference was highly pertinent. Yet, as one speaker pointed out early on, while the topic has taken on greater significance and urgency in recent years, civil-military interaction in humanitarian relief has a long history that goes at least as far back as the 1935-36 Abyssinian Crisis and World War II. In that respect, the debates over 'who' can deliver humanitarian aid, how, and to what effect are not new. Neither are questions about how the pattern of civil-military relations can affect relief efforts in insecure environments. The answers, however, have never been definitive. They have varied over time as the driving forces and the contexts in which humanitarian relief is delivered have changed. It is important therefore not to simply assume that these issues are new, or more complex, than before.

*The role of the affected state in natural disasters*

8. In large-scale natural disasters the 'voice' of the affected state can occasionally get lost in the conversation on civil-military relations, particularly when a range of international humanitarian agencies and military actors 'flood' into an affected country, overwhelming local and national authorities. In such instances, the authorities in an affected state may have concerns about the potential loss of national dignity, sovereignty, and ownership, which may affect their response and the overall consequences of the crisis. As one speaker reminded the Conference, history is replete with cases when governments that badly managed natural disasters have been susceptible to revolutions, coups, regime changes, and other crises of governance. It is important that external

[1] When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. For more information, see: http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chathamhouserule.

actors understand the political dynamics that will shape the approach taken by the host nation's government.

9. As instruments of states, military actors are legitimately deployed by governments in response to natural disasters, in their own territory or overseas. The military can be effective and valuable responders. However, use of the military in disaster response can also raise concerns in the humanitarian community over perceived political motives, particularly in situations where there are pre-existing complexities and interests, for example, strategic counter-terrorism objectives.

10. International humanitarian agencies for their part can have a hard time understanding that governments (in both affected and donor states) have a range of concerns and responsibilities, of which humanitarian response is but one. Governments are also concerned with security, economic factors, and urban planning, amongst many other issues. These remain priorities even at times of natural disasters. International humanitarian agencies are there at the behest of the affected state, but can sometimes act in ways that suggest they are overlooking the primary role of the state. External actors should understand how and where they plug into the overall response, and know when to withdraw.

11. Members of the civilian humanitarian community also worry whether military-led relief provision – by national or international military actors, at the command of states – is truly impartial, needs-based, and aligned with local priorities. This can render humanitarian agencies vulnerable to perceptions of 'complicity' and 'contagion' if there are military operations or mistakes made (such as collateral damage in the form of loss of innocent life) that put the lives of aid workers at risk in conflict-affected areas. It can also lead to relief operations being halted by government authorities or one of the other warring parties.

*Are distinctions between natural disasters and conflict clear, and are they helpful?*

12. Another source of contestation at the Conference arose around the categorisation of disasters. A number of participants expressed concern over the tendency to neatly divide humanitarian crises into binary categories, namely, natural disaster (a crisis during peacetime) and complex emergency (a crisis created by conflict or the breakdown of state authority). However, many felt that in actuality there are situations that fall outside the categories supported by existing policy frameworks.[2] Some also argued that discussion about natural disasters in particular has been overshadowed by the debate over civil-military relations in conflict situations.

13. One speaker suggested a new category of 'conflicted disasters' as very few natural disasters occur in purely benign environments without some level of conflict, inequality, violence, banditry, or disorder. They are often accompanied by huge socio-economic transformations, which can test relations between the government and the governed in an affected state. As one participant quipped, it would be useful for us to recognise this rather than to see them as 'disasters with an identity crisis'. However, another participant debated the creation of new categories, asserting that it bred a tendency to neglect differences in context and to think of natural disasters as 'easy' cases. For some, the separation between natural disasters and complex emergencies remained a useful distinction in operational terms.

[2] The Oslo and MCDA Guidelines are internationally recognised guidelines that provide direction, co-ordination, and advice on the role of the military in humanitarian response. Whereas the MCDA Guidelines address the use of foreign military and civil defence assets during complex emergencies, the Oslo Guidelines cover their use in natural disasters in times of peace only. See: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-products-products&productcatid=8

14. Disasters do not only vary by type, but also by scale. One speaker's view was that too much focus has been placed on mega-disasters, such as in Haiti and Pakistan. While they are important cases, the world is likely to experience many more small- and medium-sized disasters. In those situations local and national governments bear more of the burden of response and the level of involvement by foreign and national military actors was likely to vary.

15. There was general agreement at the Conference that categorisation was difficult and messy. There was also awareness that how a disaster was characterised or perceived had direct bearing on the pattern of civil-military relations in the response and the relationship with national and local authorities. The challenge continued to lie in identifying what distinctions were most relevant, useful, to whom, and for what purpose.

**Key Issues**

16. An indicator of the success of the Conference was the diversity of views presented on the range of issues that are raised by the involvement of military actors in disaster response. Discussions touched on international humanitarian law, the role of politics, the use of guidelines, costs and accountability, communication and coordination mechanisms, the leadership role of the UN, and operational issues such as planning and preparedness with particular reference to Pakistan and Haiti as case studies. The following issues were key.

*The role of the military*

17. There is general agreement that the military can provide a robust planning capability, excellent logistical support, specialist resources for infrastructure and engineering projects, and medical facilities, as well as life-saving search and rescue capacity. For example, US military forces played a vital role in managing air traffic and airport flow in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, after the 2010 earthquake. As one speaker pointed out, military forces can also often make a big impact with smaller contributions. Two examples of this are the work of a small team of UK military planners at the UN logistics centre in Banda Aceh, and UK and European military actors coordinating helicopters in the Mozambique floods in 2000.

18. At the same time, one of the key lessons from recent military deployments has been that military actors may not be as good as subject matter experts at assessing humanitarian needs. For example, while the US Air Force (USAF) was widely acknowledged to have done a job no other actor could have done at the Port-au-Prince airport, it simultaneously faced significant criticism from some quarters that humanitarian need had not been the main criterion for decision-making and that it had risked delaying or blocking access to agencies delivering life-saving goods (such as medicine). There were also concerns expressed about the cost effectiveness of the aid provided by the military in those instances when the military is championed as the lead mechanism for government response. One speaker drew attention to the case of Operational Hispaniola, observing that the Spanish military provided aid (including health care and drinking water) to Haitians at a cost that was around 18 times the cost of similar aid provided to a comparable number of people by a civilian NGO. Yet, criticism has also been levelled at the civilian humanitarian community for not being sufficiently fast in scaling up to the level of response needed, as well as for not being sensitive to the concerns and capacities of local civil society in Haiti and other places.

19. There was a suggestion made that the military should identify its specialisation and stick to providing those niche skills in disaster response, guarding against costly and ineffective contributions to resilience and capacity-building activities. However, various speakers raised a number of cautionary points. Firstly, crisis situations are complex. Rather than predetermining what form of

response is useful on the part of the military, there is a need for context-specific assessment of humanitarian need, appropriate responses, and which actors are best placed to provide those responses. In addition, problems that initially appear to be a logistical challenge may be more difficult to address in practice. For example, debris removal is far from a straightforward exercise in logistics; it also involves understanding land ownership, property laws, and rules about the care and disposal of dead bodies.

20. Secondly, there are often distorted perceptions about what the military can and should do, and how. Political considerations and media pressures can create a pressure 'to do something', but which may not be the most appropriate course of action in a given setting. Arguably, this was the case with Operation Hispaniola, which one speaker described as a 'PR-led misjudgement'. Similarly, media coverage of the backlog at the Port-au-Prince airport led to a knee-jerk decision to do airdrops in crowded urban areas by the US military. Coverage of disorder, particularly around an airdrop, 'muddied' NGO and public perceptions about security. This then created pressure, particularly on US-based aid agencies, to use armed escorts for access for an extended time.

21. One speaker reminded the Conference that the military can often face criticism for activities that are in fact the result of politically driven decisions. For example, US forces in Haiti have been criticised for continuing to build schools and health clinics months after the earthquake there, even though the decision for them to do so was taken at the policymaking level in Washington.

22. Finally, most of the discussion about civil-military relations thus far has been about the deployment of international military forces to assist in natural disasters outside of their own national jurisdictions. However, as the cases of Pakistan and Hurricane Katrina demonstrate, there are instances of mega-disasters and a growing number of small- to medium-sized disasters where the main military forces present are national forces, deployed by a civilian government authority. These present a different constellation of issues for the civilian humanitarian community (both locally and internationally) to grapple with and that the existing guidelines do not address.

*Early planning and coordination*

23. The creation of effective coordination mechanisms is key, as discussions across the panels revealed. The humanitarian arena is becoming crowded – for example, there were 19 different military actors involved in Haiti, in addition to hundreds of humanitarian agencies, which posed a huge challenge to coherence and coordination. One speaker involved in coordination explained that in ideal circumstances, a civilian-led coordination structure would exist in states and into which foreign military assets and international humanitarian actors could 'dock'. However, it is difficult to implement these ahead of time. State capacity and civilian authority can vary enormously across disaster-prone and disaster-affected countries. Also, problems arise as in the case of Haiti, where the civilian and UN leadership itself was the victim of the disaster. If coordination mechanisms are not pre-agreed or established quickly, military-led solutions will inevitably fill a vacuum.

24. It was also pointed out that the UN-led cluster system could facilitate coordination between civilian and military actors. However, cluster meetings can vary in terms of their purpose and quality; while some take on strategic decision-making, others focus more on information sharing. Also, there have been instances of humanitarian agencies refusing to attend cluster meetings, if certain military actors were present. While military colleagues have tended to attend without recognising that cluster meetings are an opportunity not only to obtain information but also to share it. This highlights the necessity for not only better information sharing but also greater education of all parties involved in disaster relief efforts.

25. There was also a sense that better coordination requires early planning. It is particularly true in the case of logistics. One speaker pointed out that the UK armed forces, for example, subscribe to a six-step planning process that has time and again proved useful for them in deployments. Another speaker referred to extensive intelligence gathering that precedes military deployments to conflict areas, and queried whether there was a lack of similar investment in intelligence when deploying to a natural disaster-affected area.

26. There are a number of barriers to planning by and with civilian humanitarian actors. In the first place, humanitarian agencies by and large have a very different approach to planning and training, reflecting organisational culture. As one speaker put it, while humanitarian agencies 'plan a little, train even less, but do a lot', military actors tend to operate in exactly the opposite way, spending up to 95 per cent of their time in planning and training. Secondly, humanitarian agencies have different, and more limited, resources. Finally, humanitarian agencies have a different approach to finance and budgeting. They tend to carry out needs assessments and write appeals aspiring to persuade donors to fund activities on the basis of a humanitarian imperative. This tends to make it difficult for them to prioritise planning and preparedness exercises.

*Guidelines and doctrine*

27. There was general agreement that the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines are useful. However, as a number of speakers pointed out with reference to the case of Pakistan, they do not provide guidance on working with national (as opposed to foreign) military actors. Also, they are often not understood or difficult to operationalize at the field level. In recognition of that problem, OCHA is developing a handbook on the implementation of these guidelines to improve their application on the ground, which was welcomed at the Conference. One speaker also suggested that the profusion of guidelines and positions papers had contributed to inconsistency and confusion, and urged the humanitarian community to 'rationalise, update, consolidate, and communicate'.

28. Country-specific guidelines can help an UN-led Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) make more grounded decisions on difficult issues. In Haiti, the HCT has in 2011 agreed country-specific guidelines. These have the specific intention of trying to 'wean' humanitarian agencies off an over-reliance on military assets. However, countries with different security situations within their territory – such as Pakistan – may find that even these are not specific enough to guide decision-making. In Pakistan the country-specific guidelines took months to agree. There was also a lack of 'buy in' from national authorities, who felt that they had not been adequately consulted. Furthermore, there were concerns on the part of the government about the appropriateness of guidelines being developed by the international aid community on engagement with arms of the government that had a legitimate and primary responsibility for response. All the same, there was some agreement at the Conference that when guidelines are properly drafted with input and 'buy in' by all relevant actors, they can provide a useful starting point for coordination and communication. Critically, the end point is not the development of the guidelines but how they are then disseminated and used.

29. There was a suggestion that the time of drafting military doctrine can be an important moment for civilian humanitarian actors to input and influence. While the dedication to doctrine may vary across different military actors, it can be a good starting point. The military hierarchy can be very responsive if principles have been signed off from a higher level.

*The principle of last resort – or is it first resort?*

30. The Oslo and MCDA Guidelines promote what is commonly known as the principle of last resort. This is the notion that military assets should be used only as a last resort to support urgent humanitarian needs, based solely on humanitarian criteria, and under civilian leadership or returned

to civilian leadership as soon as possible. This principle is a central idea in the Guidelines and other documents governing the decision to use military assets. Yet, even among governments there is no one consistent way in which it is interpreted and implemented. For example, while the UK refers to the Oslo Guidelines, the US, Belgium, and the Netherlands interpret 'last resort' in terms of a request for assistance from OCHA; yet other countries do not refer to guidelines at all and make pragmatic decisions on a case-by-case basis.

31. Among humanitarian agencies, the idea is emotive and understood in a similarly poor way. It tends to be seen simply in terms of 'sending in the cavalry when everything else fails'. However, as one speaker pointed out, it was drafted to describe a planning and preparation process to ensure that the non-military alternatives had been properly examined ahead of resorting to the use of military assets; that civilian and military assets are compatible; that their use is based on a proper needs assessment; and that the military assets are unique (in terms of speed, specialisation, effectiveness, efficiency, and suitability).

32. Some suggest that the challenge is one about educating and communicating the idea effectively to all parties. However, as the discussion during the Pakistan panel in particular illustrated, the problem with the principle may run deeper. In a number of countries, including Pakistan, national military actors are integral to disaster preparedness and response plans and thus often deployed as the 'first resort'. Indeed, deploying appropriate assets in a timely and appropriate manner to a national disaster within one's borders is considered a sign of good governance.

*Decision-making and leadership*

33. It was acknowledged that military actors are deployed and act in response to direction from government, with recognition that political pressure to act means that there can be a tendency to use the military as a 'quick fix'. It is often the case that in the face of large-scale disasters, decision-makers are pushed to use what is available nearest, which includes military assets already stationed in or near the area for unrelated political or security reasons (for example, near Indonesia during the Asian tsunami response). The desire not to be 'caught on the back foot' means that military assets then tend to get deployed in quantities greater than is either required or requested, generating problems related to costs, efficiency, and effectiveness.

34. In both Haiti and Pakistan, decision-making and authority at different levels in the affected state altered the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In Haiti, while the central government had fallen victim to the earthquake, it was not necessarily a 'failed state' situation. There were a number of local mayors and even some ministries available to work in cooperation with humanitarian agencies during the response. In Pakistan, the experience was different. It had, and continues to have, a strong state and military authority structure. However, the exercise of authority at multiple levels can actually obstruct the work of aid agencies in contested areas. The question of humanitarian space is a daily struggle for some agencies operating in Pakistan. There are cases of humanitarian agencies gaining permission from the political authorities, but then being denied access by a military leader or a soldier at a checkpoint. The permissions can also change repeatedly and obstruct civilian humanitarian access.

*Accountability to beneficiaries and learning*

35. It was suggested by a number of speakers and commentators at the Conference that what mattered most was accountability to the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid efforts. One speaker contended that we should be judged *only* by the benefits to the people we aim to assist. If this is the case, then our evaluation frameworks and after-action methodology may need to shift substantially.

We should be judged on whether we deliver a quality service that is needs-based, impartial, accountable, sustainable, and builds local capacity.

36. Another speaker contended that the conversation on civil-military relations in natural disasters could not simply be 'a dialogue of the giants' (i.e., the military, the UN, and the NGO community). Time and space have to be made for the voices of beneficiaries in the planning, execution, and evaluation of disaster responses. Humanitarian agencies have taken a number of positive steps in that direction, and they continue to work towards the goal of much better accountability to beneficiaries.

37. Several speakers asserted that beneficiaries often do not care from whom, or how, they receive aid so long as they do. Yet others, however, disagreed, arguing that while it was true in some cases, there are other instances where beneficiaries – individuals and groups – care passionately about who gives and what kind of aid. At worst, aid can be withheld from populations by local commanders or the people delivering assistance can be attacked.

38. The case of food drops in Haiti was an oft-cited example of unaccountable aid. It was a failure to coordinate military assets with an assessment of humanitarian need. It is unclear how military actors can ensure accountability to populations on the ground. One speaker stated that though military actors collect lessons as a way of life, they often take the form of very long documents that might not be read in their entirety or widely shared. A way needs to be found to distil the learning into useful pieces of shareable information that is then disseminated to staff and new recruits, as well as outside civilian agencies and communities. There continues to be an issue of different 'sides' doing their own evaluations but not sharing or learning from each other, and also not doing this collectively. There were many at the Conference in favour of more joint evaluations and post-response reviews that involved a range of actors, including civilians, military actors, and local actors.

*The humanitarian imperative and the importance of diversity*

39. One speaker brought the audience back to a discussion about the humanitarian imperative. This is defined by different agencies in slightly different ways, but is a key humanitarian principle that is at the core of all humanitarian work. When there is an imminent threat to peoples' lives on a large scale, agencies may take different actions (such as request military assets or armed escorts) to deliver humanitarian relief with varying consequences. However, there will be ramifications for this, possibly for the acceptance the agency has at the community level with other groups, as well as the access *without* military assets in the medium- and long-term. There is an obvious moral dilemma here that needs to be negotiated in the field.

40. Negotiating access based on 'acceptance' by the population is an active approach to security management used by many humanitarian agencies to different degrees. It is used to ensure that the assistance is based on need and conducted in ways acceptable to the community. This ensures some degree of protection for staff, programmes, and communities involved with humanitarian relief, which may involve intense negotiations with governments and/or warring parties at various levels. The most successful of these initiatives may never be well-known or well-shared, and yet civilian humanitarian access may depend on them. The use of any military assets could jeopardise this acceptance-based approach.

41. While the civil-military conversation may at times seem like it is taking place between two distinct camps, there is in fact enormous diversity within the civilian humanitarian community and within and between military actors. While perhaps hard to categorise, this diversity can be an asset and arguably leads to access and more extensive services for the communities that we are all aiming to serve. At the same time, it is important for the civilian humanitarian community to recognise that it

is difficult (but not impossible) for hierarchically organised and command-based military actors to understand, navigate, and work with such diversity.

42. Whether the military actors are nationally-based or international forces also adds layers of complexity and cultural relativism. This places some onus on civilian actors to demonstrate the value of civilian diversity to military actors in order for it not to be seen as a barrier to communication and coordination. It also calls for the military to try and understand and gain comfort with the different approaches, constraints, and organisational cultures of civilian actors. Complex emergencies can at times seem like chaos, but underneath that first impression there can be a kind of 'controlled incoherence'. There are different actors working to different mandates and following different procedures. And, sometimes this is exactly what a fast-changing and complicated situation demands.

**Areas of Possible Convergence**

43. While consensus was not the goal of the Conference, it is possible to identify two areas around which the views of most converged.

*Dialogue and relationship-building*

44 The first centred on the need for communication and dialogue ahead of time. There was general agreement that it is possible neither to foresee every possible situation nor to plan for every contingency. It is possible, however, to foresee the need for dialogue and the value of that dialogue taking place ahead of time. This is both a way for actors to understand each other better and a way to plan without the distraction of exigent circumstances. Furthermore, disasters often strike suddenly and the situation on the ground can change rapidly. In such situations, pre-existing relationships can often stand in good stead in terms of facilitating coordination, communication, and problem solving and thereby more effective and efficient humanitarian action.

45. In a similar vein, one speaker made a suggestion in favour of joint, scenario-based training, pointing to the recent example of a simulation exercise organised in France that involved different government ministries, humanitarian agencies, and members of the media. While there are notoriously high levels of turnover in both the military and various humanitarian agencies, regular interaction can nonetheless help all 'sides' move beyond myths, assumptions, and dogma and forge mutual respect and understanding.

*Gathering and communicating evidence*

46. The second area of convergence was around valuing, listening, and understanding different actors' opinions, particularly of those affected by crises. While various humanitarian agencies and military actors may take different approaches to the provision of humanitarian relief, helping people whose lives are at risk lies at the core of their activities during a disaster response. What pattern, or how, civil-military relations should develop has to be informed by this core humanitarian imperative. This requires gathering information that places the focus on the beneficiaries of relief efforts; it also means sharing and communicating that knowledge with each other in a way that can be easily understood and applied by aid workers and soldiers alike on the ground. That in turn calls for, among others things, greater transparency and openness, and for continuation of the dialogue begun at this Conference on the part of all actors, civilian and military alike.

**Concluding Remarks**

47. It is possible to summarise some key ideas for 'the way forward' that emerged from the Conference as follows:

- There is a need for civilian and military actors alike to better understand each other, in term of the contributions that they can make to disaster relief together and the particular constraints under which each operates, bearing in mind the centrality of the humanitarian imperative in any crisis situation.

- There is a value in diversity both between and within the groups delivering aid; at the same time, there is an onus on each side to demonstrate the added value of that diversity and use it for the benefit of disaster-affected communities.

- Dialogue and relationship-building before, during, and after crises is vital to build mutual understanding and respect. Shared learning, including through joint reviews, evaluations, and simulation exercises, could be one useful way forward, both in terms of improving civil-military relations and of understanding the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts on all sides.

- Most discussions so far about civil-military relations have tended to be about the role of foreign military assets or international humanitarian relief. It needs to be explicitly recognised in further discussions about civil-military operations that national military actors and national authorities are often involved in humanitarian relief. There are issues related to decision-making and leadership, as well as coordination that will be distinct to them. Any country-specific guidelines will need to address these issues in order to be relevant and useful.

- It is incumbent on everyone involved in humanitarian relief to improve accountability to the populations that they aim to serve and to take practical steps towards that end. There is room to make our existing systems and accountability mechanisms better, as well as to learn from past and present operations. In the court of public opinion, and in the opinions of the people in the countries we work, this is very important to the legitimacy and acceptance of humanitarian assistance.

- Information and context analysis is as vital to planning and executing a response to natural disasters as it is for a complex emergency or any other military operation. Humanitarian relief, even in natural disasters without conflict, can have a powerful impact on local and national dynamics of power, violence, and peace. It is important to get the diagnosis right and act with sensitivity and humility.

- The conversation on humanitarian relief during natural disasters needs to be as wide-ranging as possible and involve diverse voices and perspectives, including those of many of the actors that were not present at this Conference. This includes representatives from the affected communities and private sector companies, as well as intermediary actors such as police and civil defence units that the term 'civil-military' can otherwise exclude but who can play a vital role in crises.

*This note was compiled by Amelia B. Kyazze and Kudrat Virk. Any views expressed or errors contained herein are the authors alone.*