

**The Humanitarian Forum**

6 Whitehorse Mews, 37 Westminster Bridge Road

London SE1 7QD United Kingdom.

[www.humanitarianforum.org](http://www.humanitarianforum.org)

Tel: +44- (0)-203-096-1987

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**In preparations for:  
2016 UN First World Humanitarian Summit**

**Meeting Report  
THF and Partners  
Humanitarian NGOs role in re-shaping Aid**

**Istanbul, Turkey 4-5 December 2015**

**By: The Humanitarian Forum**



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### 1. Background

The global humanitarian community is recognizing the changes that have been shaping the humanitarian landscape over the last few decades. These emerging trends are characterized by an increased demand on humanitarian action from civilians who are exposed to natural disasters or armed conflicts. Despite the increasing numbers of humanitarian actors, multi-stakeholder responses fall short on effectively meeting these increased demands. Under funded humanitarian responses, mistrust, competition between humanitarian organizations and a lack of organizational capacity significantly contributes to ineffective responses. Since 2005 humanitarian actors have been reflecting on their work within the Humanitarian Reform process and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Transformative Agenda framework. These processes resulted in commitment from humanitarian actors to more accountable, predictable and effective humanitarian action.

The UN, supported by the international humanitarian community, believe that the time is right to organize a global summit that reforms the humanitarian system and sets out a new agenda that captures and reflects the changes and challenges across the humanitarian landscape. This will take the form of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016 (WHS) which is the first of its kind. It has been called for by UN Secretary General – Mr. Ban Ki-moon in 2013 to be a platform for a worldwide reassessment of the how effectively humanitarian system responds to conflict and natural disasters. The summit will take place after a two-year consultation process with all actors involved in humanitarian aid: charities, governments, businesses, youth, affected communities, academics and aid workers. It is an opportunity for all humanitarian agencies to reshape international aid and make it more effective. If you are interested to read more about the WHS process it is advisable to visit the website: [www.worldhumanitariansummit.org](http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org).

Since January 2014, and as part of the WHS process The Humanitarian Forum has been working with our partners across the globe to reassess the humanitarian system as it currently exists. The process involves gathering analysis from a variety of stakeholders including affected communities, private sector, government representatives, INGOs, national NGOs and grass roots organisations. The opportunity to work on the World Humanitarian Summit process gives us the chance to put key recommendations for improving the international humanitarian system to the UN in the run up to the summit in Istanbul in 2016.

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Together with our partners in 35 countries we organized 39 consultations: meetings with nearly 2,000 participants representing national and local humanitarian NGOs in those countries. The purpose of these meetings was to gauge the participants' perspectives on how to improve the humanitarian system and make their voices heard in international platforms. They are meant to influence aid policies that affect the communities where they work. Reports including recommendations and realities on the ground from each of these consultations was shared with WHS secretariat to inform their views on the system. We also organised a launch of a call to: reposition humanity at the heart of humanitarian responses, thus the title of Re-Humanise Aid (#ReHumaniseAid). It encourages all actors involved in aid to recommit to principled humanitarian action that effectively saves and protects lives over and above politics or brand visibility. The Rehumanise Aid statement recommendations are based on data from the 39 consultations mentioned above. The initiative, aims to encourage the summit secretariat to include the following 4 key recommendations on the agenda at the summit:

- Refocus on saving lives and ending suffering,
- Create a humanitarian system that works for all its parts and actors,
- Protect aid agencies from ambiguous counter-terrorism policies, and
- Utilise diaspora communities to improve aid efforts.

The statement is currently owned and endorsed by 64 signatories of NGOs. We have asked our partners who endorse its recommendations to organise briefings with government officials, policy makers, NGOs and academics about the summit and to pass the #RehumaniseAid message

Furthermore, THF advocated and promoted the content of this statement and conclusions of the 39 consultations in more than 16 meetings where we engaged with various governments, policy makers, UN, faith based organisations and INGO meetings.

THF produced three documents which summarise the analysis and opinions that have arisen from these consultations. These documents are:

- The Humanitarian Forum Thematic Report – this report looks at what was said in each region on each theme as laid out by the World Humanitarian Secretariat in the 39 consultations carried out in Europe, Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia and South and East Africa

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- Report on Diaspora-led consultations – this report gathers the points of agreement and contention that were expressed at our diaspora led consultations in the UK, the US, Italy, Canada and Norway.
- Latin America Diaspora Consultation Summary – our most recent diaspora-led event took place in Mexico together with the UN and this document summarises the main points discussed there.

## 2. What does WHS mean to humanitarian action?

The Summit process provided humanitarian organizations from the southern hemisphere an opportunity to:

- 2.1. Participate in redefining the humanitarian principles for the future,
- 2.2. Highlight the shared global heritage of moral values as a basis for principled humanitarian action that is upheld across boundaries, cultures and faiths.
- 2.3. Challenge negative stereotypes associated with faith-based humanitarian action- particularly associating Islam with terrorism.

## 3. Why should we be involved in WHS process?

Since its inception THF aimed at building bridges and trust between humanitarian NGOs and multilaterals from the Middle East and those the West. Our involvement with WHS was part of fulfilling this mandate.

Specifically we:

- 3.1. Raised awareness of WHS and its importance, and mobilized leaders of key humanitarian NGOs in 35 countries and diaspora communities in Europe and North America to get involved,
- 3.2. Provided technical support to partners so they could facilitate and host national consultations for humanitarian organizations in their countries,
- 3.3. Ensured the perspectives and concerns of humanitarian actors (NGOs, affected/ host and diaspora communities) fed into the WHS agenda. THF representatives participated in xx regional and international meetings where these issues were raised and brought forward.

**The purpose of the meeting in Istanbul between 4-5 Decembers was to encourage humanitarian actors, government representatives, and humanitarian organizations to take into consideration the perspectives of aid workers and organizations who work tirelessly at the national and local levels. Also the meeting makes a space available for focused sharing of expertise between key weighty humanitarian partners who are able to address specific aspects of the consultation,**

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**3.4. What outcomes are expected?**

- 3.4.1. Recognition of the voice of affected and responding communities to humanitarian crisis that is leveraged to reshape the humanitarian aid agenda,
- 3.4.2. Enhanced trust between humanitarian actors within a collectively owned and inclusive humanitarian system,
- 3.4.3. Protected humanitarian action from the influence of political and media agendas.

**4. Who attended?**

50 representative leaders of 38 partner organisations from 24 countries in Asia, MENA, East Africa, and Europe. (List is annexed)

**5. The Meeting Agenda**

Day 1: Friday 4rd December 2015	
18:00 – 20:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update on WHS consultation process: national, regional and global.</li> <li>- Plans by the UN for May 2016 and negotiations with governments.</li> <li>- Discussion: In the lead up to the WHS and beyond: What roles should we expect from NGOs to reform the Humanitarian System?</li> </ul>
Day 2: Saturday 5th December 2015	
9:00 – 10:30	Presentation and discussion of pathways for NGO engagement in reform.
11:00 - 13:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of a joint action plan for phases prior to and those following the WHS in May 2016.</li> <li>- Concluding remarks</li> </ul>

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## 6. Proceedings

THF shared with all participants copies of the WHS Synthesis Report: Restoring Humanity Global Voices Calling for Action, issued by its secretariat in November 2015. After a brief presentation of the report and a plenary discussion the participants were divided into 5 groups to critically discuss content and relevance of report findings to their specific context. The groups were divided as per areas of focus that emerged in the synthesis report.

**Dignity:** Empower people to cope and recover with dignity through humanitarian action that puts people at its heart, delivers equally for women and girls, reaches everyone, invests in youth and children and protects and enables people as the primary agents of their own response.

**Safety:** Keep people safe from harm by putting protection at the centre of humanitarian action, increasing political action to prevent and end conflict, preventing and putting an end to violations of international humanitarian law, and ensuring humanitarian action is not instrumentalized.

**Resilience:** Build hope and solutions for people in new or prolonged crises through collective action by humanitarian, development and other partners to strengthen people's resilience to crises, by investing in preparedness, managing and mitigating risk, reducing vulnerability, finding durable solutions for protracted displacement, and adapting to new threats.

**Partnerships:** Build diverse and inclusive partnerships that reaffirm the core humanitarian principles, support effective and people-driven humanitarian action, enable first responders to take a leadership role, and leverage the power of innovation.

**Finance:** Ensure sufficient and more efficient use of resources to preserve life, dignity and resilience in crises through new and diverse funding sources and expanded support to local organizations.

**Below are the main discussion points and recommendations for each of these themes:**

### 1. Dignity:

1.1. The issues described in the synthesis report related to dignity are quite complex and intertwined.

Generally victims of humanitarian action are seen as disempowered recipients of aid while they need to be at the heart of the humanitarian action. Women, children, elderly and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable in humanitarian crisis contexts of conflicts. Their specific needs may be different from other affected groups and should be catered to accordingly. Moreover the participants highlighted the significance of holistic understanding of humanitarian responses rather than by sector or humanitarian organizations' focus. So securing mechanisms of empowerment and

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means to sustained livelihoods and provision of education services are strategies of equal importance to provision of food and shelter to meet basic needs of affected communities.

The group's main recommendations:

- 1.2. Humanitarian organisations should lead efforts in educating community members about humanitarian issues and the challenges that affected people face at times of need. This would encourage collective empathy and better public understanding of complex humanitarian issues.
- 1.3. Governments and Parliaments should develop legal and legislative frameworks that protect the dignity of affected people according to internationally accepted standards.
- 1.4. Multilateral bodies and governments should support IHL compliance mechanisms that hold parties to account and endorse prosecution of its violators. These bodies should also pursue peaceful solutions to conflict and minimise its human cost.
- 1.5. Humanitarian response and protection of affected communities should only be delivered according to their assessed needs and not any other consideration such as their religious, political, gender or racial identity.
- 1.6. All stakeholders involved in humanitarian action including governments and non-state actors should not use humanitarian aid and provision of protection to affected communities as a tool to politically manipulate their situation of need.
- 1.7. Refugees should receive their right to access education and their skills should be utilised to earn their livelihoods and contribute to the economies of host communities.

## 2. Safety:

The group discussed the recommendations from the consultation synthesis report and identified three priority areas for ensuring safety in humanitarian action:

- 2.1. The priority to ensure safety of affected populations and ensuring that they receive the protection they need to survive the humanitarian situation. Humanitarian organizations should also advocate for improved legal frameworks, policies and mechanisms to better protect IDPs along the routes of migration. Attendees also discussed the role of humanitarian actors in facilitating the peaceful resolution of root causes of conflict. However, others warned that humanitarian organizations need not get involved.
- 2.2. In light of increased targeting of aid workers in conflict zones, humanitarian actors should ensure aid workers' safety. The important role of humanitarian organizations in doing so was also recognized and acknowledged. Local and international organizations should not be victimized or targeted while

they deliver aid. Staff need to receive appropriate training and tools that will help them better manage security in complex conflict zones.

- 2.3. Participants also highlighted the significance of providing protection to civilians affected by conflict and ensure respect to IHL in conflict zones. Aid actors need also to understand that they cannot address complex political issues with humanitarian solutions. However they may have leverage with non-formal diplomacy, negotiations and relationships with a range of stakeholders. Participants thought that humanitarian organizations should engage more with advocacy and influencing decisions putting respect humanitarian principles at the forefront of these advocacy efforts.

### **3. Resilience and Preparedness**

- 3.1. Aid actors should support regional or internationally endorsed multi-lateral agreements of mutual support at times of crisis.
- 3.2. Governments need to better invest in and resource early warning systems both at the local and national levels. This may include supporting multiple coordination mechanisms that are effective and well-structured. Investing in preparedness has proved to be more effective utilization of resources than in response.
- 3.3. Emergency response systems need to be well resourced with skilled professionals in managing and leading humanitarian responses who are multilingual and can be readily deployed to crisis prone areas.
- 3.4. Facilitate coalition building at local and regional levels between humanitarian response actors to improve collective capacity of organisations. This could be with neighbour cities and towns in the same country or cross border.

### **4. Partnerships**

- 4.1. Partnerships need to be gradually improved. At the centre of improvement is building trust between various aid actors who “in theory” should work together for the benefit of affected communities. Like minded actors including humanitarian organizations, policy research and academic centers, religious organizations and media leaders are to jointly initiate, maintain and nurture their mutual relationships to develop a trusting partnership that fulfills each organisation's missions. To achieve this the primary stakeholders could be government departments that are directly involved in humanitarian work on one side (emergency management coordination, ministries of health, education, social affairs, foreign affairs and occasionally military when they are not directly involved



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in conflict) and humanitarian charities on the other side. The group recommended the following courses of action:

- 4.2. Humanitarian organizations to allocate a set amount from their budgets for building their own capacity, skills of their staff and internal operational procedures to improve governance, transparency and accountability. They also need to improve their influencing capacity on government and other actors as individual organizations or part of wider coalitions and groups.
- 4.3. Humanitarian organizations who share similar values, principles, modes of action and find value added in their coming together under shared umbrellas- should do so to enhance effectiveness of humanitarian action.
- 4.4. Governments need to develop supportive legislative mechanisms that allow humanitarian organizations to grow recognizing their value in the voluntary action. Their partnership should be based on freedom of action within a well-regulated space of operation. In many places humanitarian voluntary organizations are viewed with suspicion by the governments.
- 4.5. National governments should encourage improved performance of humanitarian organizations based on good practice in the country and elsewhere. Governments should develop a rewards system that promotes compliance to standards of good governance, transparent and accountable operations, and collective coordinated action.
- 4.6. To minimize communication gaps, create synergies and leverage technical capacities. Government and humanitarian agencies can intensify their multilingual coordination meetings, expertise sharing and engagement in joint planning and implementation of humanitarian action

## 5. Finance:

- 5.1. The group discussed the importance of funding for continuity of humanitarian action and the need for increased collaboration between different stakeholders to ensure a transparent, accountable and effective humanitarian system that is capable of meeting the expected standards of humanitarian aid delivery and civilian protection where and when it is needed. The group members highlighted the need to distinguish between financing immediate humanitarian projects versus longer term ones of development nature.
- 5.2. The group stressed financing humanitarian action through raising new financial resources and better managing existing ones. For increasing resources the group highlighted the link between humanitarian discourse with local trends of giving and philanthropy. Humanitarian actors need to capitalize on local knowledge, culture, attitudes and perspectives on relieving those in need due to

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conflict or natural disasters. There has been numerous successful examples from Africa, Asia and among Muslim communities of tapping into charitable financial resources like Zakat, Sadaqah and Waqf for sustained funding of humanitarian action. However these were done in individual cases and there is a need to explore the potential for scaling up.

- 5.3. Equally important is the need to improve transparency and accountability mechanisms in the humanitarian system. Donors and affected communities alike should be able to see for themselves whether funds are properly utilised and wisely spent. Humanitarian actors should pay attention to internal financial controls and regular auditing of their operations to protect both the donor and affected person from the humanitarian situation.
- 5.4. Participants highlighted match funding mechanisms adopted by many foundations and government donor agencies. This mechanism pools funding from various sources, and quickly scales up available resources to address specific humanitarian needs. Funding campaigns that send culturally resonating appeals for funding and utilize media (online, radio, and printed media) have proven successful.
- 5.5. The participants also called for establishing emergency response funds at organisational, local or national levels that are readily available for use in situations of emergency and dire humanitarian need. Acting on their social responsibility enterprises of the private sector should make tax free donations towards such funds. Governments should also develop legislation and laws that encourage local organisations to play a major role in assessing needs and respond jointly with international stakeholders in light of their understanding of local cultural contexts and shared commitment to globally accepted standards in humanitarian action.
- 5.6. Finally the group also highlighted the success of crowd funding models that facilitate the direct bond between the donor and affected person who received the service. This has proven to be quite successful in raising funds and strengthening empathetic and compassionate bonds between donor and recipient of the donation.

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### **6. Recommendations prior to WHS meetings in May 2016:**

- 6.1. Continue engaging with relevant departments of national governments to influence their perspectives on the main issues in the humanitarian sector. The Turkish government should also be influential as it is the host. The main issues should include, financing, cross cultural partnerships and accountability of the sector towards its stakeholders.
- 6.2. Attending organizations are asked to initiate, build and maintain effective coalitions with stakeholders who share similar perspectives on improving the humanitarian sector including the regional multilateral organizations, private sector, military institutions, media and civil society organizations.
- 6.3. Develop a concise briefing for stakeholders about the points of contention in the summit and key issues that will be addressed in it. Organizations to create an interactive platform to stimulate community wide discussion about these issues and influence the stakeholders.

### **7. Recommendations for post WHS are:**

- 7.1. Increase commitment towards principles and standards of transparency, good governance and accountability for humanitarian organizations and the wider stakeholders.
- 7.2. Strengthen meaningful synergies and partnerships between NGOs and policy research institutions to hold stakeholders' commitments to the summit recommendations.
- 7.3. Facilitate the building of effective coalition organizations with shared cultural backgrounds, concerns and commitments towards humanitarianism that can collectively leverage their influence to bring positive change into the system.
- 7.4. Organize an annual event which gathers policy makers, researchers, aid workers and multilateral to re-visit 2016 WHS recommendations and discuss progress towards achieving the desired results.