

November 24, 2008

RE: Make Prevention of Deadly Conflict and Civilian Protection a Priority of U.S. Foreign Policy

Dear President-Elect Obama,

Congratulations on your election as President of the United States. As you take office, the United States faces enormous challenges abroad. Ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the threat of terrorism, entrenched violent conflicts in places like Central and East Africa, climate change, and increasing socio-economic inequities, all threaten the security and livelihoods of civilians globally. A transformed U.S. foreign policy is urgently needed to address these threats, save lives, and prevent future violence.

As you know, a majority of the American people favor a return to a foreign policy based on diplomacy, international cooperation, and upholding the rule of law. Senior military officials, foreign policy experts and a large swath of members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have voiced support for building a 21st century diplomatic corps and elevating the role of development in U.S. foreign policy, steps which could help avert crises and save lives.

On more than one occasion, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has highlighted the need to invest greater resources in U.S. civilian foreign policy agencies. Last July, for instance, Gates said: "It has become clear that America's civilian institutions of diplomacy and development have been chronically undermanned and underfunded for far too long—relative to what we traditionally spend on the military, and more important, relative to the responsibilities and challenges our nation has around the world."

We urge you to build on this momentum, by directing new policies and initiatives in a way that would better meet the challenges of our time. *Specifically, we urge you to make the prevention of deadly conflict and the protection of civilians core principles of U.S. foreign policy.* Such a paradigm shift is merited for three reasons:

Preventing deadly conflict and protecting civilians is vital to our security. War in places like Afghanistan and Somalia has left ungoverned spaces with gaping power vacuums. The attacks of September 11th demonstrated that U.S. policies and resources must help build the capacity of weak states to protect their people, govern wisely and provide for their citizens before threats to our collective security materialize. The recent U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has proven that the protection of civilians must be at the heart of any effort to stabilize war – torn countries.

Prevention is cheaper than reaction. Reacting to violent conflict is far more expensive than investing in tools to prevent conflict from turning deadly. The Darfur region of Sudan and the DR Congo are home to the most expensive aid and peacekeeping efforts in the world. While the U.S. has a responsibility to respond to mass violence when it occurs, prioritizing conflict prevention in U.S. foreign policy will mean fewer dollars will be spent on emergency assistance, or on a military response to quell instability.

Moral Leadership. Preventing deadly conflict and protecting the most vulnerable should be core principles of U.S. policy because it's the right thing to do. Outrage over atrocities in places like Darfur and the DR Congo has never been a partisan issue. Making the policy changes and dedicating the resources to make "never again" a reality shouldn't be either.

Policy Recommendations

1. Make the prevention of deadly conflict and protection of civilians guiding principles of your first National Security Strategy. Your leadership in reshaping U.S. foreign policy and mending relations with the international community is urgently needed. Including conflict prevention and civilian protection as fundamental pillars of U.S. foreign policy in the next National Security Strategy will lay the foundation for a more effective approach to building security, nationally and globally. This strategy should inform an integrated, interagency mechanism for long-range strategic planning, tied directly to the allocation of resources, which would ensure the implementation of these principles.

2. Build a 21st Century Diplomatic and Civilian Response Infrastructure

In 2008, nearly a quarter of U.S. diplomatic positions were vacant. Too many personnel are positioned in Europe, and too few in South Asia, the Middle East, East and Central Africa, and Latin America, where the need and challenges are great. The lack of capacity and inappropriate positioning of personnel undercut our ability to respond to the challenges of the 21st century, strain the diplomatic corps, weaken the State Department's ability to direct U.S. foreign policy, and has left some of our allies wondering if the State Department or the Pentagon is in charge of diplomacy and development. Upon taking office, we encourage you to direct the Secretary of State to:

- Propose a plan and request funding to increase deployable State department personnel by 100% over ten years, while re-positioning current personnel to “global hot spots” – where violent conflict is likely or occurring.
- Request robust funding for the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) and stand up the Civilian Response Corps with dedicated staffing.
- Request funding for a Conflict Response Fund – to provide the State Department with a pool of money to draw upon quickly to respond to emergencies.
- Establish a diplomatic surge capability, modeled upon the U.S. Agency for International Development's Disaster Assistance Response Teams, allowing State to deploy additional personnel to enhance diplomatic capacity in regions of need for specific periods of time.

3. Bolster and Make Development Assistance more Effective

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) employs fewer than 2,000 people to administer assistance – compared with nearly 15,000 at the height of the Cold War. The lack of development expertise has contributed to USAID's reputation as a “contracting agency” and to the militarization of development, as the Pentagon has stepped in to fill the gap. By one estimate, the Department of Defense's share of U.S. foreign aid has grown from 3.5 percent to nearly 22 percent over the last decade. We encourage your Administration to:

- Develop a national strategy for development assistance which focuses on global poverty reduction and mainstreams conflict-sensitive programming.
- Propose a plan to increase technical development personnel by 100% over three years at USAID or any new development agency that is created.
- Work with Congress to ensure all development, reconstruction and stabilization assistance is placed under civilian control. The DOD does not have the expertise and is not the agency responsible for administering development aid.

4. Improve Security Assistance to Better Protect Civilians

Since 9/11, policymakers have provided the Department of Defense new authorities and funds to build the capacity of foreign militaries and security forces of their choosing. Much of this assistance has supported countries with abusive security forces, circumvented human rights provisions in the Foreign Assistance Act and undercut the State Department in its role in directing U.S. foreign policy. U.S. security assistance must be civilian led and focused on creating professional, law abiding security forces to protect civilians. Upon taking office, we encourage your Administration to:

- End or dramatically alter the DOD's 1206 global train and equip program. As the agency responsible for U.S. foreign policy, the State Department should have the lead in directing security assistance. The DOD should support the State Department in implementing such assistance.
- Make civilian protection a guiding principle in U.S. military training and doctrine.
- Support the international Arms Trade Treaty to reduce the flow of weapons to undemocratic regimes and regions of conflict.

5. Make the Protection of Civilians a Priority in U.S. Military Operations

Terrorism by its very nature is a crime against civilians. Yet in the name of fighting terrorism, the U.S. often loses sight of its purposes and allows too many civilians to suffer harm and abuse. The new counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq shows that the U.S. is learning from its mistakes by renewing a focus on civilian protection. We urge your Administration to build upon this initiative by firmly adhering to the Geneva Conventions and ensuring that measures to protect civilians are incorporated into U.S. military operations worldwide. Upon taking office, your Administration should urgently:

- Adopt a zero tolerance policy for war crimes by holding those responsible for wrongful acts accountable.
- Direct the Secretary of Defense to give the protection of civilians the highest priority in military operations and limit air strikes in areas inhabited by civilians.
- Appoint a senior Pentagon official to oversee policies to streamline currently ad hoc efforts to avoid civilian casualties, implement lessons learned, and make amends for harm inflicted on civilians during U.S. military operations.

6. Support Robust Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Tools

Current U.S. arrears to the U.N. are nearly \$1.6 billion – the most of any member state. Today, more than 110,000 U.N. peacekeepers are serving in 20 missions around the world. Too often, peacekeepers lack the resources, training and mandate to protect civilians from violence, or are sent into volatile situations, where there is no peace to keep. Additionally, the lack of coordinated and strategic financial support for countries emerging from conflict often makes it difficult to consolidate the peace and prevent future violence. To support UN efforts in this area, we encourage you to:

- Request funding to pay down nearly \$1.6 billion in U.S. arrears to the U.N. and request Congress permanently lift the cap on U.S. dues to U.N. peacekeeping while continuing to urge substantive U.N. reform.
- Direct the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. to work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Security Council members, and major troop contributing countries

to ensure U.N. peace operations have adequate resources, training, and mandates to protect civilians from violence, and adhere to basic human rights standards.

- Voluntarily restrict the use of the United States' veto in the Security Council in situations involving genocide, major war crimes and major crimes against humanity.
- Include a voluntary contribution to the UN Peacebuilding Fund in the FY10 budget request, and direct the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. to engage at the highest levels with the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The inability of the international community to resolve violence in places like Darfur, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Northern Uganda has proven that, in addition to strong political will, new policies and capacities are needed to protect civilians and address conflicts. Prioritization of conflict prevention at the most senior levels, a wise investment of resources, effective U.S. foreign policy institutions, as well as international coordination are needed. We urge you to begin shaping a more sensible, effective U.S. foreign policy by making the prevention of deadly conflict and civilian protection the highest priorities.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International USA

Better World Campaign

Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC)

CARE

Citizens for Global Solutions

The Enough Project

Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quakers)

Genocide Intervention Network

International Rescue Committee

Oxfam America

Refugees International

CC: Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee