



# OCHA

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
Response Support Branch – Coordination Division  
Civil-Military Coordination Service**

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**Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord) Operational Guidance for  
Appropriate Interaction with Armed Actors in the Context of the COVID-19 Response v1.0**

*This Operational Guidance complements country-specific guidance where it exists and considers lessons observed from the SARS outbreak in 2002-2003 and the Ebola outbreak of 2014, amongst others. This operational guidance will be continuously updated as the situation evolves.*

1. Armed actors<sup>1</sup> are or will likely be involved in an affected government's response to COVID-19 in a number of ways. This operational guidance provides practical approaches to navigating humanitarian operating environments where:
  - a. domestic armed actors are responding to COVID-19 as part of the government's efforts,
  - b. where peacekeeping forces and/or foreign armed actors (military and/or police) may possess unique capacity to support humanitarian requirements,
  - c. combinations of the above.
2. The primary consideration for engaging with armed actors in relation to the COVID-19 response is to analyze the risks and benefits of the engagement and identify potential unintended secondary and tertiary effects to both short- and long-term perceptions on the overall humanitarian response. This is particularly true for humanitarian operations in conflict settings.
3. Militaries and armed actors are increasingly acting as first responders for national authorities in response to the COVID-19 emergency. Militaries could be tasked by national leadership to: **maintain law and order** on land and at sea during instances of lockdown and border closure; provide **engineering support** for emergency construction requirements; provide **logistics and transport** of essential goods and services (including medevac); provide **health care and medical support** to national authorities through personnel, medical equipment and facilities and PPEs; establish **communications**; and conduct **aerial assessments** of population movements in contained areas, amongst other traditional and non-traditional roles in support of national authorities.
4. Appropriate **liaison arrangements** need to be established or maintained at all relevant levels to sustain effective **information sharing** to maintain common situational awareness between humanitarian and relevant armed actors; identify constraints and limitations in the response; determine who is doing what, where, when and how at different levels; and coordinate to ensure that planned activities are not duplicative or contradictory and will not generate potential unintended negative secondary and tertiary effects in both the short and long term.

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<sup>1</sup> Armed actors include a country's armed forces and its different branches, police forces at national or sub-national levels, Civil Defense organizations that perform security-related functions, quasi-military organizations, police units that perform military functions, government militia and foreign military forces from UN and Hybrid Peacekeeping Forces and other armed actors that may have a role in the COVID-19 response

### **Global Level Actions**

5. The nature of the pandemic and subsequent global response maintains the characteristics of large-scale natural disaster response and, as such, could enable closer cooperation with armed actors, where appropriate. However, in conflict settings, the use of military assets and cooperation with armed actors must be weighed against potential negative repercussions on the overall response across countries.
6. OCHA's Civil-Military Coordination Service (CMCS) will scale-up its liaison with relevant humanitarian organizations (including WFP, WHO and relevant INGOs and consortia), and potential providers of foreign military and civil defense/protection assets (MCDA), to, as a **last resort**, support the establishment of air bridges, air medevac routes, or other identified requirements, where needed and feasible.

### **Country/Regional Level Actions**

7. Conduct specific COVID-19 CMCoord assessments to determine the activities of government armed actors in the COVID-19 response at the national and sub-national level (refer to #4) and identify the liaison focal points from the military side (this could be the CIMIC Officer, Civil-Military Operations Officer, Operations Officer, etc.), if not done yet. Scale-up liaison with identified counterparts through available (primary and alternate) means to facilitate activities in #5.
8. Government armed actors are tasked by their relevant civil authorities, at national and sub-national level, to undertake specific tasks to support wider COVID-19 response operations. Identify liaison counterparts within the relevant civil authorities. This is critical in conveying consistent and coherent humanitarian messaging to both civil authorities and armed actors to facilitate coordination of operational issues to sustain humanitarian action, where needed.
9. Liaison counterparts for military and police components as part of a UN or Hybrid Peacekeeping Mission need to be identified. At the very least, information sharing as indicated under #5 should be undertaken to maintain common situational awareness.
10. The expected outputs of the liaison structure and dialogue with the national governments should be to support the Humanitarian Community in its ability to predictably access beneficiaries and ensure the forward movement of humanitarian assistance and to continue programming with those populations.
11. In cases where unique military assets may be needed, all efforts should be made to ensure the usage of this asset is time limited and does not generate longer term second and third order negative consequences. Humanitarian decisions to use military assets should be done in accordance to the **Last Resort** criteria.
12. In areas where there is an active conflict, transparency of purpose, consistent and coherent messaging need to be conveyed to affected communities through the most effective means. Managing expectations and seeking the advice of community leaders may be a viable means of designing a local level solution on a way forward.
13. This guidance will be updated as conditions evolve or major changes to the global use of military assets in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic occur.

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