

: Global Governance Spotlight

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The World Humanitarian Summit. Triumph of Humanity?

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After noticeably declining in the 1990s, military conflicts have recently increased and are characterised by great brutality and complexity. These conflicts, but also natural and other disasters, pose immense challenges for the international community and have created an unprecedented need for humanitarian assistance: in 2015, 82.5 million people in 37 countries relied on this type of aid (UN OCHA). Although USD 10 billion was provided by donors, the available funds fell a long way short of the USD 20 billion required, according to the United Nations, despite a further USD 7 billion being mobilised outside the UN framework. The lack of resources and the need for a reform of the humanitarian system prompted the UN Secretary-General to convene the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016. The aim is to achieve an international consensus on strengthening the principles governing humanitarian aid. A key input is expected from the European Union (EU) and its Member States, which are among the world's largest humanitarian aid donors and have a wealth of operational experience in this field.

Extensive consultations in advance

In Istanbul, governments, donors, humanitarian organisations, the private sector and representatives of affected communities will attempt to reach consensus on effective methods to save human lives and ameliorate suffering in humanitarian crises. Ahead of the WHS, extensive consultations took place with a wide range of stakeholders, involving more than

23,000 people in 153 countries over three years. The key outcomes of these consultations were summarised by the UN Secretary-General in his report for the WHS. He is frank in his assessment: there is outrage, he says, that the numbers of people forced from their homes have risen to levels not seen since the Second World War, without enough being done to overcome this crisis, that humanitarian action is still often used as a substitute for political solutions, and that national sovereignty is placed above people's rights to protection and assistance. He points out that the international aid architecture is seen as outdated and resistant to change, fragmented and too dominated by donor interests. All the consultations, he says, emphasised people's desire for change in order to end suffering, prevent crises and uphold international law.

A vision for change – humanity: a shared responsibility

In his report, entitled *One Humanity: Shared Responsibility* – the core document for the WHS – the UN Secretary-General calls for an international humanitarian system that is in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948. He also states that the international community's actions should live up to the promises of the Charter of the United Nations to end wars. The document thus goes far beyond mere proposals to improve the humanitarian system: it also addresses the political level. It calls for a "responsibility to act" based on five core responsibilities:

1. Political leadership to prevent and end conflicts

Humanitarian assistance may ameliorate suffering and peacekeepers may stabilise situations, but they cannot create lasting peace. The World Humanitarian Summit should therefore be the turning point, according to the UN Secretary-General, leading to timely, coherent and decisive political leadership based on risk analyses. Preventing crises must be the priority; if they break out nonetheless, crisis management with and for people is required.

2. Uphold the norms that safeguard humanity

When States violate international law or interpret it too expansively, other States and non-State actors can easily regard it as an invitation to do the same. The WHS must therefore demand compliance with existing laws: this is one of the key points made in the report. In particular, civilians and civilian objects must be protected in the conduct of hostilities, and full access to and the protection of humanitarian and medical missions must be ensured. One weakness of international humanitarian law is the continued lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. The UN Secretary-General takes the view that parties to armed conflict have a core obligation to uphold the law in the areas under their control and to utilise and strengthen the global system of law, making use of the UN Security Council. He also draws attention to the global justice system, which should complement national judicial frameworks.

3. Leave no one behind

One of the most visible consequences of conflict, violence and disasters has been the mass displacement of people within countries or across borders. Women, children and other vulnerable groups are especially affected. A measurable displacement reduction target of at least 50 per cent by 2030 should therefore be set. Large-scale refugee movements should be viewed as a shared responsibility and a new international cooperation framework should be established for this purpose, according to the report. It is also important to prepare for new migration movements resulting from natural disasters and climate change and to provide legal opportunities for migration.

4. Change people's lives – from delivering aid to ending need

Sustainable development must reduce people's risks and vulnerabilities. It is essential, therefore, to reinforce, not replace, existing national and local systems, placing people at the centre and building community resilience. The commitment should be as local as possible and as international as necessary, according to the report.

5. Invest in humanity

The international community must accept that our shared responsibilities for humanity require political, institutional and financial investment. This means investing in local capacities, risk reduction, effectiveness, technology transfer and public-private partnerships. Resources are also needed for stability, the crisis response and peacebuilding, according to the Secretary-General's final package of demands. There should be a move from individual short-term projects to collective outcomes, leading ultimately to an increase in cost-effectiveness.

In fact, funding is increasingly emerging as the main problem in humanitarian aid today. It was therefore the key focus of interest for the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, whose report, tellingly entitled *Too important to fail – addressing the humanitarian financing gap*, was published in January 2016. The nine Panel members – eminent figures from politics and business – were tasked with identifying ways in which the gap between rising needs and the resources available to meet them can be closed. They found that in 2014, the world spent around USD 25 billion, including private funds, on providing humanitarian assistance. According to their calculations, however, there is still a funding gap of USD 15 billion, which must be closed. The High-Level Panel therefore proposes the following actions:

- *Shrink the humanitarian need* by preventing and resolving conflicts, increasing investment in disaster risk reduction (DRR), and supporting development. It is also important to bridge the humanitarian-development divide with programming based on joint analysis.
- Deepen and broaden the *resource base* for humanitarian action: Insufficient funding for humanitarian aid means not only more suffering but also a wider spread of global instability. Helping people in distress is therefore in donors' own interests. The Panel proposes that governments use the opportunity of the WHS to sign up to the concept of a solidarity levy and create a steady revenue stream for humanitarian action. It is important to harness the power of commercial enterprises as well, as they have demonstrated great creativity in the business world.
- Improve delivery through *more efficiency*: Systemic change in humanitarian aid delivery is needed in order to raise new money and use it more effectively. Since the status quo is not an option, donors and implementing organisations should come together in a Grand Bargain. Donors would not simply give more but would commit to more multi-year funding and less earmarking, and

aid organisations would reciprocate with greater transparency and cost-consciousness.

Agenda for Humanity: a policy framework and roadmap

The UN Secretary-General's report is intended to be a call for action. It includes an "Agenda for Humanity", placing the document alongside the other much-quoted Agendas for Peace and for Sustainable Development. Overall, the report neatly sums up many of the problems besetting humanitarian aid; it also emphasises the responsibility of political leadership to prevent and end conflicts and help people in need. The danger inherent in this approach, namely the subsuming of humanitarianism into political agendas, is obvious and has been under way for some time. Politicians frequently invoke humanitarianism to justify their actions – even those which violate international law. The only option, then, is to tackle the root causes of the problem. Politicians still tend to take action only when the headlines are dominated by scenes of horror. The conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, both of which have created a seemingly endless need for humanitarian assistance and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, are symptomatic of this approach. Against this background, the UN report quite rightly underlines the responsibility to act. This lies with States, which have a duty to uphold the law and protect the humanitarian organisations. They, in turn, should not allow themselves to be used as political tools.

International humanitarian law and human rights norms form comprehensive bodies of law which protect civilians in all circumstances. Numerous treaties have been signed in order to strengthen this legal protection, although in many cases, the initiative has come from civil society, examples being the landmine and cluster bomb bans. But it is not only rebel groups and dictators who violate international humanitarian law; last year, four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council were implicated in the bombing of hospitals – a serious violation of the law of war. Strengthening enforcement is therefore an urgent but difficult task. Participants in the WHS should give unequivocal support to the proposals from the International Committee of the Red Cross and Switzerland to establish a reporting mechanism for the enforcement of humanitarian norms.

Another important and relatively new institution is the International Criminal Court. Its work is gradually taking shape, with its first verdicts against rebel leaders. However, States are still very reluctant to relinquish their sovereign powers. This makes human rights protection even more important due to its effective enforcement mechanisms, at least at the

regional level. The hundreds of verdicts handed down for Russian and Turkish abuses in the conflicts in Chechnya and the Kurdish regions, respectively, bear eloquent witness to that fact.

The difficult challenges faced by Europe last year as a consequence of the refugee crisis have once again demonstrated the need for better international coordination of the allocation of refugees. On 19 September 2016, the UN will hold a high-level meeting in New York to address this issue. The WHS should underline the international community's obligation to cooperate on this issue and call for humanitarian organisations to be given access to all refugees.

As another key topic for discussion, the WHS should focus on avoiding dependency on humanitarian aid. This is a vexed question, given that around 40 of the world's countries have been receiving humanitarian assistance for more than a decade. A particularly negative example is the Democratic Republic of the Congo – an aid recipient since the start of the conflict in 1996. The ceasefire in 2002 did not bring peace, largely because those in power profit from the crisis and rely on the continued provision of humanitarian aid to fuel the conflict. There is no doubt that the aid is vital for those in need, but political leaders have a responsibility to find solutions to the country's problems and reduce its dependency on aid. What is needed, therefore, is a strategy to facilitate the transition from aid to development. The WHS should prepare a suitable draft.

For many States, the Grand Bargain is the centrepiece of the WHS. Due to a lack of coordination, far too many resources are being wasted at present, and new donors are poorly integrated into the existing system. There is scope to improve matters through multi-annual funding, improved complementarity between aid and development, and more private sector involvement. Nonetheless, it is clear that the USD 15 billion shortfall cannot be covered from private donations or efficiency increases alone. The High-Level Panel has proposed the establishment of a solidarity fund for this purpose, and a clear position on this proposal is needed from the WHS.

With the Agenda for Humanity, the foundation has been laid, but further progress will depend on the international community's willingness to take action. The Istanbul summit will answer that question. Under the Secretary-General's proposals, the parties represented at the Summit would make individual commitments to specific measures, which will be set out in a joint document. It is hoped that this will create the political will (or pressure) for a fundamental change in the way in which the international community responds to human suffering, resulting in tangible progress within three years. How this progress and the implementation of voluntary commitments

are to be followed up has yet to be determined. In light of past experience with donors' pledges of aid, the WHS should demand a monitoring mechanism as a matter of priority.

The EU: leading the way?

The EU as a whole – the European Commission and the Member States – is the world's largest source of humanitarian aid. In 2012, the Commission alone spent 1.3 billion euros on humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries, and the initial aid budget for 2014-2020 has been fixed at 6.6 billion euros. This aid is provided on the basis of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. For the WHS, the EU has produced a document entitled *A global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action*, in which it identifies seven priorities for the reform of the global humanitarian system. Three of them relate to the principles of humanitarian aid. They range from reaffirming the values underpinning humanitarian aid and a commitment to keep humanitarian work distinct from political agendas, to ensuring humanitarian actors' access to people in need, and cooperation with the human rights community. Four priorities focus on improving humanitarian effectiveness through partnerships within the humanitarian community itself but also with local, national and regional actors, donors, the private sector and development actors.

Together with the Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA), the EU presented and discussed these priorities at four regional roundtables, where they were reaffirmed and explored in greater depth. One key demand was for more intensive research to be conducted on humanitarian issues, e.g. on aid provision in contexts of urban violence. Above all, however, it was repeatedly emphasised that as humanitarian aid and development assistance adhere to different principles, there should be no blurring of the lines between them; they should, however, be deployed in a complementary manner. And finally, the discussions also reiterated that States and de facto governments have a particular responsibility to strictly uphold

the relevant international humanitarian norms, for this body of law is the basis on which humanitarian organisations gain access to people in need and thus fulfil their mandate.

With these demands, the EU is clearly in accord with the Agenda for Humanity. The EU's support could well prove to be a decisive factor for the success of the WHS. It is important, therefore, for the EU to continue to take the lead in the humanitarian field and to be willing to make tangible commitments in line with the Agenda.

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Further information

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