

Conference Report

sef: Policy Lunch 2016

sef:

The World Humanitarian Summit. What will the EU bring to the table?

Michèle Roth

Thanks to the initiative by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) took place in Istanbul in May 2016. 55 Heads of State and Government and other officials from 173 countries as well as approx. 9,000 stakeholders met to discuss and endorse the Agenda for Humanity and its five core responsibilities, proposed by the UN Secretary-General. In order to implement the Agenda, individual and joint commitments were made during the Summit that will be presented publicly on a “Commitments to Action” platform.

The Summit was preceded by a comprehensive consultation process with key stakeholders involving more than 23,000 individuals in 157 countries over three years. On May 11, 2016, in the run-up to the Summit,

the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) and its cooperating partner CIDSE hosted a Policy Lunch at the Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in Brussels. The event aimed at taking stock of the results of the preparation process so far and at discussing expectations in particular with regard to the European Union’s role during the Summit.

In his welcome address, Dr Gerd Harms, Deputy Chairperson of the sef: Executive Committee, reminded the audience of the tremendous humanitarian challenge the world was facing today. According to an estimate by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), around 125 million people worldwide are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. More than 60 million people are forcibly displaced mainly by violent conflicts and severe violations of human rights. In other words, one person out of every 122 has been forced to flee his or her home.

Good intentions – target missed?

In view of these numbers, the WHS came just in time, as the chair of the Policy Lunch debate, Patrick Leusch from DW Media Services, Bonn, noted. But has the comprehensive preparatory process been a success? Why did Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and others draw out of the process shortly before the Summit?

The panelists at the sef: Policy Lunch all agreed that the original intentions of the process had been good, but also very ambitious. Gosia Pearson, Policy Officer



sef: Policy Lunch 2016: Welcome by Gerd Harms

at the European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) in Brussels, emphasized that this has been the first multi-stakeholder process without an intergovernmental track. She welcomed the intention to be inclusive, but with the multitude of actors concerned, the process finally got too complicated. The Global Consultation report, in her view, captured all that was brought into the process. But then, the outcome document of the Summit did neither emerge out of this nor of an intergovernmental process, as there was no forum for such a process. Instead, the UN Secretary-General

therefore welcomed that the Summit – as a political event – took this important debate up, too.

While all speakers agreed that the report by the UN Secretary-General and his “Agenda for Humanity” were political documents, they represented different views in how far the outcome of the consultations were reflected in these documents. According to Munn, important results of the Asian consultations, where he had been directly involved, had not been taken up. As an example, he mentioned the emphasis on the different challenges with regard to disaster response and response to humanitarian emergencies as a result of violent conflicts. He also criticized that due to too many processes of interpretation, the original voices got lost. Furthermore, to his observation, the WHS secretariat did virtually collapse after the global consultations.



sef: Policy Lunch 2016: Hans-Joachim Heintze, Veronika Burget, Patrick Leusch (Chair), Gosia Pearson and James Munn (l.t.r.)

took some aspects out of the global consultations but chose for his outcome document a much broader political frame. Although this might have been the only way to integrate as many stakeholders as possible, the absence of an intergovernmental process eventually led important actors and decision-makers such as Russia to pull out – and, eventually, MSF as well. In their press statement, they argued as follows: “But putting states on the same level as non-governmental organisations and UN agencies, which have no such powers or obligations, the Summit will minimise the responsibility of states.”

The states' responsibility is particularly obvious when it comes to conflict prevention and resolution – the first of five “core responsibilities” put forward by Ban Ki-Moon in his “Agenda for Humanity”. Conflicts did not pop up over night, it was well-known that they were coming, Dr James Munn, Head of Humanitarian Policy at the Norwegian Refugee Council in Geneva, said. Prevention therefore was possible – but it needed political drivers and will. Humanitarians should not be involved in conflict prevention, Veronika Burget, External Relations Officer at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Brussels, agreed. But then, the humanitarian system would break down if conflict prevention and resolution were not taken seriously, she continued. She

Better coordination, closer cooperation?

For Professor Hans-Joachim Heintze from the University of Bochum and Director of NOHA Network on Humanitarian Action, the pull-out of MSF was also a sign that humanitarian actors were still independent and acting only according to humanity. Although this was to be welcomed in general, Heintze underlined that humanitarian aid needed better organization and coordination in view of the many crises and the enormous demand of people expecting aid. The number of actors is steadily growing, including new donors from the Islamic world or the business sector who are not familiar with the rules of the humanitarian system. This leads to overlap, but as Heintze stated: “We cannot afford overlapping in view of the huge demand.” The Summit's intent was to bring all relevant actors together and to streamline their action to close the gap. This was clearly supported by Burget, who argued that humanitarian actors had to get out of their comfort zone and to start a dialogue with other actors, while admitting that this was complicated and challenging.

There was also clear disagreement among the panelists on the role other policy fields should play at the Summit. “It is the World *Humanitarian* Summit, not the World *Integration* Summit”, Munn stated. According to him, the “Humanitarian” had been lost on the way, but the focus needed to be on humanitarian needs, e.g. on better access in protracted crises. Other participants criticized that humanitarian actors and the development community still were living in two separate worlds not talking to each other. However, everything was so interlinked and needed equal attention, Pearson said. In particular in protracted crises, humanitarian missions needed to come to an end at some point, Heintze argued. People should be enabled to help themselves. This

was also the intention of a recent Communication by the European Commission on Forced Displacement. As Pearson explained, these people were often not targeted at all by development assistance but they needed assistance to become self-reliant.

Burget called for displacement to be integrated into the national development plans implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Displacement should be seen as a chance, too, not only as a burden. Cooperation between the development sector and humanitarian aid will remain a challenge, Heintze explained, as they followed different principles. The relevant actors had to be aware of this. According to him, experts with an interdisciplinary approach were urgently needed as promoted by the EU.

Take leadership in humanity!

So what did the discussants expect from the EU, then? Heintze emphasized the importance of the enforcement of humanitarian law. “We don’t need new law”, he stated, but the existing law had to be implemented. He therefore called on the EU to become a pacemaker in that regard and to also put pressure on its partners. Burget urged the EU to always look at local priorities first which sometimes was hindered by conditionality. Development assistance and business had to be pulled in to close the financing gap, and the reality of protracted displacement had to be faced. Munn summarized his wish list to the EU very shortly: “Take leadership in humanity!”

Global Governance Spotlight 2|2016

The World Humanitarian Summit.

Triumph of Humanity?

Hans-Joachim Heintze

May 2016; 4 pages

In 2015, 82.5 million people in 37 countries relied on humanitarian aid (UN OCHA). This number, once again, stretched the global humanitarian system to its limits. Already in 2012, the UN Secretary-General convened the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016. The aim is to achieve an international consensus on strengthening humanitarian principles as well as on a Grand Bargain for closing the humanitarian financing gap. In our Global Governance Spotlight 2|2016, Professor Heintze describes and assesses the extensive consultations ahead of the Summit and the reports by the UN Secretary-General and the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing to the WHS. He concludes with an outlook on the potential contribution of the EU to the Summit - as one of the largest humanitarian aid donor with a wealth of operational experience.



Imprint

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