

An Urgent Call to Reposition Human Needs at the Heart of Humanitarian Responses.

*Humanitarian agencies around the world are calling on key players in aid delivery to communicate and collaborate better at all levels, in a bid to refocus on what really matters: **ending human suffering**. The message from local, national and diaspora NGOs echoes a consistent frustration with how international aid is organised and delivered – the unnecessary barriers, competition and exclusions – distracting from the real purpose of **putting human needs first**.*

The call for a reform of the global humanitarian system is a key issue for 1,940 participants representing 1,324 humanitarian organisations in 39 preparatory consultations facilitated by The Humanitarian Forum ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit which will take place next year. The 20-month consultation, in 35 countries, brought together grassroots community and national NGOs, government representatives, affected communities and members of the media.

Joint-Statement On Humanitarian Reform:

Following extensive consultation on the way humanitarian aid is organised and delivered, and in light of the escalating complexities of global humanitarian crises, we the undersigned believe the humanitarian system needs radical reform and the following key issues need to be urgently addressed:

- 1. Refocus on saving lives and ending suffering:** NGOs, donors and governments must not compete over resources, political influence and visibility but cooperate better and focus their efforts on the common cause of meeting human needs.
- 2. Create a humanitarian system that works for all:** Humanitarian actors must reform the current system to make it more inclusive and therefore accountable and equitable by proactively involving those currently excluded in the global South and East.
- 3. Protect aid agencies from harm and counter-terrorism policies:** Multilateral agencies, governments and donors must do more to protect aid workers, understand the real challenges they face on the ground and protect them from the negative impact of counter-terrorism legislation and policies.
- 4. Utilise diaspora communities to improve aid efforts:** The knowledge, networks and dedication of diaspora communities must be better utilised to plan and deliver humanitarian aid as well as promote community cohesion and peace-building.

Refocus on Saving Lives and Ending Suffering

The humanitarian system inadvertently promotes competition not cooperation, particularly in crisis situations where international actors often bypass the government and compromise the capacity of local and national NGOs. International actors subcontract local and national NGOs to implement their short-lived projects rather than enter into equal, longer-term partnerships with them. This leads to tensions, mistrust, ambiguity of roles and inequitable competition over funds, with an undue focus on visibility, branding and political leverage. **Humanitarian actors need to work together to recommit to their key priorities: reaching people in need, ensuring the survival of all affected populations without discrimination, protecting them with dignity and strengthening their resilience.**

Towards this end, national and international humanitarian actors should hold each other to account, enhance their cooperation, mutual trust and firm commitment to de-politicised and principled humanitarian action. They should collaborate through joint partnerships to achieve common goals

and give emerging actors from the global South the space to operate in their own way. **The humanitarian system needs to move from a centralised, unilateral Western-oriented approach to one that is broader, more inclusive and localised.**

Create A Humanitarian System That Works For All

The global humanitarian scene includes new actors from the global South and East who remain outside the Western-oriented humanitarian system. Participants called for the new actors to be engaged in the humanitarian system and take on leadership roles and policy creation. This will require proactive recruitment and engagement as well as an investment of time and resources in building their capacities. Donors should demonstrate impartiality and greater flexibility to meet these needs.

The system must also hold relevant UN agencies to account for the way in which pooled funds are allocated if national actors are denied fair access. Furthermore, **the political and humanitarian arms of international systems need to be distinctly separate** so that a state's political aims or the decisions of the Security Council are not able to hamper aid efforts. **Saving lives, protecting vulnerable communities and delivering aid to the needy should always take priority over political bias.**

Protect Aid Agencies From Harm and Counter-Terrorism Policies

In many regions NGOs have to negotiate with armed parties in order to access people in need. Governments often interpret this as 'indirect' support for non-state armed groups. In some parts of the world this has led to aid workers being persecuted and financial restrictions being imposed, such as blocking money transfers to affected areas or even freezing assets, which means aid cannot reach people in need. **This is a breach of the humanitarian imperative and undermines the principle of indiscriminate assistance.**

Participants also stressed the importance of protecting affected communities and aid workers from harm, especially in armed conflict zones. **Aid workers can be doubly affected when trying to deliver aid in conflict zones: they can be targeted and attacked by armed groups and be accused of supporting terrorism by governments.**

Governments need to rethink what constitutes 'support for terrorism' in the context of NGOs negotiating humanitarian access. Also the UN and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement need to do more to protect aid agencies from harm, and from such allegations given the current ambiguities in counter-terrorism legislation. The finance sector must accept that their restrictions and regulations often impact life-saving work and should be more proactive in helping to find solutions. NGOs need to improve transparency and accountability, comply with all laws and regulations as well as develop adequate risk management structures. **An international working group of NGOs, governments and banks should be established to adequately collaborate towards best practice and less ambiguous counter-terrorism policy.**

Utilise Diaspora Communities To Improve Aid Efforts

Diaspora communities make a significant impact on humanitarian aid efforts through financial contributions but their skills, expertise, dedication and insight remain under-utilised. Diaspora communities can potentially play an instrumental role in addressing issues that aid actors cannot, such as negotiating access with armed non-state actors, or mitigating the causes and effects of

terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. In addition to this, the participants in our diaspora-focused consultations raised the issue of stigma around diaspora humanitarian workers who are often unfairly regarded as unskilled, biased and politicised.

We ask the UN and Red Cross and Red Crescent movement to increase the visibility of diaspora organisations and encourage the governments of their countries of heritage to recognise their value. We also ask that humanitarian actors make a proactive effort to form working partnerships with them.

The Humanitarian Forum is a network of humanitarian organisations that aims to build bridges, create platforms and be a catalyst in the movement towards more efficient, just and sustainable humanitarian responses. We have been working with our partners across the globe on World Humanitarian Summit consultations. As part of our efforts to maintain this global introspection of humanitarian action, we have put together the most salient issues raised in our consultations in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and the MENA region. **We urge the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat to consider these points** ahead of the summit in Istanbul in May 2016.