Geneva Academy Expert Seminar - 15th November 2016

Using New Technologies to Enhance Protection During

Armed Conflict

While the use of new technologies in warfare is commonly associated with the potential for greater destruction, this Geneva Academy expert seminar focused on the potential and real contribution new technologies can bring to the protection of victims in armed conflict. The panel brought together three experts from the fields of human rights protection and development of new technologies to explore how technology, from social media to advanced robotics, can be used to protect victims in conflict. The panelists considered how the current trend in uploading, storing and sharing information via new technologies, as well as developments in robotics, are being harnessed as a tool for greater protection. The event highlighted the significant protective opportunities new technologies may provide, the potential of which is only beginning to be explored.

Joanne Mariner, Senior Crisis Response Adviser at Amnesty International, discussed the use of new technologies in fact-finding and human rights advocacy. Amnesty International has been able to use the development of new technologies to overcome challenges related to lack of physical access to conflict zones and places of detention. In particular, the use of satellite imagery, as well as spatial mapping and modelling of areas with the help of witness and survivor testimonies, has helped disseminate the reality of occurring violations to the general public.

Hadi Alkhatib, Founding Member and Project Lead of the Syrian Archive Project, explained the use of open source investigations in conflict zones. The Syrian Archive database works to centralise and automatise the process of finding and processing useful and credible information emerging from the conflict, responding to the challenges brought by the current mass production of data. This in combination with Digital Verification standards provides a unique platform for recording human rights violations in situations which may otherwise go undocumented.

Kamilo Melo, Postdoctoral Researcher at the EPFL Biorobotics Laboratory, works on developing robotics systems for disaster risk reduction, as part of NCCR Rescue Robotics Grand Challenge. The partnership's vision is to develop the use of robotics for search and rescue missions, and innovations include walking, flying and amphibious robots able to access, interact and adapt to disaster scenes. This use of robotics has the potential to provide extensive support to rescue workers, and provide significant new protection opportunities in some of the most dangerous conditions.