

Challenges for Humanitarian Aid in a Globalised World

Note on the World Humanitarian Summit 2016 in Istanbul

Humanitarian needs have increased all over the world. Their scope and diversity has generated a large financing gap. In 2016, assistance will be needed for 90 million people. Two thirds of them are displaced people because of violent conflicts. The other third are victims of natural disasters or pandemics.¹ A flagship report on humanitarian financing, released at the beginning of the year by a high-level panel and co-chaired by the EU Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva, put the sum needed in 2015 to help 125 million people suffering from wars, earthquakes, floods and other crises at \$40 billion. The total raised in 2015 for global humanitarian aid was just under \$20 billion, down from around \$24 billion in 2014, pointing to an annual shortage of up to \$20 billion. Against this background, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced in 2012 the organisation of a World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016 in order to find ways to better tackle humanitarian needs in a fast-changing world marked by increasing migratory flows. Six weeks after the Summit this Note tries to evaluate its outcome.

1. Participation

The Summit aimed to bring all stakeholders together to discuss how to reshape the global humanitarian system, to develop stronger partnerships and to seek innovative solutions. In fact, up to 9.000 aid workers, civil servants and NGO activists are said to have been present, but with a few exceptions, political heavy weights were absent. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon complained that next to German Chancellor Angela Merkel no other G7 leader showed up. None of the permanent members of the Security Council was represented at the highest level.² Thus, the official programme with its vague commitments and seven high level round-tables generated much less positive dynamics than multiple side events.

2. Outcome

The Summit delivered a « Grand Bargain » agreement which was concluded among the heavy weights of humanitarian relief — 15 states and 15 U.N. agencies, coalitions of the main international NGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement. Its 10-point plan crystallized reforms that have been

¹ The European Parliament estimated in its November 2015 resolution that a billion people could be displaced because of climate change by 2050, with more than 40 % of the global population living in areas of severe water stress. Economic losses from natural disasters are likely to increase dramatically from the USD 300 billion currently lost annually.

² Even some NGOs signaled their doubts about the meeting. Doctors Without Borders pulled out of the conference, calling it “a fig leaf of good intentions.”

percolating for years, turning them into a shared, comprehensive framework. Thus, donor countries and implementing institutions agreed to boost the funds that they channel through local humanitarian providers, which are often best positioned to respond successfully to crises. They pledged to increase this support from where it stands now, at less than 1 per cent of global funding, to 25 per cent by 2020. However, the Grand Bargain has no firm targets for the expanded use of cash. Its language remained vague. The emphatic statement on the need to respect humanitarian law – a specific declaration was signed by 48 states – will not do much to bring an end to the world’s most devastating conflicts. In his final statement, the UN Secretary General qualified the WHS as « not the endpoint, but a turning point » in a longer process of change. However, he did not immediately announce where to go next. A proposal on how to take action forward at global scale is expected ahead of the UN General Assembly in September 2016.

3. Involvement of the European institutions

The European institutions were actively involved in WHS and in the whole process that led up to it. In September 2015, the European Commission adopted the EU's policy paper for the Summit, a Communication called 'Towards the World Humanitarian Summit: A global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action'³. Communication set out the EU's strategic vision for reshaping humanitarian action ahead of the conference. Subsequently, the EU and Member States agreed on the common vision for the World Humanitarian Summit in the Council Conclusions of 12 May 2016. The European Parliament adopted its own resolution in preparation of the WHS on 15 November 2015. The EU supports the entirety of the core commitments put forward by the United Nations⁴.

4. The implication of the Church

Beyond the presence of many Church related organisations at the WHS, the Holy See sent an important delegation led by the Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin to Istanbul. In his round table intervention he stressed: "The human person should be the aim of any and every humanitarian action. This transcends politics and is ipso facto indispensable, even, and especially, in cases of disasters and conflicts. In our highly interconnected world, the use of force and armed conflicts affect, in different ways, all nations and peoples. No one is spared. A culture of dialogue and cooperation should be the norm in dealing with the world’s difficulties. Heavy reliance on military intervention and selfish economic policies is short-sighted, counter-productive and never the right solution for these challenges." With regard to migration he offered the following analysis: "Migration is itself an essential element of international life. It challenges us to develop a correct transnational vision that goes beyond the narrow evaluation of world events and to develop new cultural, economic and social vision in which human mobility could play a positive and central role."

³ Cf. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=comnat:COM_2015_0419_FIN

⁴ Cf. www.sgreport.worldhumanitariansummit.org

5. Conclusion

Globalisation is entering in a new phase. Violent conflicts, natural disasters and epidemics push people to leave their traditional homes. Images from the richest places of the world are available everywhere thanks to the internet and smartphones. They work as a pull factor. Migration on a large scale is thus becoming a major feature of our globalised world and adds to the increased global flow of information, goods and services. Humanitarian aid offers help to the millions of people on the move who are desperate to survive. Providing humanitarian aid more broadly and more efficiently is thus necessary. However, it is not sufficient. Humanitarian assistance needs to be coupled more closely with development assistance in order to offer perspectives for a decent and sustainable life in areas where life is dangerous and unattractive today.

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