



WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

ISTANBUL • 23-24 May 2016

Impartiality in Reporting in Crises and Protecting Journalists

SPECIAL SESSION

All Core Responsibilities of the Agenda for Humanity

“Reliable data and information [...] are a powerful driver of respect and compliance with international law. Journalists, human rights defenders and civil society can all play an important role in reporting facts as they happen.

Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit

CONTEXT

In humanitarian crises, whether as a result of conflict or natural disasters, access to reliable and impartial information is essential. Accurate reporting can help to mobilize a response from the world at large, but is also of crucial importance to people caught up in crises themselves, who need reliable information to make life-or-death decisions. However, the very nature of humanitarian crises makes evidence-based reporting difficult, because of physical access challenges in disasters, insecurity due to conflict and the wish of combatants on all sides to control the agenda and influence information flows.

Like humanitarian workers, journalists face enormous personal risks when carrying out their professional duties. According to figures from the Committee to Protect Journalists, 1,139 journalists have been killed since 1992. Violence against journalists, whether in the form of harassment, threats, kidnappings, illegal detainment, physical attacks, or murder, is an assault not only on civilians, but on the availability of impartial information.

As well as impeding the flow of information from affected areas, physical access restrictions and the increased violence against journalists also has less obvious repercussions. Journalists increasingly become risk-averse and rely on embedding with armed forces on one side of the conflict to get access to insecure areas. International journalists also increasingly rely on freelancers or local stringers to access the most dangerous or disaster-affected areas.



By doing so, media corporations not only outsource the risks to reporters without institutional backing or support, but also increase the potential for receiving information that is unverified, one-sided or politically biased. Social media also plays an increasingly important role as a source of information from areas where access for journalists is limited. While social media provides affected people with a voice and journalists with increased access to real-time information, the accuracy of these sources is often hard to verify and might lead to bias in particularly politically-charged environments or in situations where disaster-affected people are desperate to attract attention to their personal situation.

The UNESCO-led United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity proposes a number of mechanisms to combat impunity. These include incorporating this issue into country analyses and programming, working with member states to develop and implement relevant legislation, promoting awareness among states, policy makers, and members of the press, and strengthening partnerships between the UN, other intergovernmental organizations, and civil society groups.

OBJECTIVE

This Special Session will bring together leading media practitioners with experience of reporting in conflict zones and natural disasters to identify good practice in reporting on humanitarian crises, and to consider standards of reporting which is balanced, can help to mobilise global response and which prioritises the safety and security of their reporters as well as the people caught up in crises. This session will also examine the increasing role of social media and emphasise the need for impartial and accurate reporting on humanitarian crises as an important issue to be taken forward. This Special Session is an opportunity to bring world media leaders to Istanbul to reflect on their role in transmitting information about crisis areas to the world, but also on ways to reduce the risks reporters are exposed to.

The outcome of this Special Session will be the renewed commitment of all relevant stakeholders to the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, consolidating commitments from stakeholders towards this Plan of Action.

BACKGROUND

The first ever World Humanitarian Summit will take place from 23 to 24 May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. Three years of extensive consultations reaching more than 23,000 people in 153 countries generated a call for change in how the international community addresses humanitarian need and suffering and called for a renewed commitment to humanity. In his report for the World Humanitarian Summit, the United Nations Secretary-General calls upon Member States and other stakeholders to accept and act upon five core responsibilities that he believes are critical to delivering better for humanity. His Agenda for Humanity outlines the key actions and strategic shifts necessary to deliver on these responsibilities.



The Special Sessions are born out of the consultation process and focus on the launch of strategic initiatives spurred on by the WHS process which correspond to the five core responsibilities. These initiatives harness the vision, skills and capacities of coalitions of stakeholders, who are committed to responding to the call to action in a specific area. Istanbul is the moment to demonstrate global unity and solidarity to prevent and end suffering, and to take all steps necessary to make humanity the driver of decision-making and collective action.

The Special Sessions will focus on key partnerships and strategic initiatives spurred by the World Humanitarian Summit Process and will provide an opportunity for Member States and stakeholders to make commitments in support of these and as a means of achieving the Agenda for Humanity.

FORMAT AND STRUCTURE

The Special Session will be a moderated panel discussion with six to eight speakers, and will include an opportunity for participants to commit to the United Nations Plan of Action. The Special Session will result in a Summary document that will include the individual and collective commitments made during the Session and will contribute to the Commitments to Action document of the World Humanitarian Summit.

This Special Event will last for one hour. Given the length of the session, there will not be time for all participants to announce specific commitments. Therefore they will be asked to share their commitments in support of this Special Session through the on-line commitment platform before or during the Summit.

The Special Sessions will be open to media and be broadcast and webcast live. The time and location for this session will be made known shortly.

REGISTRATION AND SPECIAL SESSION PREPARATIONS

The focal point will engage with interested stakeholders in the run-up to the Summit to assist in the development of commitments. Please refer any queries related to this session to Derk Segaar at medialeaders.session@whsummit.org. As part of the online registration process for the Summit there will be the opportunity to register to attend this session. Details on registration will be circulated to all invitees in the coming weeks.