



Humanitarian response for Libya Stakeholder conference, May 8, 2011

Outcomes and recommendations

Background and Summary:

On March 24 The Humanitarian Forum (THF) and League of Arab States (LAS) jointly organised a conference to discuss the humanitarian situation in Libya¹. The meeting provided a unique platform for discussion between a wide range of humanitarian organizations and helped create partnerships. As the humanitarian situation in and around Libya continued to deteriorate, the League of Arab States and the Organization for the Islamic Conference (OIC) convened a second conference, facilitated by The Humanitarian Forum.

The conference on 8 May brought together leading humanitarian organizations from the multilateral system, Europe and the Middle East to share up-to-date information on Libya, understand the changing trends in the crisis, discuss the need to build the civil society sector and government organisations, promote regional leadership and promote networking and partnerships.

Opening session:

Dr Hany El Banna, chairman of THF, welcomed the participants. He described the Conference as excellent initiative convened by prominent institutions in the region, illustrating regional leadership and commitment to help meet the escalating humanitarian needs in Libya. Dr. Hany El Banna introduced the Conference keynote speakers, who all agreed to the importance and timeliness of the meeting.

Dr. Abdel Aziz Hegazy, former Egyptian Prime Minister and President of the Egyptian NGO Federation, spoke of the “many unexpected and unpredictable conflict areas that have erupted across the region” and the vital requirement for coordination amongst all humanitarian actors. He called for a humanitarian fund for Libya and demanded urgent action: “there are consequences to lives if we procrastinate”.

Dr. Ahmed Hussein, OIC Humanitarian Affairs Cairo Office, welcomed the participants on behalf of Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the OIC, and Ambassador Atta Al Manan, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, who were both unable to attend the Conference. He commented on the dangerous and critical situation in Libya, requesting participating organizations to cooperate and complement each others’ efforts.

Her Excellency Sima Babous, LAS Assistant Secretary General for Social Affairs, thanked Dr Hany for his “commitment and initiative” for the conferences. She also thanked all the participants for their continued support to Libya. Given the current circumstances in the region, she emphasized that partnerships and collaboration are essential to help alleviate humanitarian suffering.

¹ <http://www.humanitarianforum.org/pages/en/cairo-conference-for-libya.html>. Humanitarian information is available on <http://northafrica.humanitarianresponse.info/>.

Information exchange and situation update:

To update the participants on the current situation in Libya, *Panos Moumtzis*, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya, confirmed that the number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) has reached 60,000. He also referred to the pressing needs in western Libya. He recognised that 51,000 people have been accommodated by the Tunisian government and people, but added that there is little media coverage and information on the rest of western Libya. Given the current situation, it is important that efforts are coordinated, humanitarian needs are met immediately, and that information is continuously updated and shared. The UN has launched a flash appeal, of which 46% has been funded. This significant gap must be met, and greater contributions should be channeled to Libya.

Ahmed Benmussa, Libyan Committee for Humanitarian Response (LCHR) described the situation in different parts of Libya from his personal experience, describing it as being “on the verge of collapse”. He urged participants to respond to the crisis immediately, as the situation continues to deteriorate, with food supplies running low, and hospitals working beyond their capacities. He thanked the organisers of the conference and said that the participants’ “voice will overcome the voice of death in Libya”.

Sir Nicholas Young, British Red Cross, said that the events taking place in Libya illustrate the need to work better together. There is great need for THF’s work of creating links, commitment and shared understanding between humanitarian organisations from the West and East. The events in MENA region are an opportunity to help build a civil society for the future.

Her Excellency Sheikha Hissa Althani, former UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, described the situation in the region as “extremely challenging”. She drew attention to the growing proportion of disabled people, and the need to ensure sufficient medical attention and care both now and in the future.

Laila Negm, LAS, and Dr Ahmad described the first joint aid convoy organized by LAS and OIC, that had resulted from the conference on 24 March. This involved 20 NGOs from Egypt, Libya and the UK, and illustrates an emerging regional leadership. They presented a video of this².

Collaboration:

Working groups looked at practical and tangible opportunities for collaboration in the areas of: medical and other relief; advocacy, media and information focal points, and; building civil society.

Medical and other relief (facilitated by Mohamed Aderdour, Qatar Charity)

Participants continued to update each other on the most relevant activities undertaken. They also discussed some of the continuing and newly emerging challenges. The principal issues discussed included:

- Participating organizations updated the group of their future activities and potential contributions to ensure that efforts could be coordinated. The Egyptian NGO, Al Orman, for example confirmed its willingness to finance the surgical procedures. A representative from Resala stressed the organization’s access to volunteers, who are willing to participate in humanitarian efforts.
- Insufficient capacity of hospitals and the need to release patients immediately after complex operations. This in turn affects the rate of recovery of patients. Absence of social support, as well as medical follow-up hinders recovery further.

² Copies are available from the LAS.

- Various organizations have succeeded in getting victims in need of critical care out of Libya to receive medical attention in neighboring countries. However, the question about the future of these victims has not yet been addressed. It is important to discuss whether their return should be an option or not.
- Closely associated with the issue of critical patient care in neighboring countries are the patient companions. Issues such as housing and per diems for this group have been discarded by many organizations.
- Both the Libyan and Egyptian authorities have issued visa requirements for entry into the respective countries. This in turn will significantly hamper and reduce the speed of humanitarian response further.
- Coordination and access to accurate information represent an ongoing challenge.

Recommendations:

- Not enough aid is getting into Libya. There is an urgent need to meet medical needs and provide human resources.
- Aid is not well coordinated, although the work of OCHA was welcomed. There needs to be a mechanism to coordinate humanitarian assistance (both in kind and financial). OIC presented a simple Facebook tool that they are developing³. Representatives from the Libyan Committee for Humanitarian Response confirmed they attend OCHA meetings. The Committee also publishes regular reports with up-to-date information on medical needs and requirements.
- Work to provide safe route to ensure the delivery of aid. Greater focus and attention should be dedicated to the western regions.
- Provide psychological support for children, women and people with special needs.
- Explore ways to provide the necessary resources to send ambulances equipped with intensive care units where they are needed urgently.
- Institutions are required to look into the percentage of the population which has received medical attention abroad. It is important to address the issue of their return back to Libya. Closely associated with this, is the issue of those who can accompany the wounded. They also require food and shelter.
- The group discussed the need for the LAS to pressure member states to take effective decisions to achieve an end to the current situation in Libya.
- A joint project was proposed by Mahba for Special Needs, in which they could provide psychosocial support if another organisation can provide artificial limbs.

Advocacy, media and information focal points (facilitated by Jamie Balfour-Paul, Oxfam)

The group agreed **advocacy/media messages** that can be used by individual organizations (and potentially in joint work).

Unimpeded humanitarian access (even if it means in practice accessing places one by one):

- This is consistent with international humanitarian law as well as being an urgent moral case to reach people in need.
- Agencies need to maintain a country wide approach and as far as possible operate in or through Tripoli as well as Benghazi – this enables better access negotiations in the west, especially by the UN.
- Areas in particular need of unimpeded access are Misrata (via land and sea), and west-east strip along western mountains⁴.

³ Further details from libyanews@ichad-oic.org. See also www.ichad-oic.com.

⁴ As at 24 March, Gaddafi controls the west-east strip between Ras Ajdir - Zuwara - Zawiya to north, and opposition controls the strip from Dehiba - Jabu - Zintan to south. Further south in the lowlands, Gaddafi forces are also in control so the opposition is vulnerable to attack from

- There are concerns of key life lines being attacked in the conflict – this must be avoided and closely monitored. For example in the southern desert, attacks on the Great Man Made river as well as oil pipelines could have severe humanitarian consequences if water supply is affected and there are further fuel shortages.
- Agencies trying to operate in all of these areas need to communicate to all concerned and put into practice their impartiality and neutrality and need to communicate.

Needs:

- These must be treated country-wide even though they vary between east and west.
- In the east, urgent humanitarian needs exist currently and must be addressed together with protection needs including decontamination of unexploded ordinance etc – in parallel, capacity building work is vital.
- In the west needs are more life-saving as well as protection.
- Also, there is a need for preventive action now to prevent an escalation of the crisis and the preservation of public services. This requires urgent action⁵ in 3 key areas: food pipeline (for the whole population), water treatment and spare parts, and the banking system. Maintaining fuel and power supply are also crucial.
- There are 58,000 IDPs in public places and there are likely to be gaps in needs, as well as vulnerability.
- Finally, Libyans require a food basket appropriate to their society (additional food items to those available in standard WFP rations).

Coordination:

- All actors to make use of main portal <http://libya.humanitarianresponse.info/> to post their reports and access information - including OIC and LCHR weekly reports.
- OCHA should be resourced with Arabic speakers to ensure that reports from Arab NGOs, OIC and LAS are incorporated into UN reporting system, but non-UN actors need to be proactive to link with UN. OCHA should also ensure their situation reports get to conference participants and have Arabic translations as far as possible.
- Together, UN - OIC - LAS need to coordinate better and this crisis is a good prompt for this as all have Libya offices based in Cairo.
- The Red Crescents and ICRC have their own distinct coordination mechanisms and this must be respected - an issue of complementarity.

Funding:

- The UN appeal is only 46% funded which is not acceptable. A revised appeal will be released soon, and this must be funded.
- OIC and LAS have not launched appeals, but if they do these should be linked with the UN appeal and Arab donors should also fund the UN appeal.

Protection of civilians:

- All relevant actors have a duty to respect international humanitarian law, which includes proportional use of force and forbids indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian property.
- NATO needs to provide comprehensive and transparent reporting on harm to civilians and civilian casualties, and parties to the conflict also need to report. Ultimately this data needs to go to the UNSC through the UNSG monthly reports.

Cessation of hostilities and political solutions

Gaddafi forces to north and from south.

⁵ All this comes under stabilisation heading but should be mobilised sooner rather than later.

- We are not political but press for cessation of hostilities/humanitarian pauses to enable access for assistance and evacuations.
- This is separate and distinct from the political process about which we do not have specific detailed messages but ask for a political outcome that meets the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Libyan people.

The group also repeated the agreement on **information focal points** from the 24 March conference, although there was little time for further discussion on this. This earlier meeting had said that there should be focal points for:

- **medical needs – AMU and OIC had offered to jointly act as the focal points**
- local partners in Libya – volunteers are welcome to take this area forwards
- **public messages – Oxfam offered to act as the/a focal point** for messaging/lobbying/media products done by different agencies as well as being a source of sharing and support between members. (They could possibly initiate joint statements/products, if participants sign up to this). Oxfam added on 8 May that they could also provide one-off **training** events in media and advocacy, subject to clear proposals, available funds and staff capacity (funding is not currently available).

For these:

- <http://northafrica.humanitarianresponse.info/> will be the hub
- UNDP had offered to analyse/finalise information for the focal points, perhaps using volunteers placed in the focal point organizations.
- All organisations are encouraged to send the focal points information and provide feedback on their reports.

Building Civil Society (facilitated by Dr. Hany Al Banna, THF)

The group agreed on the need to build civil society in the short and long terms. Dr Hany added that this is as important as medical relief.

It was agreed that bilateral and multilateral institutions must support the development of the civil society in Libya. They should raise awareness of the local situation in Libya, and ensure that the civil society receives sufficient funding. This could include:

- Training, particularly in financial management and strategic planning
- Twinning, in particular with Arab NGOs outside Libya
- Developing a culture of volunteering, particularly amongst women and youth
- Facilitating partnerships
- Mahba for special needs offered to be a venue for all training.
- THF will provide further training for local CSOs and can support networking between them. Dr Hany described the training that THF had organized for 200 people from Al Beyda and Benghazi in recent weeks.

Some of the challenges are: information; monitoring and evaluation; stability for civil society strengthening, including a legal framework.

Other recommendations and outcomes:

- An **increased, joint regional leadership by OIC and LAS**. This will include **online coordination tools** (easily accessible through Facebook) and a **second joint humanitarian convoy** involving 50 NGOs. Several people called on LAS and OIC to facilitate more Arab funding.

- Participants called on **regional institutions to ensure that more funding is made available** for Libya, such as OPEC, Islamic Development Bank, and the Arab Economic Development Fund.
- More **coordination in Libya** between the LCHD and UNOCHA. Also, improved coordination amongst Libyan NGOs, several of whom met for the first time at the conference. This follows coordination amongst Egyptian NGOs that started after the 24 March conference. Local NGOs could consider working under one umbrella to ensure that humanitarian assistance to Libya is coordinated. Within Libya, Libyan organizations and associations should come together, and form a network to ensure needs across Libya are heard and coherently expressed.
- Calls for a Libyan involvement in all regional and international humanitarian processes. **Libyan and Egyptian NGOs are welcome at cluster meetings.**
- The participants also suggested follow-up meetings in Tunisia and Benghazi.

Closing session

Echoing the Sheikha's comment that "the whole region is on fire", there was an impassioned plea to humanitarian organisations and the LAS to act now in Yemen.

The Conference illustrated regional leadership and commitment to help meet the escalating humanitarian needs in Libya. Since the 24 March meeting, prominent Islamic and regional institutions have increased their humanitarian assistance to Libya. A case in point is the Islamic Development (IDB), which has organized four aid convoys since the March meeting, and has expressed its willingness to coordinate efforts with all organizations. Qatar Charity and Qatar Red Crescent have also illustrated their commitment to the Libyan people. The provision of medical supplies and staff as well as training for emerging organizations are areas that the two organizations are currently undertaking, respectively. The Arab Medical Union (AMU) also drew participants' attention to the convoy the union was organizing for May 10, calling on all organizations to contribute or coordinate efforts.

Dr Hany concluded the meeting by saying that this was one step in building civil society in Libya. "The Humanitarian Forum has been honored to act as a bridge and facilitator. The Organization for the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States are the real forces that will lead the Arab organizations in cooperation with the UN."