HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

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

Course handout · Week 9 : The CMCoord function: officers, focal points, liaison and forums

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-9/

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

Week 9 : The CMCoord function: officers, focal points, liaison and forums

Objectives

- Describe the roles of OCHA, CMCoord officers and organisations' focal points.
- Organise liaison with armed actors: who, at what level, with what messages.
- Run a civil-military coordination forum and measure its usefulness.

Who does what

- Within the United Nations, **OCHA** is responsible for humanitarian civil-military coordination. Its specialised section in Geneva develops guidelines, trains and deploys CMCoord officers; its country offices lead coordination in the field.
- OCHA's **CMCoord officers** link the humanitarian community and armed actors: they analyse, advise the humanitarian leadership, run forums and manage humanitarian notification.
- The **CMCoord focal points** of agencies and NGOs apply the rules in their organisation and take part in forums.
- On the military side, **liaison** or CIMIC officers are the usual counterparts; in peace missions, there are also officers in charge of liaison with humanitarians.

Organising liaison

Effective liaison is prepared:

- **Levels**: strategic (humanitarian leadership and force command), operational (OCHA and headquarters), tactical (field offices and local units). Each level deals with matching issues.
- **Common key messages**, validated by the humanitarian leadership: principles, country rules, priority requests.
- **One voice**: a small number of designated counterparts, to avoid contradictory messages.
- **Continuity**: military rotations are short; a handover file (contacts, agreements, rules) is given to each new team.

> Each military rotation is an opportunity to recall the rules. An arriving force knows neither the country guidelines nor the history of relations.

The civil-military forum

In many countries, a **civil-military working group or forum** regularly brings humanitarian organisations together, sometimes with military representatives for part of the meeting. It serves to:

- share the analysis of armed actors and risks;
- prepare common positions (escorts, use of military assets, military aid projects);
- track incidents linked to civil-military interaction;
- update the country-specific guidelines.

A good practice: a **humanitarian-only** part, to discuss freely, then a part with armed actors if needed.

Measuring the usefulness of coordination

A few simple indicators help monitor the quality of CMCoord:

- share of notified movements that received an acknowledgement;
- average processing time of requests for military support;
- number of incidents linked to confusion between humanitarians and the military;
- share of military rotations that received a briefing on the country guidelines;
- number of access impediments resolved through dialogue.

Example. Out of 240 movements notified in a month, 180 received an acknowledgement: 75%. If the target is 90%, 216 acknowledgements are needed, that is 36 more: liaison with headquarters must be strengthened.

Training and preparedness

Preparedness improves coordination when a crisis strikes: joint disaster simulation exercises, training of the military on humanitarian principles, contingency plans that set out the role of national armed forces.

Humanitarians take part in these exercises **as humanitarians**, without playing a military role, and with caution in conflict settings: taking part in an exercise of a party to the conflict may be perceived as association.

For practitioners, OCHA offers free online modules and a UN-CMCoord course of several days, by application: this is the official path to becoming a CMCoord focal point or officer.

Exercise: preparing the handover

A new foreign brigade replaces the previous one in your area in two weeks. You are your NGO's CMCoord focal point and are preparing, with OCHA, the first contact meeting.

List the five key messages to convey and the three documents to hand over.

Model answer. Messages: humanitarian principles and distinction; rules of the country guidelines (no weapons in premises, no shared transport); how humanitarian notification works; request to share information on explosive ordnance and operations affecting civilians; designated counterparts. Documents: country guidelines, notification procedure, list of designated contacts.

Key takeaways

- OCHA coordinates CMCoord; CMCoord officers make the link; focal points apply the rules in their organisation.
- Liaison at three levels, common validated messages, one voice, continuity at every rotation.
- Civil-military forum: a humanitarian-only part, then a part with armed actors if needed.
- Track a few indicators: acknowledgements, processing times, confusion incidents, briefings, impediments resolved.
- Preparedness and joint exercises, with caution in conflict; official training through OCHA.

Quiz

1. Within the United Nations, humanitarian CMCoord is coordinated by:
   A. UNDP
   B. UNICEF
   C. OCHA
   D. The Department of Peace Operations
2. Why do military rotations require a handover?
   A. To change the guidelines at each arrival
   B. To prepare the payroll of the new units
   C. To reduce the strength of the force present
   D. They are short and the force does not know the rules

3. A good practice for a civil-military forum:
   A. Do away with minutes
   B. Let the army chair every meeting of the forum
   C. Always meet in a base
   D. Plan a humanitarian-only part

4. 180 acknowledgements out of 240 notified movements is:
   A. 80%
   B. 70%
   C. 60%
   D. 75%

5. The official path to becoming a CMCoord officer is through:
   A. This Mini MBA, recognised as equivalent
   B. A military school and CIMIC training
   C. An engineering degree in logistics
   D. OCHA's official modules and course

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