Committee: Security Council

Topic: Protecting medical care in armed conflict areas

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Introduction

Attacks against health care in armed conflicts constitute one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of our days. During wars and armed conflicts, medical workers are kidnapped, injured or killed, medical facilities and transports are bombed, attacked or misused, wounded fighters and patients are often killed.

Access to medical services has also been obstructed in certain areas. Such attacks are a violation of the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols and WMA regulations in times of war. The ICRC Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols should protect medical personnel in armed conflicts. The parties at war should not interfere with medical care for wounded or sick civilians or attack medical care facilities. Health care personnel must be considered as neutral and not be prevented from fulfilling their duties.

Key word definition

WMA: World Medical Association

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

WHO: World Health Organization

Countries and organizations concerned

Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)): an international independent medical humanitarian association that provides

medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters or exclusion from health care.

The World Medical Association (WMA): an international organization representing physicians.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

World Health Organization (WHO): a specialized agency of the United Nations concerned with international public health.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR): human rights NGO that uses medicine to document and advocate against mass atrocities and severe human rights violations around the world.

The greatest number of attacks has occurred in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya, the occupied Palestinian territory, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo,

Background information

According to the International Humanitarian Law, medical personnel exclusively assigned to medical duties as well as medical units and transports must be respected and protected in all circumstances. It is, also, prohibited to attack the wounded and sick, provided they abstain from any hostile act and do not attempt to escape.

While the rules protecting medical care on the battlefield are robust, attacks on health care are unfortunately frequent in places like Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and many other armed conflict settings around the world. Attacks on health care can take multiple forms. For instance, attacks against medical personnel and patients, armed entry into health facilities or direct targeting of hospitals located in conflict areas are all violent acts against health care. There is a variety of reasons for such attacks such as the intention of the opposite party to deprive
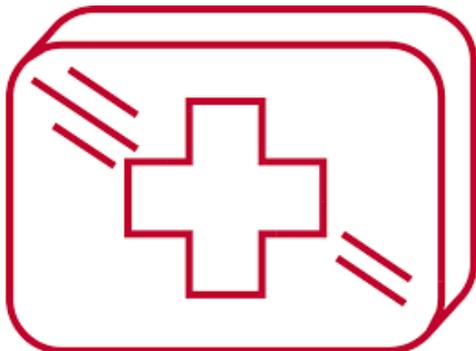
enemies of health care to either gain military advantage or ensure health care for its own soldiers. Another motive to use violence against health-care facilities could be inducing fear to the local population, which has been observed numerous times during the Syrian war and the civil war in South Sudan.

Relevant treaties

Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols: international treaties that contain the most important rules limiting the barbarity of war. They protect people who do not take part in the fighting (civilians, medics, aid workers) and those who can no longer fight (wounded, sick).

International Humanitarian Law: a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict

Previous attempts to solve the issue

On 3 May 2016, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286, that condemned attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.

In 2017, the WHO launched its Surveillance System on Attacks on health care (SSA). This tool collects data on attacks on health care providers all over the world and monitors how those attacks impact the health of the affected population.

Possible solutions

✓ The suggestion of data collection, analysis, systematic reporting and documentation of violence against medical personnel and facilities could lead to the development of strategies for protection of medical personnel.

✓ After suggesting the creation of a monitoring and reporting system of attacks against medical care, you could recommend the improvement of the current accountability system in order to ensure the punishment of the violators of the International Humanitarian Law.

✓ Another way to protect medical care would be to provide reparations and assistance to victims of attacks against medical care in armed conflict and restoring essential services.

✓ It is also essential to raise public awareness and expand education so that zero tolerance for illegal attacks on healthcare is established.

Bibliography

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Links for further reading

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