

CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT

RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

ANNUAL REPORT

2023





Peter Biro

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Cover Photo: CIVIC / Hajer Naili

LETTER FROM SUSAN OSNOS, BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends and Supporters of CIVIC,

As we reflect on the events of 2023, we must acknowledge another year of profound suffering for civilians caught in conflicts around the world. From the escalating crises in Sudan and Gaza to the ongoing turmoil in regions like Yemen, Mali and Ukraine, communities caught in the crossfire define our mission.

Amidst these extraordinary challenges, however, there have also been signs of hope. Efforts to prevent the devastating impact of explosive weapons in populated areas have gained momentum, along with increased recognition of the need for concrete measures to mitigate civilian harm. The road to meaningful change and the implementation of these commitments demands CIVIC's sustained vigilance and advocacy.

In December, the Department of Defense (DoD) released the long-awaited DoD Instruction on Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response (CHMR DoD-I), a policy to overhaul and standardize how the United States prevents and, when necessary, responds to civilian harm in its military operations. The policy, which is the very first of its kind, reflects numerous civil society recommendations provided by CIVIC and the Protection of Civilians Working Group

In 2023, we witnessed the emergence of new conflicts and the deepening of existing ones, each leaving its own trail of human suffering and destruction. It is incumbent upon us, as advocates for the protection of civilians, to redouble our efforts in response to these crises especially after the world's attention has moved on.

At CIVIC, we are unwavering in our dedication to this cause. Our work takes us to the frontlines of conflict, where we apply our unique methodology of training, accountability, and community engagement to mitigate the effects of conflict on civilians. It is through your continued support and partnership that we are able to make a difference and apply the methods that we know have an impact.

As we look ahead to the challenges that lie before us, we know that our collective efforts have the power to effect change as we work toward a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict.

Thank you for helping us get there.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Sherer Osnos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Susan" being the most prominent.

Susan Osnos, CIVIC Board Chair



LETTER FROM UDO JUDE ILO, INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2023 was a significant milestone for CIVIC. We commemorated our 20-year anniversary and continued to honor the audacious dream of Marla Ruzicka to push for improved protection of civilians in conflict situations. Through her courage and determination, our founder ignited a movement that has redefined the way civilians are protected.

Last year, CIVIC's then Executive Director, Federico Borello, stepped down after nearly a decade of dedicated service in this role. Federico's leadership grew CIVIC's international profile and expanded the organization's footprint across continents.

While 2023 was a year of celebration and transition, it was also a difficult one on many fronts. I have felt privileged to lead CIVIC in this defining period and build upon the outstanding work of our colleagues over the years.

As the world experienced horrific wars and destruction in Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, Ethiopia, Nagorno Karabakh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, and elsewhere, we saw a significant toll in civilian casualties throughout the year. We were confronted with horrid images of the devastation in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel. In Africa, we witnessed a resurgence of military coups on the back of deteriorating economic fortunes and security situations. Unprecedented natural disasters in Syria, Türkiye, Libya, and Morocco reminded us of the vulnerabilities of our environment - particularly in Syria and Libya where armed conflicts exacerbate climate vulnerabilities.

It was not all bad news, as the world responded with increased awareness of the need to protect civilians in conflict. The events in Gaza spurred an unprecedented outcry and interest in the protection of civilians, especially among young people and civil society. Governments faced criticisms for failing to enforce international law and not doing enough to protect civilian lives. While the Security Council was paralyzed by politics, the moral voices of the General Assembly and other high-level UN officials were consistent in responding to conflicts, demanding respect for international law, and placing greater emphasis on the protection of civilians.

This has strengthened our resolve to be present in areas where civilians are harmed. In Ukraine, several of the communities in which we worked were able to take over the management of community protection groups independent of CIVIC, signaling ownership and sustainability of these initiatives. In Somalia, CIVIC was the only NGO to provide training to its National Army. Our team in the United States blazed the trail and provided leadership in holding the US government to account on its civilian protection obligations, but also provided critical technical support to key government agencies. Through our UN program, we provided thought leadership and constructive engagement on civilian protection issues. In Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, our voices were loud, and our network was constantly expanding with CIVIC being present and influential in major conversations around the protection of civilians.

Lastly, I am honored to recognize and express my deepest appreciation for the dedicated members of CIVIC's global team. Their relentless commitment has been pivotal in driving forward our mission and their collective efforts have not only made a tangible impact, but also served as a source of hope in times of crisis.

We owe these modest results to your continued support and partnership. Our commitment to a world where no civilian is harmed in conflict is unwavering and we thank you for supporting our mission.

Sincerely,



Udo Jude Ilo, Interim Executive Director



OUR MISSION

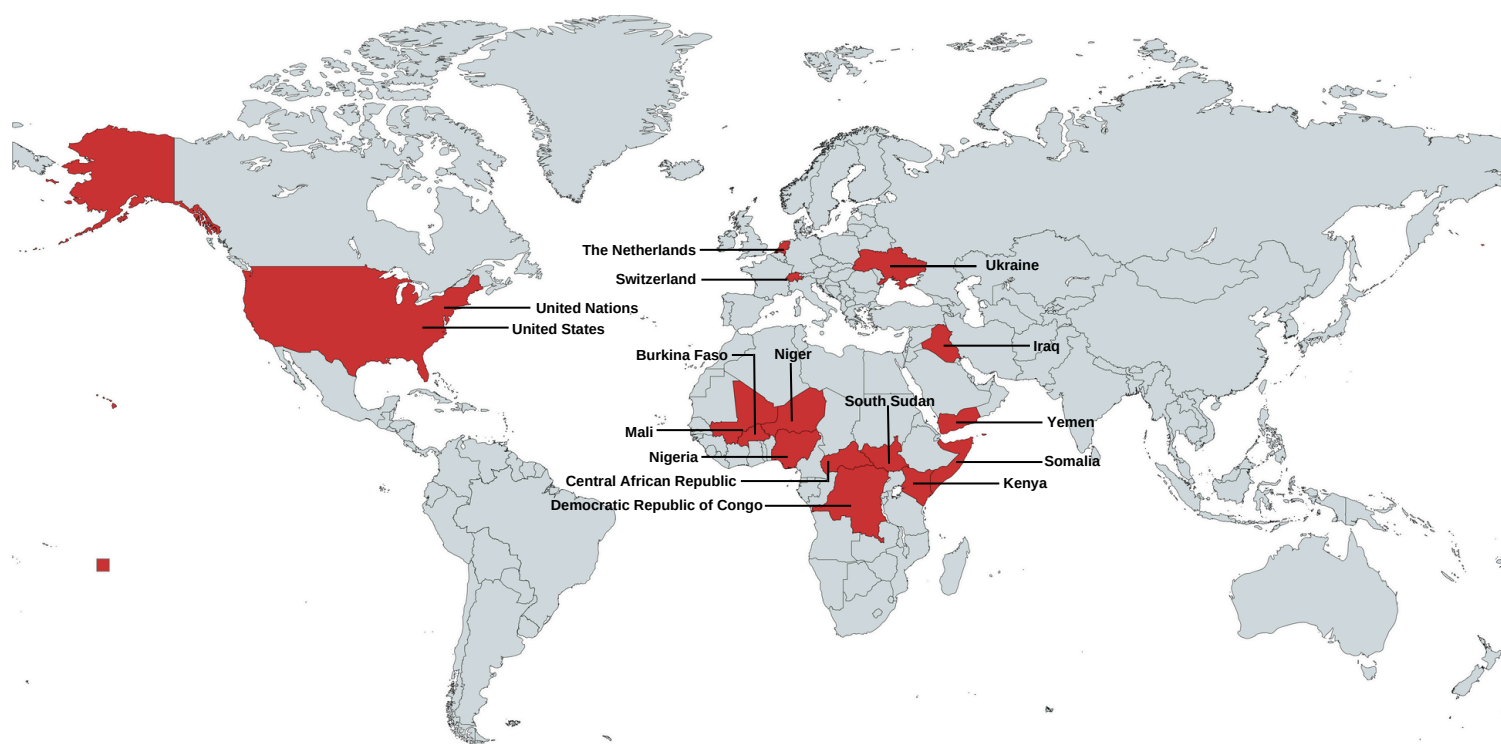
Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is a non-profit organization that strives for a world where no civilian is harmed in conflict.

There is nothing inevitable about civilian casualties in war. Civilian harm can be prevented, minimized, and remedied.



CIVIC / Hugh Kinsella Cunningham

WHERE AND HOW CIVIC WORKS



RESEARCH

CIVIC conducts in-depth research, speaking with victims and survivors and engaging with militaries. This allows us to develop pragmatic recommendations that can be implemented to reduce further harm to civilians and to properly respond when harm does occur.

ADVOCACY

Drawing from our research and field presence, we formulate recommendations for policymakers. We develop a detailed advocacy plan for every situation, reaching out to all parties who might positively influence the outcome we seek.

PROGRAMMING

A core CIVIC value is the belief that civilian harm is not inevitable in armed conflict. We work with communities to improve their protection and provide tools for them to engage with government, militaries and other stakeholders to ensure their needs are understood and met. We believe that communities in conflict know what is best for themselves and we support them in telling their stories.

20 Years Demanding Better Protection for Civilians in Conflict

In 2023, CIVIC commemorated 20 years of work to protect civilians in conflict. While it was an opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments and growth, we also recognize immense work remains if we are to live in a world where civilians in armed conflict are not harmed.

From Gaza to Sudan, Yemen to Ukraine, Somalia to Syria, civilians continue to bear the brunt of war and armed conflict. The world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since WWII and a quarter of the world's population – about two billion people – live in conflict-affected areas.



Honoring Marla Ruzicka's Legacy



CIVIC was founded by Marla Ruzicka in 2003 in response to the devastating harm to civilians caused by US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our founder refused to view civilian casualties as mere collateral damage or an unavoidable consequence of conflict. She was adamant that the US military minimize harm to innocent women, men, and children; keep a count of civilian casualties; and provide amends to injured civilians and their families, including compensation. Although Marla's life was cut short 18 years ago, her aspirations remain at the heart of our mission and work. CIVIC was honored to have Marla's mother, Nancy Ruzicka, attend a 20th-anniversary event in Washington, DC. Read how those who crossed paths with Marla remember her.

Launch of #NotCollateralDamage Campaign



In 2023, CIVIC launched the [#NotCollateralDamage campaign](#) to bring global attention to the plight of civilians around the world at a time of rising instability and increased disregard for international law. Echoing our organizational belief that civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of armed conflict, the campaign called on warring parties, countries, and governments as well as multilateral organizations to take action to prevent and reduce civilian harm. In 2024, CIVIC will continue raising awareness about the need to protect civilians in armed conflict and using the hashtag [#NotCollateralDamage](#) in its messages and public initiatives.



Global Failure to Protect Civilians

2023 was an appalling year for the protection of civilians, marked by sustained violations of international law, along with insufficient and often selective global attention to civilian harm. From Sudan to Gaza, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo – just to name a few – warring parties have failed to take sufficient precautions to protect civilian lives in accordance with their international obligations. In some cases, the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure appeared intentional.

At the same time, third parties have also failed to uphold the international system designed to protect civilians in armed conflict by undermining the international legal frameworks and institutions created to serve this purpose.

Permanent members of the UN Security Council, who bear the primary responsibility to maintain peace and international security, have themselves contributed directly and indirectly to civilian harm, including failing to act or acting selectively on protection crises.

Civilians continue to be threatened by the consequences of the widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), which has been a dominant feature in several armed conflicts, including Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza. The use of EWIPA causes disproportionate and indiscriminate harm to civilians, as well as the loss of critical facilities such as hospitals, water stations, and power plants. As a result, civilian populations have been deprived of essential services such as water, electricity, and medical care, while accessing humanitarian aid has become increasingly difficult and dangerous. Although more than 80 countries have signed the [Political Declaration](#) on strengthening the protection of civilians from the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of EWIPA, there is, as of yet, sparse evidence that countries are avoiding their use or better preparing to plan for or mitigate the consequences arising from their employment.

Security assistance providers, such as the United States, have also continued transferring explosive weapons and other arms to states violating international humanitarian law and human rights. The unconditional transfer of weapons to parties to conflict not only contributes directly to civilian harm, but also sends a signal of political support for harmful conduct.



New Wars, High Cost for Civilians

2023 was particularly marked by the eruption of two major armed conflicts: one in Sudan on April 15th and the other in Gaza between Israel and Palestinian armed groups on October 7th. Both conflicts have resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the displacement of millions of people.

These conflicts confirm an alarming trend of a rise in armed conflicts around the world, resulting in increased deaths, injuries, and long-term impacts on civilians. In 2022 alone, more than 238,000 deaths were recorded in global conflict, marking a 96 percent increase from the previous year, according to the [Global Peace Index](#).

By the end of the year, the UN [reported](#) that at least 12,000 people had been killed across Sudan. Reports of targeted killings in Darfur have raised fears of ethnic cleansing. As a result of the conflict, Sudan now faces the world's largest internal displacement crisis, with 9 million people internally displaced. Approximately 1.7 million more have fled to neighboring countries.

In Gaza, close to 30,000 deaths were [recorded](#) and more than 56,000 people injured. A complete siege imposed by Israel, coupled with relentless bombardment, has caused the displacement of more than two-thirds of the population (1.7 million out of 2.3 million people). The UN described Gaza as '[uninhabitable](#)' as a result of Israel's intense military campaign. Some experts [suggest](#) the Israeli military campaign is one of the deadliest and most destructive in history.

Both conflicts have continued in 2024 and have now resulted in some of the largest humanitarian crises in the world.



Tamil Guardian

Military Coups & Protection of Civilians

The military coup that took place in Niger on July 26th is the fifth such instance in the Central Sahel since 2020, following similar events in Mali (2020 and 2021) and Burkina Faso (January and September 2022). Although the reasons for the coups vary, the transitional authorities in all three countries cited the deteriorating security situation caused by armed opposition groups (AOGs) and community conflicts as the primary reason for the takeover.



Stuart Price

Unfortunately, the trends and data indicate that civilians are now at an even greater risk since the coups. According to [ACLED](#), Burkina Faso recorded its highest death toll in 2023 since the country's crisis began in 2015. In Niger, the month after the coup saw a 42 percent increase in violence, mainly due to continued AOG activity, organized banditry in the Maradi region, and inter-communal violence in the Tillabéri region, as soldiers stripped their positions in these areas to join Niamey at the call of the new military leaders.

The humanitarian crisis in the region is worsening due to the regional and international sanctions imposed after the coup. These sanctions threaten existing stabilization efforts, exacerbating the current crisis. Additionally, the coup has led to a restriction of civic engagement, resulting in an increase in human rights violations, limitations on freedoms, and harm to civilians. It has also resulted in a decline in the government's responsibility to protect civilians.

CIVIC is monitoring the situation to assess the consequences for civilian protection. In such crises, it is essential to provide support for community protection. Local communities have shown remarkable resilience in the face of such emergencies. Supporting their self-protection mechanisms is crucial. However, if donors continue to pivot away from these crises, they will continue to move away from civilians during their most significant moments of need. Finding innovative and alternative ways to engage with military authorities and support civilians in the Sahel remains as critical as ever.

Dis/misinformation and Civilian Protection

Although the use of disinformation in warfare is not new, the widespread availability of the internet and growing use of social media have dramatically accelerated the speed at which it can be spread. The World Economic Forum stated in a report that false and misleading information, supercharged with cutting-edge artificial intelligence, threatens to erode democracy and polarize society, posing the top immediate risk to the global economy.

In 2023, CIVIC began researching how misinformation and disinformation in armed conflict can affect civilian protection, focusing on the war in Ukraine. The research resulted in the publication of a [report](#) that found that much of the disinformation spread by Russian-affiliated actors has been targeted directly at Ukrainian civilians with the goal of influencing their behavior, often in ways that endanger their lives. The report also highlighted the challenges faced by governments, specifically the government in Ukraine, in preventing, limiting, and responding to tactical and hyper-local disinformation during times of conflict. CIVIC is increasingly tracking how tactical disinformation affects civilians in other countries where we work and emphasizes the need for multi-lateral actors to dedicate more resources to understand how to address this threat.



CIVIC / Roman Pilipey

In conflict settings, disinformation—alongside misinformation and hate speech—can undermine civilians' ability to access critical information needed to assess protection threats and make decisions about their well-being. It can also incite violence between community members or erode the social cohesion needed to restore or maintain peace.

Disinformation about humanitarian organizations can disrupt their efforts to deliver life-saving services to civilians or make it more difficult for civilians to access these services when they are available. Beyond physical harm, disinformation can inflict mental stress and suffering on civilians already exposed to many other potentially traumatic events.

In light of the growing use and threat of disinformation in conflict settings and the increased targeting of civilians with disinformation, armed actors should consider not only how to identify and counter misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech (MDH) that could impact their military operations, but also how to address MDH that could trigger physical and mental harm to civilians. Moreover, non-military protection actors, such as Global Protection Cluster members, will increasingly need to adjust protection monitoring mechanisms to consider how MDH are contributing to protection threats, and multi-lateral institutions should contribute to setting new norms that discourage the spread of harmful MDH. Social media platforms and their parent companies have a responsibility to invest resources in countering the spread of harmful MDH on their sites.

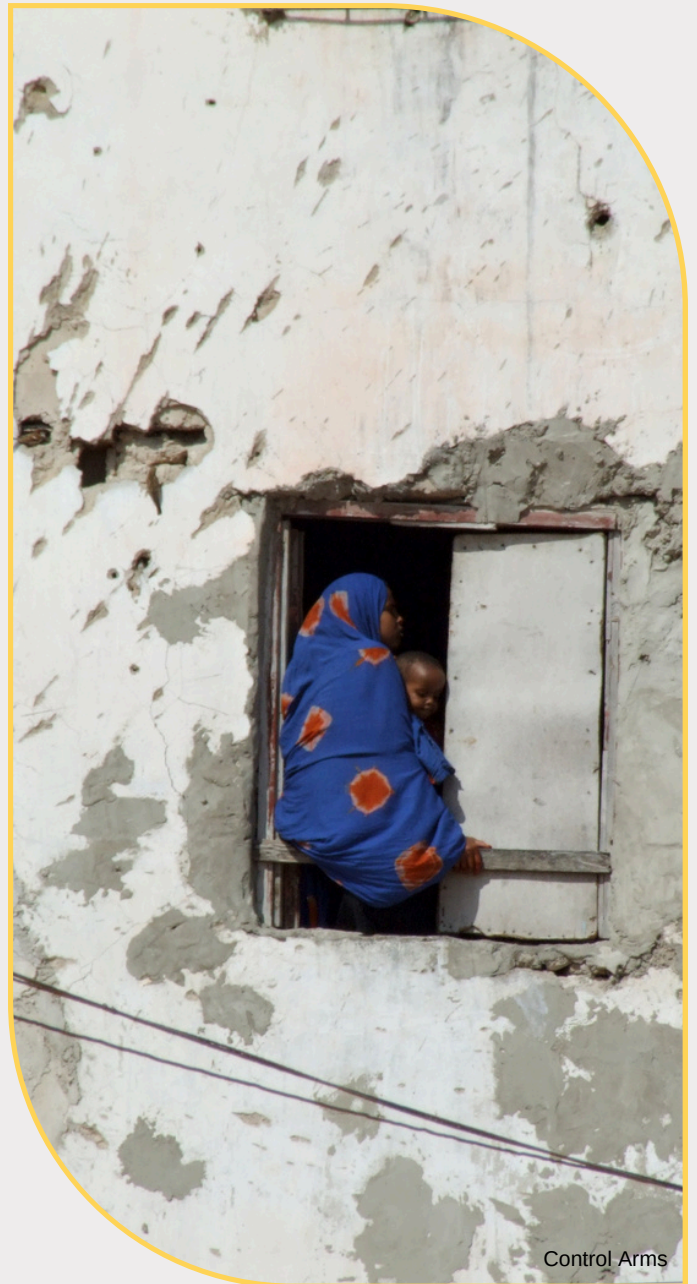
US Arms Transfers/Sales: Progress and Challenges

The United States is the world's largest arms exporter. Too often, weapons made in the United States are used to harm civilians in conflict or violate human rights. In 2023, CIVIC accelerated its work in the US advocating for transparency and accountability in US arms transfers. Our advocacy model combines sector-leading expertise, close relationships with civil society partners, and informed political strategies to effect real policy change and deliver results for civilians.

Early in the year, CIVIC publicly launched the Arms Sales Accountability Project (ASAP), a coalition of more than 25 diverse organizations focused on advocacy, research, and grassroots mobilization around US arms exports. Together, ASAP members have advocated for structural reforms to US arms transfer laws and policies to promote the protection of civilians, human rights, transparency, and accountability. ASAP members have engaged with the State Department, Defense Department, and Congress and developed informative public research on relevant law and policy. Our analysis has been featured by media outlets including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *CNN*, *HuffPost*, *Al Jazeera*, *Business Insider*, and other leading publications.

In February 2023, the Biden administration published a new Conventional Arms Transfer policy that significantly elevated human rights and civilian protection considerations in US arms transfers, reflecting CIVIC and coalition advocacy. In September 2023, the State Department announced the Civilian Harm Incident Response Guidance (CHIRG), a response to CIVIC and coalition advocacy on the need for monitoring whether and how US-origin weapons are used in human rights violations or civilian harm.

Despite progress in US policy on paper, the urgency of accountable arms transfer policies resurfaced in late 2023, as US arms transfers to Israel facilitated catastrophic levels of civilian harm in Gaza. In response to the crisis, CIVIC established a civil society working group focused on US arms transfers and civilian harm risks in Gaza. The working group has been a key organizing platform for research and advocacy efforts related to the crisis.



Control Arms

AFRICA

EAST AFRICA



East Africa and the Horn of Africa continued to experience protracted and low intensity armed conflicts such as in Somalia, northern Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and parts of Kenya throughout 2023. A new conflict opposing the Sudan Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces also erupted in Sudan in April, becoming one of the deadliest conflicts of the year with more than 12,000 people killed and the forced displacement of 6.6 million people, according to the United Nations. Fears of an ethnic genocide in Darfur have risen as reports of unlawful killings and sexual violence and rape of women and girls have emerged. CIVIC also conducted several activities along the Kenya-Somalia border, in Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to prevent, minimize, and respond to civilian harm in places of armed conflict.

In Wajir and Lamu along the Kenya-Somalia border, CIVIC developed activities to engage civilians with the aim of creating dialogue and restoring trust with the military and security forces. On these occasions, civilians organized as Community Protection Groups (CPGs), comprised of individuals from different clans to ensure full representation, laid out protection issues arising from military and security operations, and both sides worked together to identify solutions to minimize them. Involving youth in the identification of protection issues and the design of

solutions was also identified by CIVIC as a critical need, and therefore, we partnered with the Somali Youth Development Network to train its members on protection issues and engagement with military and security forces.

In Somalia, CIVIC conducted training to sensitize the national armed forces and state-aligned militias on key concepts of protection of civilians and civilian harm mitigation (POC/CHM). The training targeted troops mobilized to fight the armed group Al-Shabab. Similar training sessions targeted state-aligned militias in Dhusamareeb, Beletweyne, and Adale, as well. State-aligned militias, also called community militias, were created to support Somalia's Armed Forces in their fight against Al-Shabaab. Having access to community militias and training them on civilian harm mitigation (CHM) was a critical achievement for CIVIC, as these militias that had received no prior training, were able to learn how to distinguish between civilians and combatants as well as take all necessary measures to protect civilians during hostilities, among other protection tools and tactics.

CIVIC also conducted training sessions on civilian protection and CHM for troops of the East African Community Regional Forces deployed in Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The aim was to enhance their understanding and the need to protect civilians as a force multiplier in their effort to promote security and lasting peace in the Great Lakes region.

“This training is going to reduce - and even eliminate - the mistakes that happened before from the SNA (Somali National Army). I now understand that the overall objective is protecting civilians who are not directly involved in conflict.”

Soldier in Somalia Armed Forces deployed in Dhusamareb

“I have attended many trainings before on application of the laws of war, but today I have received training on the practical application and learned that civilian harm should never be ignored.”

Deputy Chief of Staff, East African Community Regional Force

Impact on the Ground

- 5 POC/CHM training sessions were conducted by CIVIC East Africa in 2023
- 386 soldiers of the SNA mobilized to fight Al-Shabaab received training in POC/CHM
- 216 members of community militias received training in POC/CHM
- 742 civilians organized in Community Protection Groups were engaged in a variety of activities aimed at identifying protection issues and designing solutions
- 106 EACRF troops deployed in Goma and across the DRC received training in POC/CHM

NIGERIA



EU / Samuel Ochai

In 2023, CIVIC pursued strategic engagement with key supporters of the protection of civilians, including the National Human Rights Commission, the Chief of Defence Staff, and the Solicitor General of the Federation. CIVIC seized the opportunity during the election of a new presidential administration to push for policy reform centered on the protection of civilians. Nigeria has yet to adopt and implement the Protection of Civilian policy. This policy, for which CIVIC has been calling, would provide a more robust framework for civilian protection amidst the complex and evolving challenges posed by armed factions, potentially reducing harm to civilians significantly.

CIVIC also made strides in community-based protection efforts, addressing misconduct by security personnel. In Dikwa, reports surfaced of a soldier allegedly extorting civilians at a checkpoint leading to farmlands. CIVIC's Community Protection Committees (CPCs) reported the incident, prompting a thorough investigation by the commanding officer. As a result, the soldier was demoted and barred from participating in civilian-led activities.

Similarly, in Konduga, concerns were raised by civilians facing threats from Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs), hindering their access to farmlands. In response, the Nigerian military launched an operation to dislodge AOGs from the area, ensuring farmers could safely harvest their produce.

Moreover, years of CIVIC's advocacy culminated in establishing Nigeria's first national mechanism, the Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell (CCTARC), within the 7th Division of the Nigerian Army. This pioneering initiative empowers the military to systematically track, analyze, and respond to instances where civilians may be harmed during military operations, marking a significant step forward in safeguarding civilian well-being.



CIVIC

SAHEL



Ed Kashii

Despite the challenging year experienced in the Sahel, CIVIC demonstrated flexibility and innovation in adapting to the changing environment. The coups in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso had a significant impact on programming in the region, prompting donors to halt activities and review their strategies. However, through thoughtful engagement with stakeholders, CIVIC continued to advance civilian protection strategies.

In Burkina Faso, CIVIC collaborated with a group of six civil society organizations (CSOs) to develop their advocacy priorities and elaborate an approach to protecting civilians in the region. This was done using the [CIVIC POC Evaluation Framework](#) developed in 2022. Through dialogue with Burkinabe military leaders, the CSOs addressed issues related to the protection of civilians, resulting notably in the creation of the Brigade of Volunteers to Defend the Fatherland (BVDP) in June 2022. The establishment of the BVDP sought primarily to address the number of civilian casualties caused by the Volunteers to Defend the Fatherland (VDP), an armed self-defense group created to fight violent extremist groups. The BVDP is attached to the National Theater Operations Command and manages the VDP in various communes across Burkina Faso.

While the BVDP was established in 2022, CIVIC began to see mitigation efforts take shape in 2023 with, for instance, the CSO consortium providing feedback on a VDP code of conduct.

In 2023, CIVIC conducted a study on opportunities and challenges to the protection of civilians in Tillabéri, western Niger. The [report](#) highlighted worrisome trends, such as the rise of armed non-state actors who have emerged without state presence.

CIVIC and MISAHÉL (African Union Mission to the Sahel) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will enable a closer partnership between the two organizations on matters related to POC. This MOU will establish connections between CIVIC and the African Union Peace and Security Commission, facilitating further collaboration with the continental body to advance the protection of civilians in Africa.

Unfortunately, as a result of the military coup in Niger in July 2023, efforts to develop civilian harm tracking capabilities within the Nigerien Armed Forces were interrupted. In late 2022, an MOU was signed between the FAN (Nigerien Armed Forces) and CIVIC. Following the signing, a working group was formed to begin the process. CIVIC provided advice and support for this initiative. An assessment process was designed and was about to commence when the coup occurred, halting these activities.

“This training convinced me that the difficult situation in Burkina Faso has worsened due to a lack of recognition of the dangers caused to civilians in the conflict.”

”

A member of Burkina Faso’s Security and Defence Forces
who attended a training on civilian harm mitigation

EUROPE

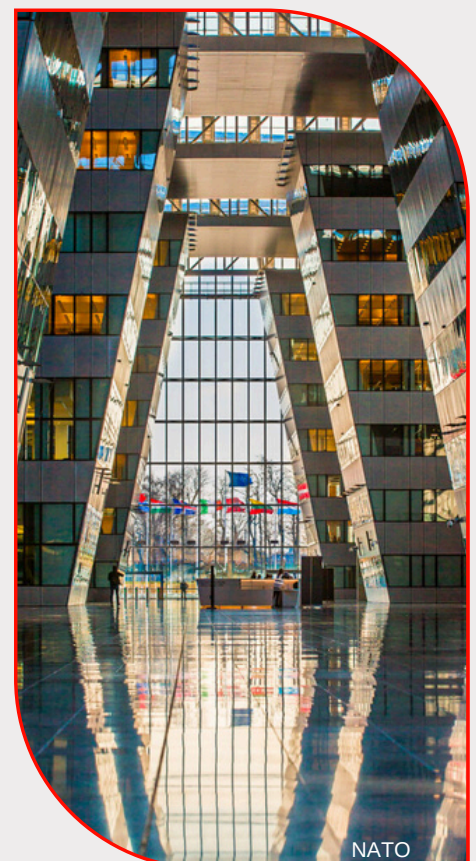
Throughout 2023, CIVIC pursued its advocacy efforts across Europe to change and/or reinforce policies and practices in order to prioritize the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Over the years, CIVIC has strengthened its engagement with NATO, and in 2023, it resulted in an increased recognition by the North Atlantic Alliance of the importance of civilian harm mitigation in all types of its operations, from territorial defense to crisis management and urban warfare. For the first time in 2023, non-governmental organizations, including CIVIC, were also included in an exercise from the STEADFAST JUPITER series to test the Alliance's readiness to respond to an attack on its territory. Partly due to CIVIC's input, the scenario included centralized reporting on civilian casualties and engagement with high levels of command on mitigating civilian harm.

CIVIC, alongside other NGOs, also provided inputs to increase attention on civil environment in the new NATO's Operational Concept on Multi-Domain Operations in the Urban Environment. Finally, CIVIC was also asked by NATO's Headquarters to provide recommendations on the ways in which the Alliance could support measures for the protection of civilians in Ukraine.

Within the EU, CIVIC – in coalition with other NGOs – advocated for key issues to be reflected in the new Civilian CSDP Compact, including a commitment to human rights due diligence, adherence to International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, prioritizing the protection of civilians, addressing security challenges stemming from climate change, and a commitment to a regular, structured dialogue with civil society. The Compact is a key instrument of the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy.

As a member of a coalition of NGOs, CIVIC supported efforts at the Dutch Ministry of Defense (MOD) to develop a Civilian Harm Mitigation Roadmap process. This initiative is aimed at revising the Netherlands' approaches to civilian harm mitigation (CHM) and response in crisis response operations. Through our and our partners' engagement, the Ministry of Defense of the Netherlands committed to adopt a wider definition of civilian harm and create a reporting mechanism for affected civilians. The Roadmap process is also being internationalized, with the Dutch MOD and the US Departments of State and Defense creating an international Contact Group on Civilian Harm Mitigation, which now involves over a dozen countries and meets regularly to consult on stronger protection mechanisms.



UKRAINE

In 2023, the death toll in Ukraine reached a grim milestone, surpassing at least 10,000 civilians according to the UN figures. Daily, numerous communities – where residents still reside – continued to face missile attacks.

CIVIC's operations in Ukraine in 2023 were a blend of strategic successes and adaptive responses to challenges, marked by significant institutional growth and impactful contributions to civilian and military protection efforts in Ukraine.

Our Protection Team's establishment of seven Community Protection Groups across two regions significantly enhanced local safety and preparedness. These groups, engaging 311 participants with balanced gender representation, facilitated 28 community meetings central to crafting and executing local protection strategies, and boosting community safety and preparedness. Additionally, the Local Initiatives Fund supported 12 local projects reaching over 23,000 people, directly addressing the protection needs of civilians, particularly the most vulnerable groups.

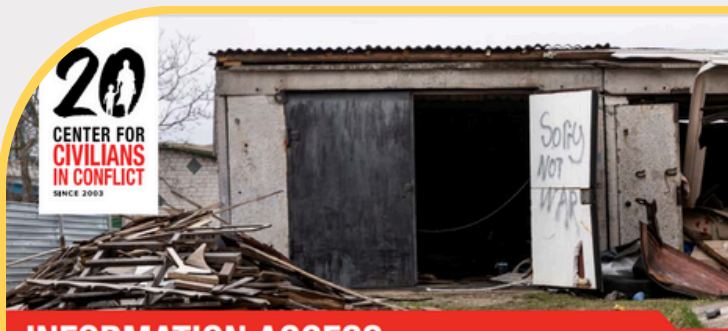
Our training programs achieved noticeable results, with 21 sessions on civilian protection and negotiation skills for 345 officers, and specialized training for 161 civilians on critical security matters. One of our key milestones was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Kyiv National University's Military Institute, which has contributed to strengthening our collaboration with the Ukrainian military for better protection outcomes.

The constantly changing security environment in Ukraine posed significant constraints on external military training. Yet, the high demand for CIVIC's expertise in the country led to the integration of our training within the Armed Forces Ukraine Mobile Training Team, thus reaching hundreds of military personnel at their stations. Through this innovative approach, CIVIC's training on preventing, mitigating, and responding to civilian harm in conflict reached military personnel even under challenging circumstances.



CIVIC / Daniel Brown

In 2023, CIVIC published four research reports focused on different aspects of the protection of civilians in Ukraine: "Self-Protection in Practice: Ukrainian Efforts to Avoid Harm During the Russian Invasion", "Information Access: A Self-Protection Shield for Civilians In Ukraine", "When Words Become Weapons", "The Role of Civil-Military Cooperation in Protection of Civilians".



INFORMATION ACCESS: A Self-Protection Shield for Civilians in Ukraine

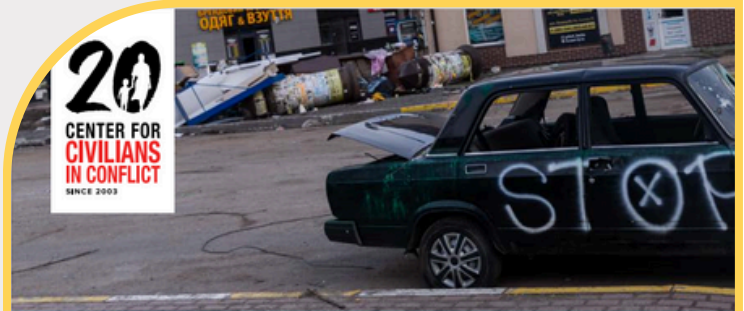
ABOUT CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict. Our mission is to support communities affected by conflict in their quest for protection and strengthen the resolve and capacity of armed actors to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla's legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflict zones and key capitals throughout the world where it collaborates with civilians to bring their protection concerns directly to those in power.

OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to information in civilians' ability to protect themselves and their communities in conflict. Research has shown that information is an essential need, which helps make decisions, access resources, and hold actors accountable. So, access to information is the first step in the United Nations' 'Do No Harm' framework.



SELF-PROTECTION IN PRACTICE: Ukrainian Efforts to Avoid Harm During the Russian Invasion

ABOUT CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT

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I. OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The civilian toll resulting from the armed conflict in Ukraine in 2022—has been devastating. It has included indiscriminate warfare, critical infrastructure targeted for civilians' safety, and tactics that have been used to occupy and control territory.



THE ROLE OF CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION IN THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS:

The Ukraine Experience



WHEN WORDS BECOME WEAPONS:

The Unprecedented Risks to Civilians from the Spread of Disinformation in Ukraine

MIDDLE EAST

IRAQ



CIVIC / Matt Longmore

Although CIVIC's program in Iraq ended in 2022, the Community Protection Groups (CPGs) and Champions Advocacy Group (CAG) that CIVIC established continue to advocate for their communities' most essential protection challenges. The CPGs and CAG have utilized the tools and connections to leaders in their communities and governorates to push for the inclusion of women in security forces and for their consideration of meaningful roles that can transform how security forces interact with civilians. They have also worked towards ensuring that displaced individuals who have returned to their areas of origin are accepted and reintegrated into their host communities. Furthermore, they have addressed climate-related protection challenges and used the CIVIC-established referral approach (in coordination with local and international organizations) to support the returnees and the most vulnerable groups.

In early 2023, CIVIC held discussions with the community-based protection structures – the CPGs and CAG – that it had set up and facilitated throughout previous years, to explore efforts that support their sustainability without CIVIC intervention.



Getty Images

YEMEN



Peter Biro / EU

The situation in Yemen remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with numerous armed groups, a collapsing economy, and the looming threat of war. CIVIC continued to address and resolve protection needs at the community level and through engagement with government officials, and military and security forces.

In 2023, CIVIC effectively expanded its operations and geographical reach to six governorates across Yemen where it provided training to 1,000 members of security and military personnel on civilian harm mitigation. Additionally, the organization supported at least two policies civilian protection, which included the development of a code of conduct policy for the security and defense forces and an action plan for creating weapons-free zones.

Our approach also involves the active involvement of local communities affected by violence. In 2023, CIVIC granted small funds to civil society and community-based organizations in Yemen to advance the protection of civilians through advocacy. These grants resulted in the establishment of a platform aimed at supporting youth activism for peace and inclusion, a child protection electronic platform to share information on protection issues children face, and a "Charter of Honor" between communities and security forces aimed at limiting and preventing the carrying of weapons in Taiz governorate.

In 2023, CIVIC also supported Community Protection Groups (CPGs) with the launch of successful initiatives. These initiatives included the release of dozens of people who had been arbitrarily detained by armed groups, the removal of security personnel from checkpoints where they had been causing harm to civilians, and the vacating of the Ghubaira Technical Institute, located in Al-Muwaset District in Taiz governorate, by armed actors who had been occupying the facility since 2025.

CIVIC also partnered with the Executive Unit for the Management of IDP Camps in the Republic of Yemen to establish the formation of an Early Warning Department. The department's creation was suggested by CIVIC-supported CPGs in Marib to help mitigate risks to civilian protection and concerns in conflict areas and frontlines. The objective is to facilitate safety and security and to put in place effective measures for humanitarian response coordination.

"Never in my life did I think I could sit with the military and explain what is needed to be safe - and yet, thanks to CIVIC, I can do this for myself, my family, and my community. Now I have established such a relationship with the military and security forces that when community protection issues arise, I go directly to them and resolve matters without needing CIVIC's direct support. I feel empowered. I feel strong. I feel as if there is a falcon on my shoulders."

A Yemeni woman and member of the CIVIC-supported CPGs

RESEARCH, LEARNING, INNOVATION

Throughout the year, CIVIC's Research, Learning, and Innovation (RLI) unit worked to strengthen the organization's practice in specific areas of work where it has significant experience: for example, by focusing on localization and protection analysis in CIVIC's support to civilian protection groups (CPGs) in places like Yemen, Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, and the Sahel.

Staff within RLI also undertook analysis and research on thematic issues that increasingly pose a threat to civilians in the countries where CIVIC works, including climate change, disinformation, and the deployment of artificial intelligence in warfare.

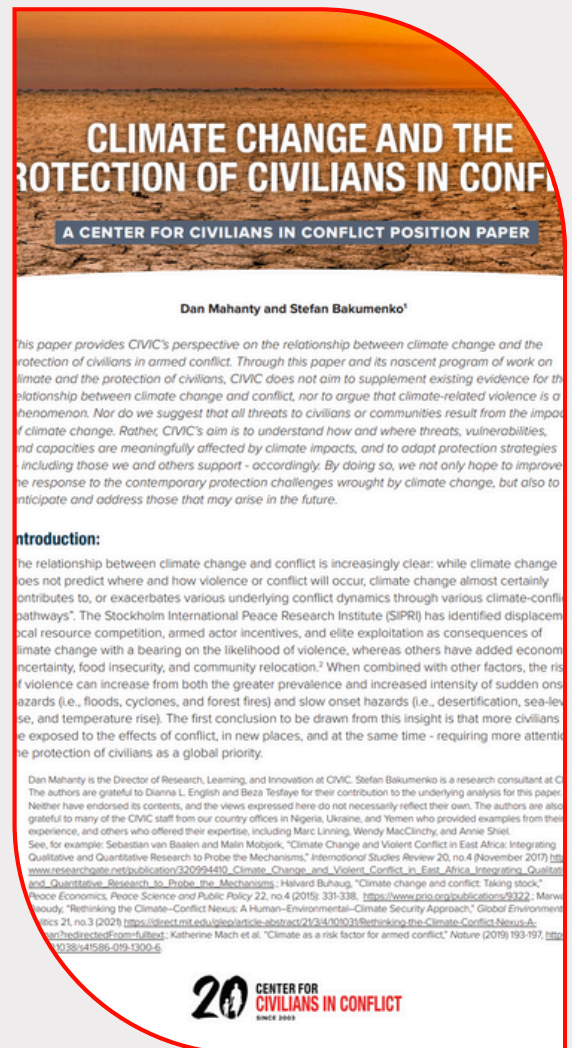
Specifically, RLI built on research conducted in 2022 into the impact of climate change in Yemen and Iraq to develop a framework for integrating climate change into CIVIC's programs and activities more broadly. CIVIC published a policy brief outlining the organization's perspective on the link between Climate Change and the Protection of Civilians. Additionally, the RLI unit supported research on the UN's response to climate-related protection concerns in South Sudan.

In 2023, RLI also deployed its Senior Research Advisor to Kyiv to lead a research project with the Ukraine country office to assess the impact of disinformation on the well-being of Ukrainian civilians following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

This resulted in a 64-page report containing 26 recommendations including to the governments of Russia and Ukraine, as well as social media and tech companies. The research concluded that much of the disinformation that Russian-affiliated actors have spread has been targeted directly at Ukrainian civilians with the goal of influencing their behavior and was often done so in ways that endanger civilian lives.

The RLI unit also led efforts to ensure gender was incorporated fully into CIVIC's work, and undertook learning activities to evaluate programming and to consolidate or expand staff knowledge in key areas related to protection of civilians.

In 2023, RLI's staff members began developing a digital training tool to enhance CIVIC's protection analysis capacity. Located on the online learning platform Kaya, it will offer an opportunity for CIVIC staff (and potentially protection sector peers in the future) to more thoroughly apply and integrate protection analysis into their programs.



UNITED NATIONS

In 2023, CIVIC pushed to advance civilian protection by conducting advocacy targeting legislative processes, policy development, organizing events at the United Nations, and producing research publications primarily on the role of UN peacekeepers in protecting civilians.

CIVIC successfully influenced the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) mandate, including on the prioritization of Protection of Civilians (POC), community liaison assistants, and early warning and rapid response systems. CIVIC also influenced the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) annual report, including on gender, civil society inclusion, and transitions. Finally, CIVIC influenced the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) termination resolution, including on freedom of movement and the Malian authorities' continued primary responsibility to protect civilians, despite the sudden demand for a premature withdrawal of the mission by the government of Mali. CIVIC achieved this impact by conducting bilateral meetings and distributing advocacy briefs.

In May, CIVIC co-organized the annual UN's Protection of Civilians Week 2023, with UN OCHA, the Permanent Mission of Switzerland, and - for the first time - the Permanent Mission of Belgium. Record attendance reflected the growing influence of the week as the number of violent conflicts around the world is the highest ever recorded since WWII. CIVIC held three events on private military security contractors, mis/disinformation, and peacekeeping with Member States, UN and civil society partners. CIVIC was also represented by the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) in a fourth event on explosive weapons. Throughout these events, CIVIC mobilized POC stakeholders, offered concrete, evidence-based policy recommendations, and raised civil society voices.

With UN Peacekeeping Missions facing hostilities from national stakeholders and some forced to withdraw such as in Mali and Sudan, the risks of significant harm to civilians through a deterioration of the security, humanitarian, and human rights situation increased. CIVIC actively worked with stakeholders to advocate for transitions that minimized threats to the protection of civilians. To that effect, CIVIC produced a research publication 'Integrated United Nations Approaches to Protection During Peacekeeping Transitions: Lessons Learned from MONUSCO', using the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a case-study to highlight how integration between UN actors can reduce risks. A high-level launch event was held with the Permanent Mission of Ireland. The Policy Brief was based on research conducted in the field and remotely with stakeholders ranging from the UN to civilians. CIVIC succeeded in conducting its research despite hurdles connected to safety, security, and access.



CIVIC / Matt Longmore

In New York, Geneva, and beyond, CIVIC continued to be recognized as a global civil society leader on protection of civilians and civilian harm mitigation, including by current and former UN Security Council members, UN Member States, UN officials and other stakeholders. In 2023, CIVIC organized numerous events and participated in dozens of forums, conferences, seminars, and summits. These included the UN General Assembly High Level Week, a UN Peacekeeping Ministerial preparatory conference on Protection of Civilian and Strategic Communications, Geneva Peace Week, Berlin Climate Security Conference, ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, Global Protection Forum, and the Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping, among others.

CIVIC also forged new and expanded research partnerships including with the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, a diverse coalition of expert researchers, the Rift Valley Institute and a network of local researchers in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and through an Applied Research Program with the Geneva Graduate Institute on “Protecting Civilians When Disaster and Conflict Coincide.”

“Transition isn’t anything new for us, but reading it in a succinct, academic, policy advisory type of product is very useful.”

”

MONUSCO official, February 2023



UNITED STATES

In 2023, the United States continued to use force around the world and provided significant security assistance and arms to governments engaged in conflict globally, including Ukraine and Israel. CIVIC continued to advocate for the adoption and implementation of US laws and policies to protect civilians in US operations and address the risk of civilian harm in US security cooperation activities.

As the supplier of more weapons than the next four countries combined, the United States often transfers weapons that contribute to civilian harm and fuel conflict. With support from the Open Society Policy Center, the CIVIC-led Arms Sales Accountability Project (ASAP) advocated for stronger civilian protection and human rights safeguards in US arms transfers. In February 2023, the Biden administration published a new Conventional Arms Transfer policy that significantly elevated human rights and civilian protection considerations in US arms transfers. In September 2023, the State Department announced the Civilian Harm Incident Response Guidance (CHIRG), a response to CIVIC and its partners' advocacy on the need for monitoring of how and whether US-origin weapons are used in human rights violations or civilian harm. In 2024, CIVIC will push for stronger and more consistent implementation of these policies as well as their codification in US law through the passage of bills such as the SAFEGUARD Act.

In December 2023, the US Department of Defense released the long-awaited Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction on Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response (CHMR DoD-I), a policy to overhaul and standardize how the United States prevents and responds to civilian harm in its military operations. The policy, which is the first of its kind, reflects numerous civil society inputs and recommendations provided by CIVIC and the Protection of Civilians Working Group. The DoD also released revisions of the DoD Law of War Manual reflecting civil society calls for alignment with international legal standards around the presumption of civilian status in targeting and additional details on feasible precautions. In 2024, CIVIC will work to ensure robust implementation of DoD civilian protection policies, including by pushing for the rigorous investigation and provision of amends for past cases of civilian harm.



CIVIC / Matt Longmore

Donors & Supporters

CIVIC is grateful for the partnership of governments, multilateral institutions, foundations, corporations, and individual donors. The support we have received over the past 20 years from so many who believe a world in which no civilian is harmed is possible cannot be understated. Last year also reinforced the importance of our mission as new and ongoing conflicts continue to cause human suffering.

Thank you to the individuals and institutions who have donated in support of civilians in conflict around the world. On this page, you will find a list of our supporters for the 2023 fiscal year (January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023) who gave generous gifts of \$1,000 or more.

Foundations and Corporations

- The Caldera Foundation
- The Countess Moira Charitable Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Open Society Policy Center
- The Bernard & Sandra Otterman Foundation
- Sida
- UBS Optimus Foundation
- Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

Governments and Multilaterals

- Canada: Global Affairs Canada (Ukraine)
- Denmark: Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Norway: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sahel)
- European Union: Service for Foreign Policy Instrument (Ukraine//Nigeria/East Africa)
- European Union: Directorate-General for International Partnerships (Sahel)
- Ireland: Department of Foreign Affairs (UN)
- Netherlands: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (East Africa, UN, Yemen)
- Switzerland: Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Sahel/UN)
- United Kingdom: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (Nigeria)

Individuals

- Amy Towers
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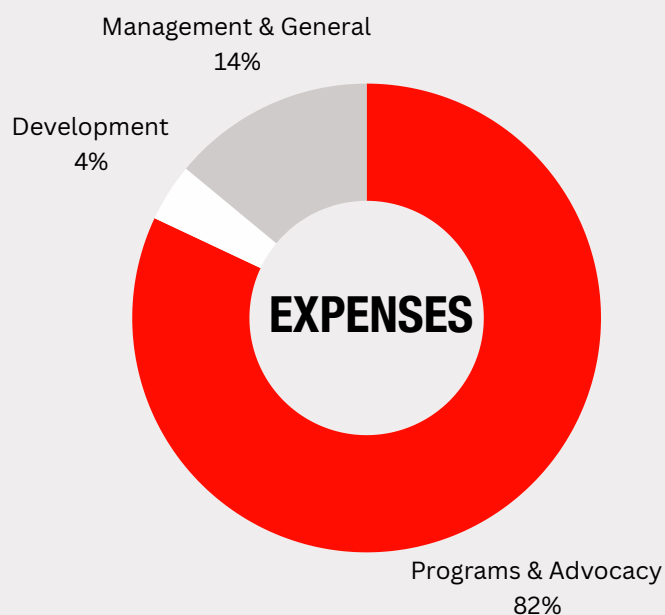
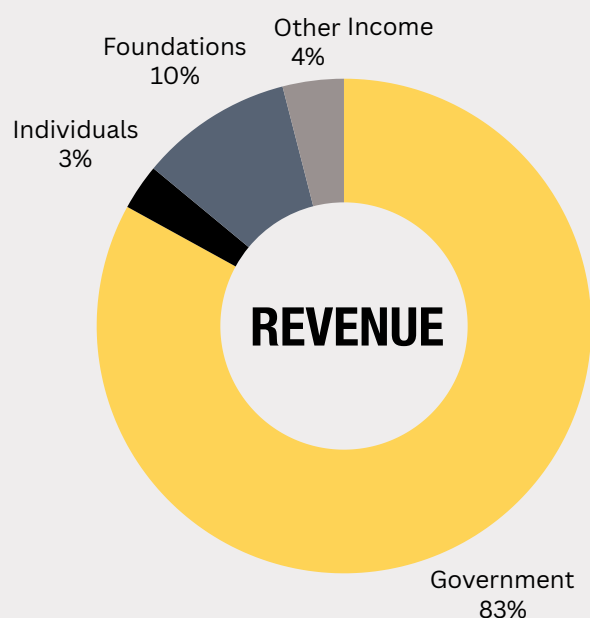
2023 FINANCIAL INFORMATION



ICRC

STATEMENT OF FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

CATEGORY	PROGRAMS & ADVOCACY	DEVELOPMENT	MANAGEMENT & GENERAL	TOTAL
Salaries & Benefits	\$6,243,546	\$342,221	\$901,968	\$7,487,734
Consultants	947,960	81,053	484,586	1,874,531
IT	110,159	7,397	8,642	132,634
Meetings & Conferences	448,690	-	-	448,690
Other Expenses	790,183	4,895	14,326	212,842
Rent & Utilities	293,444	-	231,282	696,991
Supplies & Equipment	280,033	12,378	51,388	382,073
Travel	1,037,589	3,736	25,043	1,085,020
TOTAL	\$10,151,604	\$451,680	\$1,717,234	\$12,320,518



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION *

ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$6,243,546
Accounts Receivable	947,960
Contributions Receivable	110,159
Prepaid Expenses	448,690
ROU Asset - Operating	790,183
Property & Equipment - Net	95,561
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 7,929,623

LIABILITIES

Accounts Payables & Accrued Expenses	\$275,892
Refundable Advances	3,377,367
Operating Lease Liability	677,688
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$ 3,720,947

NET ASSETS

Beginning	\$6,239,197
Change in Net Assets	(2,030,521)
	\$4,208,676

TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$7,929,623
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* Preliminary unaudited financial information as of 31 December 2023



**CENTER FOR
CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT**
SINCE 2003

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