Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations: Progress, Problems and Prospects

Dr Charles T. Hunt

Wednesday 29 May, 2019: 6pm for 6.20pm – 7.30pm at Dyason House, 124 Jolimont Road, East Melbourne

This year marks twenty years since peacekeepers in Sierra Leone were first mandated to ‘protect civilians from the threat of physical violence.’ Since then, the Protection of Civilians (PoC) has moved from the periphery to becoming a centre of gravity for peace operations, and for the whole UN system.

While media headlines dwell on the failures and inaction, research has shown that peace operations have contributed to a reduction in civilian victimisation, a decrease in conflict-related violence and the likelihood of conflict reignition.

Nevertheless, peacekeepers on the ground continue to face significant challenges. As UN peace operations are commonly deployed in contexts where there is little or no ‘peace to keep’ they are required to confront complex and shifting threats to civilians. Much remains to be done to deliver on this cardinal obligation.

To mark the International Day of UN Peacekeepers – May 29 – Dr Charles Hunt will draw on recent research trips to UN peace operations in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan – the three biggest missions – to explain where and how peacekeepers are contributing to the protection of civilians, the major impediments to achieving more, what is currently being done to tackle these and what else can be done to improve the impact of the UN’s protection efforts.

Dr Charles T. Hunt is Vice-Chancellor’s Senior Research Fellow and ARC DECRA Fellow at the Social & Global Studies Centre at RMIT University, Melbourne, and honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. His research is focused on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, UN peace operations and peacebuilding in post-colonial states. Charles has worked with the Australian government assessing their role in peace operations and performed consultancy roles with the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and several international humanitarian NGOs. He has worked extensively conducting field research in South Sudan, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. He is author and editor of five books including UN Peace Operations and International Policing (Routledge, 2015), Exploring Peace Formation (Routledge, 2018) and Regionalism and Human Protection (Brill, 2018).

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