**Briefing at the African Ambassadors Group**

**Geneva, Palais des Nations, 14/11/2014**

30 mins presentation by Anita Bay Bundegaard, SCI director in Geneva, and Cathrine Andersen, Humanitarian Counsellor at the Norway Permanent Mission in Geneva.

Attendance: there were about 45 people in the room, not all but many were Ambassadors (with 3 new Ambassadors, Morocco, Tunisia and Zimbabwe, for whom it was their first meeting).

Chairmanship of the Group: Rwanda Ambassador, who made very supportive introduction (very relevant to have Guidelines to address this problem)

* Anita introducing the Guidelines, and the work of GCPEA on it.
* Cathrine: worrying trends on military use of schools; engagement with States; work on how these Guidelines can be implemented; Guidelines are one piece of a bigger puzzle; final text will be presented in Geneva at a later stage.

Questions:

Liberia (took the floor twice)

* Very good document but challenges to enforce it
* Challenge for Governments in power to enforce the Guidelines when they are caught in an armed conflict, and under pressure.
* Students are easily recruited to join militant movements and armed groups; teachers will be recruiters and use as intelligence. How can we take this into account?
* at the point of a civil conflict, Governments are not in control anymore, so hard to control that all schools will be free from military use

Cote d’Ivoire

* apologies from our Ambassador who is busy in Berne with other meeting
* Cote d’Ivoire is playing an active role in the development of the Guidelines and is committed to continue to support the process
* Be assured of Cote d’Ivoire commitment in the adoption of the Guidelines

Sierra Leone

* It is vital to ensure that education is maintained during armed conflict
* However, it will be difficult for the military involved in the armed conflict not to use everything at their disposal, including schools => challenge of implementation

South Sudan

* Guidelines are a wonderful document, but we should put more emphasis on protecting pupils rather than buildings

Senegal

* Very welcomed initiative to protect schools from military use
* War is a rupture of order. All the essential principles to respect are in the Geneva Conventions. Aren’t the Guidelines stating the obvious?
* As Governments, we’re convinced by the Guidelines and we adhere to the Principles. Wouldn’t it be more relevant to address the Guidelines only to the fighting parties (notably armed groups)?

Algeria

* Thanks for your efforts in this process; Guidelines are very useful and we support them.
* In case of asymmetric conflicts, states should respect the Guidelines, but what about armed groups? We’re discussing with ICRC on how to encourage armed groups to respect IHL better.

Chad

* Military use of schools is something that we also experienced in our country
* Governments are already engagement for greater respect of IHL
* It is more relevant to address the Guidelines to armed groups
* What is the added value of the Guidelines compared with the Geneva Convention?

Answer and concluding remarks

* Supportive remarks from Nigeria (Counsellor at the Mission in Geneva) from the panel: Nigeria is part of that initiative because protection of schools is genuinely needed. Belligerants and armed groups find it convenient to use schools for military purposes; I witness that first-hand in my country. Schools become legitimate targets. Key programme in Nigeria at the moment: to relocate schools out of Boko Aram areas to ensure that they are better protected.
* Cathrine: Governments are bound by IHL, but so are armed groups. Engagement with armed groups is key. ICRC and Geneva Call involved in this. The Guidelines are not a magic tool that is going to solve all problems, but it is a contribution. It is a matter of raising awareness and encouraging other alternatives than using schools for military purposes. We would like to use the Guidelines as a basis for further discussion among States. We are looking at getting broader commitments from States and at the next steps.
* Anita: of course States are committed to respect IHL. The Guidelines help to comply with the law. It is a practical tool, and take the reality of military operations into account.