HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

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

Course handout · Week 7 : Notify, deconflict, share: information between humanitarians and the military

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.

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Week 7 : Notify, deconflict, share: information between humanitarians and the military

Objectives

- Explain how a humanitarian notification (deconfliction) system works and its legal and practical limits.
- Decide which information to share, with whom and in what form, without endangering people.
- Set clear sharing rules: classification, personal data, channels.

What humanitarian notification is

In conflicts with intense hostilities (air strikes, artillery), humanitarian organisations inform the parties to the conflict of the location of their **fixed sites** (offices, warehouses, supported hospitals) and their **movements** (routes, times). This mechanism, called a **humanitarian notification system** or **deconfliction**, is often managed by OCHA.

Aim: that the parties can take this information into account in their operations and **avoid striking** humanitarian sites and people.

> Notification is a risk-reduction measure. It gives no additional protection: protection comes from international humanitarian law, whether or not notification took place.

The limits to know

- **No guarantee**: a party may ignore the information, receive it too late or pass it badly to its units.
- **No condition**: a site that has not been notified remains protected by law (civilians, civilian objects, medical units). Never let anyone believe that the absence of notification makes a site a target.
- **No authorisation**: notifying is not asking for permission. In some contexts, parties turn notification into an authorisation regime; this must be documented and reported.
- **Risk of misuse**: a site's location could be used to target it. The decision to notify is taken after analysis.

Which information to share

A simple rule: share **what protects**, do not share **what exposes**.

- **To share** (depending on the context): humanitarian sites and movements for deconfliction; general situation of needs; state of roads, bridges and airports; security trends; disaster response plans; areas contaminated by explosive ordnance.

- **Not to share**: beneficiaries' personal data; lists of displaced people; information on violations collected from victims; locations of people at risk; any information that could be used for targeting, recruitment or reprisals.

Sharing is **reciprocal** as far as possible: forces can provide information on road safety, dangerous areas, unexploded ordnance and planned operations that will affect civilians.

Forms and channels

- **Aggregate and anonymise**: share "3,200 displaced households in the northern district" rather than a list.
- **Designated channels**: through OCHA or the CMCoord focal point, not through multiple informal contacts.
- **Written rules** in the country guidelines: what is public, what is restricted, what is never shared.
- **Data protection**: organisations apply their policies (for example the United Nations principles on personal data protection, or the ICRC handbook on data protection in humanitarian action).
- **Traceability**: keep a register of what was notified, to whom, when, and the replies received.

When a notification fails

If a notified site is hit, the organisation:

1. brings its staff and the people present to safety;
2. documents the facts (time, coordinates, proof of notification);
3. informs OCHA and the coordination forums;
4. together with the other organisations, raises the issue with the party concerned and requests an investigation;
5. reassesses the usefulness and risks of notification in this context.

Rigorous documentation of notifications is what then allows credible advocacy.

Exercise: sorting information

A peace force asks humanitarian organisations for: (a) the list of names of displaced families in a camp; (b) the coordinates of your warehouses; (c) the areas where children have been recruited by an armed group, with the names of the families who reported it; (d) the state of the roads to the south.

For each request, say whether you share, in what form and through which channel.

Model answer. (a) No: give aggregated figures. (b) Yes, for deconfliction, through OCHA's mechanism. (c) Not the names or sources; a general trend can be shared by child protection actors, according to their protocols. (d) Yes, it is useful to everyone, shared through the logistics cluster or OCHA.

Key takeaways

- Humanitarian notification reduces risks but creates no protection: protection comes from the law.
- A non-notified site remains protected; notifying is not asking for authorisation.
- Share what protects, never what exposes: no personal data or information about victims.
- Aggregate, anonymise, use designated channels and keep track of every notification.
- When it fails: secure, document, inform, raise the issue, reassess.

Quiz

1. A humanitarian site not notified to the parties:
   A. Must close until it is notified
   B. Remains protected by humanitarian law
   C. Loses its civilian status in law
   D. Becomes a legitimate target for the parties
2. Humanitarian notification is:
   A. A risk-reduction measure
   B. A donor obligation
   C. A request for authorisation
   D. A security guarantee

3. Which information must not be shared with an armed force?
   A. The list of beneficiaries' names
   B. Needs aggregated by district
   C. The state of the roads
   D. Warehouse coordinates for deconfliction

4. Why keep a register of notifications?
   A. For the media and public reports
   B. For the payroll of site staff
   C. For accounting of mission costs
   D. To document and advocate

5. The best channel to share information with the forces is:
   A. The organisation's social media
   B. The channel designated by coordination (OCHA)
   C. Drivers, who meet the patrols
   D. Each staff member through personal contacts

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