



WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

ISTANBUL • 23-24 May 2016

Humanitarian Principles

SPECIAL SESSION

Core Responsibility Two of the Agenda for Humanity



“Ensure full respect for the guiding principles of humanitarian action, namely, humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.”

Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit

CONTEXT

At the heart of humanitarian action, there are a set of well-established core humanitarian principles, humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, which all governments have affirmed through UN resolutions (notably UN GA resolution 46/182 and 58/114) and which are anchored in International Humanitarian Law. Humanitarian Principles are based on the seven principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, reflecting more than 150 years of humanitarian experience. The 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2015 unequivocally reaffirmed the importance of the Fundamental Principles to gain trust, acceptance and safe access, which are necessary to work in proximity with affected communities and to deliver effective humanitarian action.

The first goal of the Summit is to reaffirm and re-inspire our shared commitment to humanity and the universality of humanitarian principles. This is the only way we can hope to alleviate the suffering of the 125 million people in our world who are at risk of being left behind. While many contexts require stronger cooperation between humanitarian and development actors, preserving the vital role of principled humanitarian action, particularly in situations of conflict and violence, is a critical aspect for taking the Agenda for Humanity forward.

There was a strong call from the WHS consultation process for the need not only to preserve and reaffirm the principles, but also to apply them more consistently and ensure they are respected by all humanitarian actors in every context.



Every regional consultation has highlighted the importance of principled humanitarian action, and, in addition to Member States' existing commitments to International Humanitarian Law, 48 NGOs have signed a joint statement on humanitarian principles as a contribution to the Summit.

All countries and humanitarian actors should reaffirm their commitment to the universal relevance of the principles of humanity and impartiality – in line with international law – and the essential operational relevance of neutrality and independence to deliver assistance and protection according to needs and without discrimination in all circumstances.

Humanitarian principles imply different responsibilities for different actors: donor governments must promote and not undermine principled behaviour through their financing practices and abstain from using aid as a crisis management tool; host governments must be mindful that they do not abuse or permit humanitarian principles to be abused for political or other goals; humanitarian actors for their part need to show more consistency in their application of humanitarian principles, and more honesty when they are not in a position to apply these principles consistently.

OBJECTIVE

Ensuring universal respect for the humanitarian principles is a critical element for taking the Agenda for Humanity forward, while recognizing the different responsibilities of different stakeholders in relation to those principles. The objective of the Special Session will be to identify a series of concrete commitments on how to better respect and more consistently apply those principles, as a major contribution towards the Agenda for Humanity. These commitments may include:

- Governments to commit to consistently demonstrating respect for humanitarian principles, in line with their obligation under International Humanitarian Law to facilitate relief work that is based exclusively on needs and conducted without discrimination. This includes ensuring conducive environments for humanitarian actors, developing public education programmes to disseminate humanitarian principles, and helping to establish a clear distinction between humanitarian and political action and to avoid the use of aid for political purposes.
- Regional and sub-regional organizations to commit to aligning actions with the humanitarian principles by facilitating experience-sharing among regional civil-society organizations and NGOs, and integrating the principles in humanitarian policy frameworks.
- Donors to commit to supporting impartial humanitarian action, notably by enabling humanitarian actors to develop the financial independence needed for impartial humanitarian responses. This could include a commitment to reducing earmarking, and providing increased core funding to humanitarian actors in line with recommendations in the Grand Bargain.



- Humanitarian actors to commit to increasing transparency about the external and internal constraints they face in applying the principles. This may include peer-to-peer lesson learning, independent monitoring and third party verification as well as internal policies and training defining how they want the principles to be respected by their staff, as part of new accountability mechanisms to encourage compliance to humanitarian principles.

BACKGROUND

The first-ever World Humanitarian Summit will take place from 23 to 24 May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. Following three years of extensive consultations with more than 23,000 people in 153 countries, this will be the moment to answer their overwhelming call 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 endorse and get behind five core responsibilities. These will ensure that we can deliver more and better on behalf of all those who are suffering and who need assistance. The Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity spells out how this can be achieved.

The Special Sessions respond to the specific calls made during the consultation process. They will focus on launching strategic initiatives underlying the five core responsibilities. These initiatives aim to harness the vision, skills and capacities of stakeholders in each relevant area. Istanbul is the opportunity to demonstrate unity and solidarity with the needy, to prevent and end suffering, and to take all the necessary steps to place our common values of humanity back at the heart of the decision-making process.

The Special Sessions will provide a platform for Member States and other stakeholders to make specific commitments in support of these and as a means of achieving the Agenda for Humanity.

FORMAT AND STRUCTURE

The format will be a panel discussion, composed of representatives from Member States, Regional Organizations, the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs and donor governments who will all highlight their particular commitments for taking this agenda forward.

It will produce a summary document including all the commitments made during the session. This will contribute to the Commitments to Action document of the World Humanitarian Summit.

This Special Session will last for one hour. As there may not be sufficient time for all participants to announce their commitments, they will be asked to share them before or during the Summit.



The Special Sessions will be open to media 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 Charles-Antoine Hofmann at principles.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.