The Best and the Brightest in the Aid World Have Said…

Of the many ways that protection of local populations might be pursued, it is the effort to bolster ground-level preparedness that will be the last one standing because it supports the abilities of the very people who are left standing alone as violence shuts the world out. Innumerable renowned individuals and institutions in the aid world have long urged service providers to aid local capacity for self-preservation before we ourselves are incapacitated. Here are some of their observations and conclusions.

- **Secretariat of the World Humanitarian Summit 2015**: "One call has arisen more than any other: recognize that affected people are the central actors in their own survival… This requires a fundamental change in the humanitarian enterprise. Humanitarian preparedness must be reoriented to support local coping strategies… support individual and community-based self-protection…. ."[1]

- **Save the Children-UK**: While we still have access we should use "periods of relative peace and stability to develop [stratagems including] community and household-level emergency preparedness plans so that strategies are in place for responding to attacks and safely escaping if necessary."[2]

- **OCHA** (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs): "The difficulties and uncertainties of humanitarian access lead logically to emphasis on local mechanisms and strategies for provisioning and protection. … When our access for protection and assistance is difficult, innovative alternatives are worth exploring." [3] OCHA further instructs peacekeeping deployments to "understand how the mission can support existing protection capacities within the local community."[4]

- **Walter Kälin**: "Crisis-affected populations will continue to suffer the consequences of diminished or compromised access unless we develop new, innovative approaches such as assistance by 'remote control' or development interventions in the midst of a crisis that strengthen the resilience of communities at risk …."[5]

- **ALNAP** (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action): "Whenever access permits" we must work with at-risk civilians on their own protection tactics. [6] … "The authors urge interveners to "build on people's own self-protection capacity. Humanitarian common sense affirms the value of people's own knowledge, capacity, insight and innovation in any given situation that threatens them…. People are seldom passive when they feel at risk: they engage in a range of finely judged actions to cope, respond, adapt and survive."[7]

- **USAID**: In regard to "support for local protection strategies and capacities," the agency field guide on curbing mass atrocity states that, "If local communities are supported in developing

strategies and building capacities for protecting themselves from potential violence, they will be more able to prevent and mitigate the consequences of any attacks."[8]

- **International Committee of the Red Cross**: Its repertoire of activities includes "self-protection capacity building" for "persons at risk". [9] It adds that we can "help communities improve their means of reducing exposure to risk […an example being to] assist communities to adopt early warning systems and contingency plans for emergency situations."[10]

- **ECHO** (European Community Humanitarian Office): Community "self-protection must be at the heart of protection strategies."[11]

- **Kofi Annan** (former UNSG): Local actors are "the basic source of protection, especially when all other layers of protection fail … funding and training [them] is an important investment." … "Domestic civil society represents the basic source of protection, especially when all other layers of protection fail … We must reach out [to] these actors, and employ their knowledge of the local context, their skill at operating in conflict zones… The funding and training of these actors is therefore an important investment."[12]

- **Overseas Development Institute** (leading British aid think tank): "Most people survive and do so without assistance from external parties." … "There is much that aid organizations can do to build on the strategies that communities employ" in order to "maintain their assets, escape violence, and mitigate threats."… Our "first responsibility is to understand the strategies that they adopt at times of extreme risk."[13]

- **UNHCR** (UN High Commissioner for Refugees): "Contrary to popular and journalistic opinion, most displaced people and other victims of violence do not rely upon external assistance in order to survive, but make use of their own coping mechanisms."[14]

- **Brookings Institute / Elizabeth Ferris**: "The fact is that communities have developed ways of protecting themselves when the internationals are not present and this should be recognized and supported." [15] "When a national government cannot protect its people and when the international community is unwilling to intervene with the intention of protecting civilians, communities have to rely on their own resources. These self-protection strategies need to be understood, affirmed and supported to the extent possible."[16] "In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, the particular and perhaps unique contributions which [we] can make is in supporting communities to protect themselves."[17]

- **Fred Cuny**: "The first of these myths is that victims are totally helpless in disasters. This is not the case. The victim always has a variety of resources upon which to draw, and each society has many ways of dealing with disaster. It has often been pointed out that the lower on the socioeconomic scale, the more self-reliant the family is; the more self-reliant, the easier it is to cope with disaster."[18]

- **Mary Anderson**: It is possible to support the capacities and lessen the vulnerabilities of locals "in conditions of social and political upheaval, and where the regime in power imposes limits on NGO work. It is even possible…where the situation is extremely volatile and polarized." [19] She also calls it more than a possibility but a "special *responsibility,*" arguing that agencies working in areas prone to strife or war should anticipate dangers and address people's vulnerabilities and capacities through their work.[20]

- **InterAction** (the U.S. aid consortium): "Using the experience of the affected population as the starting point of analysis lends itself directly to [protection] program design, starting with the most local possible solutions and actors first."[21]

- **International Rescue Committee**: "A central part of all of our work should be to support individuals and communities to protect themselves, building upon their existing coping strategies."[22]

- **Oxfam-America**:
  - "The current global humanitarian system… invests insufficiently in prevention, preparedness, and local humanitarian capacity."[23]
  - "There are principle- and value-based reasons that locally led and accountable humanitarian action is preferable in many situations to an internationally led response. Shifting the center of preparedness and response from the international level to the national and local level puts responsibility, decision making, and power where it should be: in the hands of the people affected most by a disaster, conflict, or other major crisis."[24]

- **IDMC** (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre): "Organisations should draw on the knowledge that IDPs have regarding the nature and timing of the threats confronting them, as well as the history of previous threats and coping strategies used to face those threats. This will help organisations to complement the responses of the displaced."[25]

- **Thomas Weiss** and **Larry Minear**: "The forward line of the world's humanitarian defense is local people themselves..." [26]" … "The challenge is to find ways of supporting and supplementing indigenous capacity" for self-reliance as conflict approaches.[27]

- **Antonio Donini**: "Humanitarian agencies need to systematically acknowledge and build on local capacities and coping strategies" [28] "The system appears to largely ignore individual and community self-protection coping strategies. Often, there is passing references to self-protection practices but with little or no evidence of meaningful analysis of local coping mechanisms or of strategic support from the humanitarian system. The overstating of the importance of humanitarian actors and limited understanding of the critical role of individuals and communities in their own survival is dangerous. Given that international protective presence on the ground is increasingly limited or absent, the system needs to better understand, and provide practical support to, self-protection measures where possible… Where access is limited, new technologies and innovative approaches should be explored."[29]

- **Rachel Hastie**: "NGOs have long worked within communities in crisis – including as implementing partners for the major UN agencies – so developing community-based protection work builds on their pre-existing strength, experience and networks."[30]

- **Roberta Cohen** adds that "strengthening [their] response strategies is one of the most important ways we can help."[31]

- **Francis Deng** and **Roberta Cohen**: Protection is "provided first of all by and through the local community, through a complex social network including family, clan village or tribe."[32]

- **UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee**: Bolstering remote management with proven *indigenous providers*, emphasizing innovative, localized humanitarian access.[33] It also argues that "practical protection is provided first of all by and through the community."[34] If routed through a community, information "can play a crucial role in helping the affected population to cope with their situation by receiving key survival messages, learning about self-protection, and bringing together actors' collective coping strategies."[35]

- **The Sphere Project**: Agencies can "protect people from physical harm arising from violence" in part by efforts to "support the affected population's own efforts to stay safe, [and] find security… including community self-help mechanisms."[36]

- **Local to Global Protection Project**: "Learning from the war years, a few preparatory measures would significantly strengthen local capacity for self-protection. These focus on facilitating vulnerable communities to develop and put in place their own preparedness measures (based on analysing their previous experiences) and building the capacity of local CSOs that are likely to remain operational during insecurity."[37]

- **Global Protection Cluster Working Group**: "We must recognize the temporary nature of our presence… and our limitations… [We must] strengthen local coping strategies and protection mechanisms."[38]

- **The Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship**: Emphasize the importance of strengthening local preparedness for man-made crises.[39]

- **Mark Frohardt, Diane Paul** and **Larry Minear**: "While much of the focus these days is on international capacity, local protection mechanisms also need more attention and support. Local people are the best judge of their own protection needs and are often experienced in coping with difficulties as they arise... At the same time, the vulnerability of local actors points to the need for well-considered strategies of outside presence and support to identify indigenous protection mechanisms and find creative ways to reinforce their efforts."[40]

- **Geneva Call** in collaboration with **IDMC** and the **Norwegian Refugee Council**: "A challenge for humanitarian agencies is to adapt their response to the local context… with the particular objective of optimising the "self-protection" capacities of internally displaced communities … assistance activities must respond to the local communities' needs and be in accordance with their perceptions of the conflict, humanitarian agencies should put an emphasis on supporting their self-protection strategies."

- **Feinstein International Center**: The "coping strategies" of threatened people "have major humanitarian implications [but] go unnoticed and unreported."[41]

- **David Korn**: "The internally displaced know better than anyone else how to meet their protection and assistance needs. Reinforcing their efforts could be a promising source of protection."[42]

- **Sadako Ogata** and **Amartya Sen**: "The empowerment of internally displaced persons has not received enough attention, despite the crucial role [they] play in meeting their own needs and influencing the course of conflict. In many situations internally displaced persons develop survival and coping strategies. In some, they and host communities develop self-defense units to ensure that people have time to flee… But humanitarian actors do not adequately draw on or support such community development activities."[43]

[1] World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, *Restoring Humanity: Synthesis Report of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit*, New York, United Nations, 2015; pp. 12-13.

[2] *Fighting Back: Child and Community-Led Strategies to Avoid Children's Recruitment into Armed Forces and Groups in West Africa*, Save the Children UK, London, 2005; p. viii.

[3] *No Refuge: The Challenge of Internal Displacement*, Internal Displacement Unit, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, June 2003; p. 70.

[4] *Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection of Civilians (POC): Strategies in UN Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2011, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/523998464.html.

[5] Walter Kälin, "Walter Kälin on the Outlook for IDPs", *Forced Migration Review*, Issue 37, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, March 2011; p. 44.

[6] Hugo Slim and Luis Enrique Eguren, *Humanitarian Protection: An ALNAP Guidance Booklet*, August 2003, Draft 1; pp. 14-15.

[7] Hugo Slim and Andrew Bonwick, *Protection, An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies* (the follow up volume) ALNAP and the Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005; p. 19.

[8] *Field Guide: Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities*, United States Agency for International Development, Washington., D.C., April 2015; p. A-10.

[9] *ICRC Protection Policy: Institutional Policy*, Volume 90, Number 871, Geneva, September 2008. **See also:** *Professional Standards for Protection Work*, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, October 2009; pp. 10, 21, 23 and 24. The ICRC here insists that we can support local insight and capacity for self-protection.

[10] *Enhancing Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence*, International Committee of the Red Cross Geneva, September 2008; p. 47.

[11] *Humanitarian Protection: Improving Protection Outcomes to Reduce Risks for People in Humanitarian Crises*, DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document No. 8, May 2016. **See also:** *Humanitarian Protection: DG ECHO's Funding Guidelines*, European Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid, Brussels, 21 April 2009; pp. 7 and 9. The report adds on p. 11 that "the most critical protection strategies of civilians may often be their own. People generally know much more than agencies about their own situation. … Supporting and empowering communities at risk to develop their own strategies to reduce exposure to and mitigate the effects of these risks, need to be maintained as a core strategy in protection work."

[12] *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, UN Security Council, S/2001/331, New York, 30 March 2001; p. 18. **See also:** Kofi Asomani (the UN Special Coordinator on Internal Displacement), quoted in *Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian Lens*, Report of the Seminar in Oslo, Norway, organized by the Norwegian Refugee Council in cooperation with the Norwegian University of technology and Science, 9 November 2001; p. 16. Asomani found that "empowering vulnerable populations is a dimension of the international community's efforts that needs to be expanded."

[13] Sorcha O'Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano, *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, HPG Report No. 26, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London, December 2007; pp. 4 and 35

[14] *The State of the World's Refugees: A Humanitarian Agenda*, UNHCR, 1997, p. 18.

[15] Elizabeth Ferris, *Responding to chaos: The world's beleaguered humanitarian community*, April 9, 2015. Found at: http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2015/04/09-world-humanitarian-community.

[16] Elizabeth Ferris, *Who is Protecting Civilians in Syria?*, September 10, 2013. Found at: http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/09/10-syria-protection-of-civilians-ferris.

[17] Elizabeth Ferris, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action*, Brookings Institution Press, 2010, Washington D.C., 2011; p. 280.

[18] Frederick C. Cuny, *Disasters and Development*, Intertect Press, Dallas, Texas, 1994; pp. 85-86.

[19] Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes*, Westview Press, Boulder and San Francisco, 1989; pp. 41 and 312.

[20] Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes*, Westview Press, Boulder and San Francisco, 1989; p. 33.

[21] *Results-Based Protection Practitioners' Roundtable: Summary Report*, InterAction, Washington, D.C., June 2013; p. 7.

[22] *Protection Mainstreaming Training Facilitator's Guide*, International Rescue Committee, New York, February 2013; p. 53.

[23] Tara R. Gingerich and Marc J. Cohen, *Turning The Humanitarian System On Its Head*, Oxfam Research Reports, published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International, July 2015; p. 11.

[24] Tara R. Gingerich and Marc J. Cohen, *Turning The Humanitarian System On Its Head*, Oxfam Research Reports, published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International, July 2015; p. 20.

[25] *Training on the Protection of IDPs: Protection during Displacement*, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Geneva, 2012; p. 4/5. See section "Build on IDP's Self-protection Capacities".

[26] Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy under Fire: War and the Global Humanitarian Community*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1995; p. 84.

[27] Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear, *Humanitarianism Across Borders: Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, Humanitarianism and War Project, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1993; p. x.

[28] Antonio Donini, et.al., *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Power, and Perceptions*, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, September 2006; p. 17.

[29] Norah Niland, Riccardo Polastro, Antonio Donini and Amra Lee, *Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action* Commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council on behalf of the Inter Agency Standing Committee and the Global Protection Cluster, May 2015; pp 59 and 64.

[30] Rachel Hastie, *Community-Based Protection*, 11-17-2014. Found at: https://www.interaction.org/blog/community-based-protection."

[31] Roberta Cohen (of the Brookings-CUNY Project on Internal Displacement), quoted in *Response Strategies of the Internally Displaced: Changing the Humanitarian Lens*, Report of the Seminar in Oslo, Norway, organized by the Norwegian Refugee Council in cooperation with the Norwegian University of Technology and Science, 9 November 2001;

[32] Roberta Cohen and Francis Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement*, The Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 1998; p. 205.

[33] Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Background Document: Preserving Humanitarian Space, Protection and Security*, 26 February 2008, WO/0803/2583/7, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/48da506c2.html.

[34] *Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Paper, New York, December 1999; p. 7. **See also**: *Sphere Humanitarian Charter 2010*, section 2 (1). *Draft*. Available at: http://www.sphereproject.org. The draft states that, "It is firstly through their own efforts, and through the support of community and local institutions, that the basic needs of people affected by disaster or armed conflict are met.

[35] *Education Action Sheet from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, Action Sheet 10.1; p. 1.

[36] *The Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian,* Belmont Press Ltd, Northampton, United Kingdom, 2011; p. 38.

[37] Justin Corbett, *Learning from the Nuba: Civilian Resilience and Self-protection during Conflict*, Local to Global Protection (L2GP), 2012; p. 59.

[38] *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* (provisional release), Global Protection Cluster Working Group, Geneva, December 2007; pp. 10 and 13. The handbook also states that, "Internally displaced persons and communities are themselves key protection actors. They have an understanding of the local context… which others may lack. They should be consulted and any existing coping mechanisms and strategies supported." (p. 180)

[39] *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*, Objective numbers 1 and 8.

[40] Mark Frohardt, Diane Paul and Larry Minear, *Protecting Human Rights: The Challenge to Humanitarian Organizations*, Occasional Paper #35, the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Providence, 1999; p. 103.

[41] Antonio Donini, Larry Minear and Peter Walker, Feinstein International Center, *Iraq and the Crisis of Humanitarian Action*, Humanitarian Exchange, Number 26, March 2004; p. 38.

[42] As quoted in: David A. Korn, *Exodus within Borders: An Introduction to the Crisis of Internal Displacement*, Brookings Institute Press, Washington, DC, 1999; p. 102.

[43] Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen, Co-Chairs, *Human Security Now*, 1 May 2003; p. 50.