HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord): preserving access and principles with armed actors

Course handout · Week 12 : Leading through dilemmas: difficult decisions and a complete CMCoord plan

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to coordinate humanitarian action with armed actors: principles, armed actors and their culture, the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines, foreign military assets in disasters, complex emergencies and integrated missions, armed escorts, humanitarian notification and information sharing, access negotiation, liaison and forums, protection, country-specific guidelines and dilemmas. Based on the public texts of OCHA and the IASC. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent course: it is not OCHA's official UN-CMCoord course, to which it refers, and it does not award any United Nations certification.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-coordination-civilo-militaire/semaine-12/

Free document from the Humanitarian Academy. It may be printed and shared freely for training purposes, without modification.

Week 12 : Leading through dilemmas: difficult decisions and a complete CMCoord plan

Objectives

- Reason through civil-military dilemmas with an explicit, documented method.
- Exercise CMCoord leadership: convince your management, your peers and armed actors.
- Present a complete CMCoord plan for a given context, ready to be defended before a humanitarian country team.

Why dilemmas are unavoidable

CMCoord often sets two goods against each other: saving lives **now** thanks to a military asset, or protecting **tomorrow's access and security** by keeping a distance. No text settles every case. The guidelines provide criteria; the decision remains a judgement.

Examples of dilemmas: accepting a helicopter from a party to the conflict to evacuate wounded people; sharing the location of a hospital that a party might target; using an airstrip controlled by a foreign force; continuing a distribution under the threat of a group demanding a share.

A decision method

1. **Clarify the need**: who, how many, how urgent, what consequences if nothing is done.
2. **List the options**, including civilian options and the "do nothing" option.
3. **Assess each option** against the criteria: last resort, effects on principles and perception, real security, effects on other organisations, duration and exit.
4. **Consult**: OCHA, civil-military forum, management and, where possible, communities.
5. **Decide at the right level**, in writing, with conditions and a review date.
6. **Explain** the decision to partners and communities.
7. **Learn lessons** afterwards.

CMCoord leadership

An effective CMCoord manager:

- **knows** the texts and the context better than their counterparts;
- **builds trust** with humanitarians (who sometimes fear any interaction) and with the military (who do not always understand refusals);
- **proposes** instead of only refusing: "no escort, but here is what we ask for road safety";
- **holds the collective line** when one organisation is tempted to go it alone;
- **documents** so that memory survives rotations, both military and humanitarian.

The complete CMCoord plan

The final assignment of this programme is a CMCoord plan for a real or realistic context, 8 to 10 pages long:

1. Context analysis and mapping of armed actors.
2. Position on the spectrum for each actor, justified.
3. Main operational rules (military assets, escorts, distinction, meetings).
4. Information sharing and humanitarian notification.
5. Access: impediments, red lines, negotiation strategy.
6. Protection: camps, gender, PSEA, children.
7. Organisation: roles, forums, liaison, handovers.
8. Scenarios, warning indicators and planned decisions.
9. Indicators for monitoring coordination.

After this programme

This Mini MBA is an independent course of the Humanitarian Academy. To go further:

- take **OCHA's free online modules** on civil-military coordination;
- apply for the **UN-CMCoord course** organised by OCHA and its partners;
- take part in your country's civil-military forums and in regional exercises;
- regularly read the country-specific guidelines published on ReliefWeb.

The diploma of this programme certifies that you passed the Academy's exams; it is not a United Nations certification.

Exercise: the evacuation dilemma

After a bombing, 9 seriously wounded people are in a health centre supported by your NGO. The nearest hospital is 6 hours away by road. The national army, a party to the conflict, offers a helicopter within the hour. No civilian air asset is available before 48 hours. The armed group controlling the neighbouring area has already accused your NGO of "working for the army".

Apply the decision method and make your recommendation.

Model answer. Immediate critical need; civilian alternative not comparable in time (48 h, or 6 h of dangerous road for seriously wounded people). Medical evacuation by military asset can be a last resort. Conditions: transport concerns only the wounded and strictly necessary medical staff, with no NGO logo or visible presence in the operation if possible; the decision is taken at the highest level in the country, documented, reported to OCHA; a message is prepared to explain to the armed group and communities that the evacuation follows medical criteria and that the NGO treats all wounded people, whatever their side. Review: do not make it a practice, seek an agreement for future civilian evacuations.

Key takeaways

- Dilemmas often set lives saved today against tomorrow's access; texts give criteria, not all the answers.
- Method: need, options, criteria, consultation, written decision at the right level, explanation, lessons.
- Leadership: know, build trust on both sides, propose, hold the collective line, document.
- The complete CMCoord plan covers analysis, positions, rules, information, access, protection, organisation, scenarios and monitoring.
- For official training: OCHA's free modules, then the UN-CMCoord course.

Quiz

1. In the decision method, what must always be included among the options?
   A. Civilian options and "do nothing"
   B. The military option alone, the fastest
   C. The cheapest option for the organisation
   D. The option proposed by the main donor

2. An effective CMCoord manager, faced with an unacceptable military request:
   A. Refuses without explanation
   B. Lets each NGO decide alone
   C. Accepts to keep good relations
   D. Refuses and proposes a useful alternative

3. Why document decisions and agreements?
   A. It is not useful once the decision has been taken
   B. So that memory survives rotations
   C. For the donor only
   D. For the press

4. In the evacuation dilemma, the military helicopter can be a last resort because:
   A. The army insists and threatens to leave
   B. The neighbouring armed group accepted it in writing
   C. Critical need, no civilian option in time
   D. It is free and available immediately

5. The diploma of this Mini MBA:
   A. Certifies success in the Academy's exams
   B. Replaces the UN-CMCoord course
   C. Is a United Nations certification
   D. Gives a military rank

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. C · 3. A · 4. D · 5. B