

**CONCEPT NOTE**

*Side Event-Protection of Civilians Week 2026 | New York | 18–22 May 2026*

19 May 2026 | 1:00-2:30 pm

**Humanitarian Diplomacy for the Protection of Civilians:  
Mobilizing Political Will in an Era of Constraints**

**Background and rationale**

The Protection of Civilians (PoC) Week 2026 convenes under the theme "How to Ensure Protection of Civilians amid Reforms and Constraints." Against this backdrop, the State of Qatar and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), together with co-sponsors the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Norway, the United Kingdom, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), Qatar Red Crescent and the IHL Center, propose a dedicated side event on humanitarian diplomacy as a critical enabler of civilian protection.

Today's crises in the protection of civilians are driven less by operational shortcomings and far more by a lack of commitment from all stakeholders. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza Strip, Sudan, South Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen, and elsewhere, humanitarian access is obstructed, civilians are targeted, and international humanitarian law (IHL) is violated, often because of the absence of political will. The decisions that determine whether aid reaches people in need, whether corridors are opened, and whether parties to conflict respect their obligations are not just taken in the field, they are shaped in capitals and in council chambers.

Humanitarian diplomacy - the engagement of political decision-makers, parties to conflict, humanitarian personnel, influential intermediaries and operational and community-level actors to achieve humanitarian objectives - has therefore become indispensable. Where operational negotiations at the field level are necessary, they are rarely sufficient on their own. Effective protection of civilians requires sustained political engagement at the highest levels: within the Security Council, through regional organizations, through states with leverage to influence parties to the conflict, and through international legal and normative forums, or recommendations from civil society.

The proposed side event will bring together Member States, humanitarian leadership and key partners to examine how humanitarian diplomacy can be leveraged as a practical and strategic tool for the protection of civilians amid growing geopolitical fragmentation, shrinking humanitarian space, and unprecedented financial constraints on the multilateral system. All Member States possess diplomatic tools and relationships that can be mobilized in defense of the protection of civilians. The event will focus on how those tools can be better deployed. Drawing on concrete experiences, the event will examine how humanitarian considerations can be effectively integrated into political, regional and multilateral processes to create more enabling conditions for access and protection. Participants will leave with practical lessons and actionable policy entry points - from bilateral leverage and negotiated processes to Security Council and regional mechanisms - that Member States and partners can apply in their own diplomatic work.

**Objectives**

- Affirm humanitarian diplomacy as a core instrument for the protection of civilians, grounded in Member States' responsibility to respect and ensure respect for IHL, and not merely as a technical complement to operational response;

## Co-Sponsor Logos

- Examine how Member States, regional actors and international institutions can effectively deploy diplomatic tools (including leverage, relationships and political capital) to uphold IHL, secure humanitarian access, and navigate the political dynamics that enable or constrain humanitarian action;
- Identify concrete entry points and actionable pathways to strengthen humanitarian diplomacy in the current global environment, including through the Security Council, the General Assembly and regional or sub-regional processes, while promoting more proactive, inclusive and context-responsive approaches; and
- Translate humanitarian diplomacy into practical, field-level protection outcomes, including through engagement with communities, civil society and security actors, and build momentum toward actionable commitments ahead of future normative processes.

## Format

**Duration:** 90 minutes **Venue:** UN Headquarters, New York **Provided:** Light snacks

EST. TIME	SEGMENT
1:00-1:15 pm	Opening
1:12-1:25 pm	Statements by co-sponsoring Member States
1:25-2:25 pm	Interactive discussion with co-sponsoring operational partners and open floor discussion
2:25-2:30 pm	Summary and closing

## Key thematic focus areas

1. **Political will, access and protection:** How Member States and regional actors can use political leverage to secure and sustain humanitarian access, including through bilateral engagement with conflict parties, and Security Council action, and how these efforts connect with mediation processes and field-level negotiation to achieve concrete protection outcomes.
2. **Defending the normative framework:** How diplomatic engagement can uphold IHL amid normative erosion, challenges to its good-faith interpretation, and persistent impunity - and the role of States in holding parties to conflict, including allies, accountable.
3. **Humanitarian diplomacy in a constrained environment:** How, as financial pressures and geopolitical fragmentation intensify, humanitarian diplomacy can serve as a force multiplier - mobilizing political support and resources and ensuring financial constraints do not inadvertently undermine efforts to protect civilians.

## Expected outputs

- A focused, high-level discussion that advances the Protection of Civilians Week agenda with concrete, actionable recommendations, that can be taken forward and followed through.
- A brief post-event summary capturing key messages and commitments, to be circulated to participants.