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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

**Towards the World Humanitarian Summit: A global partnership for principled and
effective humanitarian action**

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I. The World Humanitarian Summit — reshaping humanitarian action in a changing landscape

a) Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General has called the first ever World Humanitarian Summit to take place on 23-24 May 2016 in Istanbul. The summit is as a response to an unprecedented increase in the number of people affected by conflicts and natural disasters, including the highest number of displacements since World War II. The summit presents the global community with a unique opportunity to establish an international consensus reaffirming the principles of humanitarian aid and strengthening humanitarian action. The summit will bring together governments, donors, implementing organisations,¹ the private sector and representatives of affected populations who, where needed, should commit to more effective ways of working together for the common objective of saving lives and alleviating suffering. As a result, the summit will influence, and possibly even change, the current humanitarian *modus operandi* to better serve people in need.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are major humanitarian donors. Together, they constitute a key policy-setter with global operational experience. They are expected by many stakeholders to contribute to the success of the summit. This Communication, building on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid,² sets out the Union's vision for reshaping humanitarian action and proposes recommendations that should be endorsed by the summit. The underlying message is to build and reinforce partnerships among a multitude of actors. It is only through linked and coordinated action that the global community can respond to the escalating and multifaceted crises and disasters that demand humanitarian assistance.

b) A changing humanitarian landscape

Humanitarian crises have increased in number, complexity and severity over the last 25 years. In 2014, there were more than 400 politically-driven conflicts that affected the lives of 50 million people. Over 40 of these conflicts involved conventional warfare or terrorism.³ Many were ideologically inspired and had dramatic regional repercussions with knock-on effects on access to humanitarian aid, the protection of affected populations and the security of humanitarian workers. The lack of willingness among some actors to find political solutions means that these crises become protracted, generating needs for humanitarian assistance for years if not decades.

Natural disasters — some related to climate change and linked to mega trends, such as water scarcity, urbanisation and demographic pressures — affect the lives of 100 million people each year.⁴ Many of these disasters recur before communities have time to rebuild.

Social and economic fragility fuels humanitarian crises. Since 1990, the proportion of extremely poor people living in fragile states — where governments are unable or unwilling to provide either basic services or social equality — has increased. This means that today over 250 million people are either already affected by, or exposed to, humanitarian crises.⁵

¹ Implementing organisations deliver humanitarian aid, e.g. UN agencies, international organisations, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs. They can be international, regional, national, or community-based.

² *The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*, OJ C 25, 30.1.2008, pp. 1-12.

³ Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, *Conflict Barometer 2014*, pp. 14-15, http://www.hiik.de/de/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2014.pdf.

⁴ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2014*, p. 223, <https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201410/WDR%202014.pdf>.

⁵ World Bank, *Fragility, Conflict and Violence*, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>.

These trends, and their interdependence, have led to unprecedented human suffering and record humanitarian needs. In mid-2015, nearly 79 million people in 37 countries are in need of humanitarian assistance, including over 59 million displaced people.⁶

The humanitarian system is being challenged to do more, for more people, and at greater cost. Given the scale of today's crises and disasters, funding to cover humanitarian needs cannot keep up, despite record contributions by donors.⁷

But the humanitarian landscape has changed not only because of multiplied challenges. It is also evolving because a greater number of more diverse actors contribute to humanitarian efforts. This brings additional resources, but also changes the way the humanitarian community plans, coordinates and responds.⁸ Consequently, the UN-coordinated system has to adapt to remain relevant and add value. Despite progress resulting from the 2005 humanitarian reform and the 2011 Transformative Agenda,⁹ the system still often falls short of expectations on leadership, coordination and accountability. Above all, it can no longer be perceived as a small group of organisations and donors driven by 'Western values'. The summit should thus recognise and embrace the diversity of humanitarian actors, while reconfirming humanitarian principles and addressing shortcomings in humanitarian action.

II. Key recommendations for the World Humanitarian Summit

A wide spectrum of humanitarian actors participated in the preparations for the summit and shared their ideas on improving humanitarian aid. This Communication builds on these discussions. It recommends a global partnership to reinforce the world community's solidarity with victims of conflicts and disasters, using humanitarian principles as a starting point and advocating for concrete improvements in the humanitarian system. The recommendations are complementary and interrelated and have a single aim: to enable the humanitarian community to work together towards its common objectives of saving lives, preventing crises and disasters, and enabling recovery.

1. A global partnership for principled humanitarian action

a) Reaffirming the values underpinning humanitarian aid and committing to action

The values of dignity, integrity and solidarity are universal. They are at the core of all cultures, regardless of geography, ethnicity or religion. The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are a concrete expression of these shared values.¹⁰ They are also an operational necessity helping to provide access to assistance, to protect the most vulnerable and to ensure the security of humanitarian workers.

⁶ OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview June 2015*, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/global-humanitarian-overview-2015-june-status-report>; UNHCR, *Global Trends Report 2014*, <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>.

⁷ In 2014, the UN requested EUR 17 billion for humanitarian assistance, the highest appeal in history. Donors responded with a record EUR 10 billion, but this still fell short of covering all needs. OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview December 2014*, op cit.

⁸ Humanitarian community refers to the collective of humanitarian actors. Humanitarian actors include all entities that are involved in any aspect of humanitarian action, e.g.: governments, implementing organisations donors, international and regional organisations, the private actors, academia, or local communities.

⁹ The Transformative Agenda aims to improve the humanitarian community's response to emergencies. It focuses on leadership, coordination and accountability. It builds on the humanitarian reform. More information: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>

¹⁰ *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*, op cit., p.1, paragraph 10.

However, as comprehensive solutions to crises remain elusive, these basic values are being increasingly disregarded. This is reflected in the increasing breaches of international humanitarian law, including the universally ratified Geneva Conventions, and the inability of States and the international community to hold perpetrators to account.

Most humanitarian work takes place in conflicts in the context of a fragile political environment and weak socio-economic development. Solving conflicts that cause human suffering is not the task of humanitarian responders. Nevertheless, humanitarian actors need to understand the political and socio-economic environment in which they operate. While it is clear that humanitarian aid is neither a political, military nor a peace-building tool, humanitarian actors must work with others — and bring to their attention the atrocities of humanitarian crises — to enable them to take appropriate action.¹¹

Recommendation:

- The summit presents a unique opportunity for a renewed collective commitment confirming our collective responsibility to protect human lives and to deliver humanitarian aid. It should call for all means, be they political, development or humanitarian, to be deployed to this effect by the respective actors. The summit outcome should confirm the common basics: the values of dignity, integrity and solidarity; humanitarian principles; the respect of obligations under international humanitarian law; and the commitment to keep humanitarian work distinct from political agendas.

b) Ensuring access

Operational experience shows that humanitarian principles indeed facilitate access. Access is primarily about people's ability to benefit from aid, and facilitating humanitarian actors' access to affected people is the fundamental precondition of humanitarian relief.

However, the nature of conflicts has led to increased attacks on humanitarian personnel and theft of assets. Consequently, many affected regions have turned into no go zones for humanitarian workers. As a result, vulnerable populations are routinely denied access to aid. Every effort must be undertaken to increase awareness of the universal values underlying humanitarian action, in particular in fragile states. The dialogue with parties to a conflict, especially non-state actors, should refocus on the objective needs of the affected people.

Some host governments or non-state actors hinder humanitarian access by imposing restrictions on movement and bureaucratic obstacles to workers and supplies or by not ensuring their protection. The ongoing work of the International Law Commission on the 'Protection of persons in the event of disasters' should provide guidance in this respect.¹² At the same time, implementing organisations occasionally shy away from being present in difficult areas. Furthermore, in some situations, certain donor governments' counter-terrorism measures can potentially affect the work of humanitarian actors, who may face a dilemma between not responding to humanitarian needs or risking criminal prosecution. As a result of all such actions, there is or can be uneven delivery of critical assistance.

Recommendations:

- Humanitarian actors should engage in a more robust dialogue and advocacy with parties to conflicts to ensure access, protection and security. Local communities, and local civil society in particular, should be encouraged and empowered to advocate to the parties to a conflict for the universal values underlying humanitarian action.

¹¹ *The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises*, (JOIN(2013)30).

¹² International Law Commission, *Protection of persons in the event of disasters*, Draft Articles, GE 14-60901, <http://legal.un.org/docs/?symbol=A/CN.4/L.831>.

- Governments should first and foremost ensure a safe and secure environment for humanitarian action. They should also have in place an appropriate legal and policy framework to facilitate humanitarian access: a) for relief personnel: as regard privileges and immunities, visa and entry requirements, work permits, freedom of movement; as well as enabling principled humanitarian action in the context of counter-terrorism measures; b) for equipment and goods as regard: customs requirements and tariffs, taxation and transport.
- Implementing organisations should increase their presence in remote and dangerous areas to ensure proximity to affected populations. This requires strict but enabling security protocols, the deployment of qualified and trained staff, and cooperation with those who have access.

c) Putting protection at the heart of the humanitarian response

Humanitarian crises often make the affected populations vulnerable to exploitation and ill-treatment. The disregard of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law exposes them to further insecurity, discrimination, abuse or threat to lives. Children, women and girls, the elderly, the disabled are often the most vulnerable. It should be underlined that States have the primary responsibility to protect people affected by humanitarian crises. But when they fail or if they themselves perpetrate violations of international humanitarian law, humanitarian actors are bound to act.

Protecting people has not yet been addressed in humanitarian action to the extent it should.¹³ This is the result of factors such as a lack of strategic direction, limited capacity, diverging interpretations of protection, and the inability to connect with affected communities in conflict environments. There must be a renewed call to place protection at the centre of humanitarian response. While being solely needs-based, humanitarian activities should aim to ensure respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. At the same time, humanitarian action should support, and not be a substitute for, effective existing community-based protection mechanisms.

Humanitarian actors alone cannot ensure the protection of beneficiaries. Stronger links should be forged between humanitarian actors and the human rights community. However, it must be clear that humanitarian action should remain neutral, impartial and independent to avoid exposing the affected population and relief workers to attacks from parties to a conflict, and to the risk of being denied access.¹⁴

Recommendations:

- The humanitarian community should systematically integrate protection into humanitarian response, taking into account the vulnerabilities and capacities of specific population groups in given contexts and the threats they face. Implementing organisations, through relevant coordination mechanisms such as humanitarian country teams or clusters, should develop comprehensive protection strategies covering analysis, programming, and monitoring, and should have dedicated staff working on protection.

¹³ UNHCR, *Placing Protection at the Centre of Humanitarian Action 2015*, <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/557ea67c4.pdf>; IASC, *Principals' Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action 2015*, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/protection-priority-global-protection-cluster/>; OCHA, *Background Paper on Protection 2015*, https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/documents/oom_protection_english.pdf.

¹⁴ *Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019) - Keeping human rights at the heart of the EU agenda*, (JOIN(2015)16).

- Cooperation between the humanitarian and human rights communities, both being protection actors, should be reinforced. However, humanitarian staff should remain exempt from reporting requirements that could compromise their neutrality, impartiality and independence, or be harmful to access.

2. A global partnership for effective humanitarian action

a) A global partnership on the basis of humanitarian effectiveness

The changing humanitarian landscape requires the humanitarian community to be much more effective than today. No humanitarian crisis is the same – situations differ. Yet, in many respects, the humanitarian system still follows a one-size-fits-all approach, which does not always adequately meet needs or ensure the most efficient delivery. Moreover, currently there are no reliable and comparable assessments of humanitarian needs. The current system involves multiple data collections and disparate analyses leading to differing assessments and competition for funds. These inefficiencies cannot continue.

Effective humanitarian action requires reliable disaggregated information on needs and available capacities, including non-traditional actors if they make a relevant contribution. This requires systematic data collection by those present on the ground. Once data is collected, it should be shared among humanitarian actors and used for joint analysis and coordinated needs assessments.

Quality, results, cost-efficiency and accountability to affected populations are also key elements of humanitarian effectiveness. There is a need for common tools to measure whether the assistance addresses actual needs and brings the expected impact. In parallel, in order to maximise the reach and relevance of action, there should be mechanisms in place to ensure that the views of affected populations, particularly women, are considered throughout the response. All of these efforts should be underpinned by functioning financial tracking, if possible to the level of actual aid delivered to beneficiaries, to avoid gaps and overlaps. In turn, this approach should facilitate evaluation of results to make further improvements.

Research, innovation, and scientific solutions can help improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action, both as regard decision-making and aid delivery. Apart from traditional partnerships, cooperation with academic institutions, research networks, scientific communities, and the private sector is crucial in this regard.

Humanitarian effectiveness is about putting collective responsibility above individual institutional interests. It is only through the pooling of all knowledge, expertise and resources that the humanitarian community can achieve greater impact. The UN system should be an integral part of this effort and its individual parts must deliver on their mandates in a coordinated and efficient manner. Otherwise, there will be a need to rethink the current working methods in search for more effectiveness. The full roll out of the Transformative Agenda remains crucial in this regard.

Recommendations:

- The humanitarian community should develop a comprehensive dashboard for humanitarian effectiveness to facilitate the entire response cycle. All actors involved in humanitarian response should feed into this framework and use it. It could include:
 - repository of shared data on needs, risks, vulnerabilities, and access;
 - inventory of available capacities;
 - platform for joint risk analysis and for coordination of needs assessments;

- database for full tracking of all financial allocations from all sources and on sub-contracting to local partners all the way to beneficiaries;
 - shared quality markers;
 - common result indicators;
 - evaluation of results and impact;
 - and research.
- Donors should require implementing organisations to coordinate needs assessments, taking into account context and capacities, using disaggregated data and quality markers. Donors should use such assessments in decisions on funding allocations. They should also commit to streamline their contractual and reporting mechanisms, while complying with legal obligations and ensuring accountability to their constituencies. Implementing organisations should report against quality and results.
 - Donors should commit to the systematic inclusion of accountability to affected populations in programmes funded by them. Implementing organisations should establish standards on engaging affected populations throughout the response cycle, including sensitive approaches to specific groups, and set up adequate mechanisms.
 - The UN and other implementing organisations represented on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) should demonstrate the full roll out of the Transformative Agenda, and its systematic application thereafter. Donors should monitor and incentivise this implementation and should consider in which areas a review of the international humanitarian working methods or architecture would be warranted to ensure results.

b) Partnership with local, national and regional actors: subsidiarity and solidarity

Humanitarian effectiveness also requires better use of the whole range of capacities available from all actors. The international humanitarian system, as established by UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, is based on the premise that governments have the primary responsibility for meeting the humanitarian needs of affected populations. Many local, national and regional actors, especially in middle-income countries, have improved their capacity to deal with emergencies, in particular natural disasters. The increasing role of these actors needs to be recognised more clearly in the way international responses are designed, coordinated and implemented.

Humanitarian aid should be based on the twin principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, with local, national and regional actors as first responders, and the international community stepping in with complementary support, where necessary. The international community should act only when the capacity of local responders is overwhelmed, when these actors are unwilling or unable to meet the needs of all affected populations, or when they are incapable of avoiding spillover effects of emergencies into neighbouring countries.

The international system must connect with the wider group of responders, and must become inclusive to facilitate work of all relevant actors, depending on the specificities of each crisis. There must be a concerted effort to foster interaction and interoperability in order to minimise gaps and overlaps. For this to be effective, the global community could envisage a comprehensive worldwide inventory of assets that can be called upon in a response. Equally, there should be an effort by governments and all implementing actors to ensure that their actions are compatible with key international standards.

This approach requires a clear understanding of when the international humanitarian system should step in, and to what extent. For example, a breach of humanitarian principles and

international humanitarian law should be a clear trigger for international assistance in order to meet the needs of affected populations.

Governments and development actors — helped by the humanitarian community — should invest in building sustainable local capacity to empower local communities to withstand the consequences of a disaster and to facilitate the humanitarian response. Regional organisations should support these efforts by facilitating the exchange of know-how and coordinating assistance among States. Furthermore, cooperation between different regions of the world in disaster management and crisis response can further enhance interoperability, reduce the impacts of crises, improve planning and better prepare for crises and disasters.

Recommendations:

- Internationally and nationally facilitated coordination structures should include all actors involved in each specific response. This could be done, for example, by the opening up of the IASC humanitarian country teams or clusters. In case cooperation within the existing coordination mechanisms is not possible, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should facilitate other methods for ensuring interoperability of systems.
- The humanitarian response should be primarily based on the subsidiarity and solidarity principles. There should be risk assessments or fragility analysis established for all countries. There should be an overview of the preparedness and response capacities of relevant local, national, regional, and international actors. At the international level, such multi-stakeholder mapping could be facilitated by OCHA.
- The humanitarian community should develop guidance on context-specific scenarios that clarify the roles of responders and establish triggers for international assistance. This should be accompanied by a mechanism to ensure discipline in the systematic application of these different approaches. OCHA could facilitate such process in cooperation with relevant partners.
- Governments and donors should support the capacity building of local responders and should consider supporting them, where appropriate, during the response.
- Regional organisations should be supported in establishing a network for experience sharing and training exercises. Regional organisations should be encouraged to include solidarity provisions in their mandates to provide assistance to members affected by a natural or man-made disaster.

c) Partnership with donors, the private sector, charities, foundations, and implementing organisations for efficient and sufficient humanitarian financing

Humanitarian outcomes must be adequately resourced. This should be addressed in two ways: by ensuring the most efficient use of every euro of aid and by broadening the funding base.

Actual and perceived inefficiencies in humanitarian spending can undermine both the impact and the credibility of the humanitarian response. It is necessary to establish a complete and coherent picture of all needs that will in turn support a greater coordination of appeals and improved financial contingency planning. Encouraging innovative delivery methods, such as cash-based approaches wherever suitable to the context, can reduce overheads, and unit and transaction costs. All these actions require close partnerships between representatives of beneficiaries, implementing organisations, and donors, and with the private sector.

While improving the efficiency of humanitarian funding is essential, it is clear that current funding levels are not sufficient to meet humanitarian needs worldwide. Protracted crises are particularly affected, as they fade from public view and are overtaken by new emergencies.

The system has suffered from over-dependence on a few donors. While donors, who are not members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), and the private sector — including charities and foundations — have in some crises been real game-changers, the system has not yet found the right way to engage them in the best possible way and unlock their full potential. The system needs to become more attractive to new and diverse actors by highlighting their vital contribution, demonstrating the impact of the support they provide and facilitating partnership on the ground. The international system should concentrate on finding incentives for new actors, establishing more regular dialogue, and identifying contexts in which their participation would be of particular interest to them.

Recommendations:

- The architecture and efficiency of humanitarian action need to improve. Implementing organisations, under the guidance of the IASC, should reform the appeals system to ensure it reflects a complete picture of needs and funding requirements — this could be done via a tracking tool in the dashboard proposed above. Individual implementing organisations should ideally merge into this system and avoid issuing individual appeals in humanitarian emergencies. Instead, they should coordinate their efforts to avoid undue competition at the expense of efficiency. At the same time, appeals should facilitate the delivery of quality aid. Reporting on realizing appeals should cover data both on the needs that were met and those that were not met.
- Donors should systematically coordinate their efforts and evaluate the delivery practices of implementing organisation to identify their added value and possible cost efficiencies, based on common humanitarian standards.¹⁵
- Donors and implementing organisations should increase the proportion of people receiving cash-based assistance while taking the specific context into account. A target could be envisaged.
- The UN system and the traditional donor community should engage in closer dialogue with non-DAC donors, middle-income countries, regional organisations, the private sector, charities and foundations in funding humanitarian action. This could be done by regular, formal or informal, meetings under the OCHA Donor Support Group¹⁶ or the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative.¹⁷
- The private sector should be given incentives to contribute to humanitarian assistance, for example when committing to corporate social responsibility targets.

d) Partnership with development actors

The heavier humanitarian caseload has made the partnership between humanitarian and development actors all the more important. Recurrent and protracted humanitarian crises and prolonged forced displacement mean that emergency humanitarian aid can no longer carry the burden on its own. There is a compelling need to reframe the humanitarian-development cooperation so that this partnership reinforces the outcomes of both streams. Stronger resilience has already emerged as a shared objective for both humanitarian and development actors.

¹⁵ Such standards aim to ensure quality of aid, e.g. on: accountability, management, coordination, etc.

¹⁶ More information: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/partnerships/relations/ocha-odsg_en.

¹⁷ More information: <http://www.ghdinitiative.org/>.

The interaction between humanitarian aid and development cooperation should start at the pre-crisis stage, with a joint analysis that should include, inter alia, risks and vulnerabilities, followed by investments in resilience and risk reduction in order to better anticipate, prepare for, and respond to a crisis or disaster.¹⁸ During and in the aftermath of a crisis or disaster, joint strategic planning and multiannual programming should be established. Such joint planning should map the combined efforts, build synergies on respective strengths, and — where relevant — outline a flexible transition from humanitarian to development aid based on clear exit points where humanitarian action should give way to development efforts.

Funding should come from humanitarian and development instruments, with a clear division of labour as per the respective added value to combine covering immediate needs with medium- and long-term response targeted at root causes. Long-term development funding is particularly important in protracted crises to pave way for sustainable solutions, especially to enhance the capacity of host and local communities to cater for the displaced population.

Recommendations:

- There is a need for a new model for humanitarian-development cooperation. It should include joint multi-hazard risk analysis and, where relevant, multiannual programming and financing, and exit strategies for humanitarian actors. It should address issues such as preparedness and refugees and internally-displaced populations, especially in protracted situations.
- Donors should seek to facilitate more predictable multiannual financing through joined-up humanitarian and development funds, especially for protracted crises.
- Donors should consider introducing crisis modifiers in development programmes that allow the reallocation of resources for crisis response, enabling a more flexible approach.

III. EU contribution and next steps

The World Humanitarian Summit and the process leading up to it create the political momentum to strengthen the global community of solidarity with people affected by humanitarian crisis and disasters. It is an occasion to reach out to third countries, European citizens, and other partners to communicate on the moral obligation of helping victims of conflicts and disasters and of avoiding spillover effects, such as instability and displacements. The Commission invites Member States and other partners to share experience and collaborate to this effect.

The summit will be an important milestone for principled and effective humanitarian action and will set the agenda for a number of changes to the system. The implementation of its outcomes will thus require efforts from the global community and its individual actors. Therefore, the commitments taken in Istanbul should be verifiable and measureable. It would be useful to take stock of their realisation at regular intervals to keep the focus on progress.

After the summit, the Commission will set out the specific EU contribution to implement the summit outcomes. The Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication outlines some examples of work already ongoing within the EU to make humanitarian action more fit for purpose.

¹⁸ *The EU Approach to Resilience*, COM(2012) 586 final; *Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries*, SWD(2013) 227 final; *The Post-Hyogo Framework for Action*, COM(2014) 216 final.