VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing 84 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide, which are based in 19 European countries. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

May 2016

VOICE contribution for the
new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy

❖ **Key messages:**

➢ VOICE welcomes the EU undertaking creating a new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. We recognize the current political context and that the strategy aims to address the EU's need for security both inside Europe and in its neighbouring countries. By prioritizing conflict prevention and resolution, resilience and international law, the Global Strategy is an opportunity to reaffirm the EU's global role in relation to these issues.

➢ The Strategy should be based on the EU's values and norms and embrace a broad concept of security, focussing on human security with people at the centre. Such an approach would best reflect the EU's values and norms, and the strengths it can leverage from its wide toolkit of funding instruments, diplomacy and CSDP and those of its member states.

➢ The Strategy must have a strong focus on conflict prevention and resolution. The humanitarian system is overstretched treating the symptoms of political failures.

➢ Development and humanitarian policies and actors have a role to play, but in seeking a common approach, the EU must ensure that their distinct added value and comparative advantages are not lost.

➢ Resilience is important, but treat it with care. Resilience should build support structures for people and communities in fragile contexts; that focus cannot be achieved without civil society participation.

➢ Recommit to a rules-based international order, with specific attention to International Humanitarian Law and other guarantees of protection.

❖ **Introduction:**

VOICE **welcomes the EU undertaking** creating a new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. As a union, the EU has solid values, such as human dignity, pluralism, non-discrimination and respect for human rights, and it has a commitment to international law at its core. Through its commitment to development and humanitarian aid, the EU has chosen to become a major global donor, demonstrating the solidarity of the EU and its citizens towards other regions of the world.

These **norms and values** have been enshrined in the Treaty on the European Union and reflected through the dialogue and outcomes of the series of international summits in 2015-2016.The EU has committed to and civil society have helped shape the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Addis Conference on Financing, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), COP21, and for humanitarians in particular, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) this May 2016 is important.

This strategy is an opportunity to build on these strengths while adapting to the shifting political and security context within which the EU is operating. We recognize the current political context and that the strategy aims to address the EU's need for security both inside Europe and in the neighbouring countries.

❖ **Putting people at the centre - different concepts of security:**

Security can be conceptualized in many ways. There is often a narrow focus on State and physical security, whereas everyone, in Europe and abroad, would be best served by a vision for the upcoming Global Strategy that focused on **human security, and putting people first**. Human security includes people-centred, multi-sectoral, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented approaches. This best leverages the EU's strengths, values and reputation, including as a global donor committed to the humanitarian principles, and is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals commitment to leave no one behind.

A multi-disciplinary approach is needed and a focus on human security helps to identify which exact tools and approaches are required to ensure people's protection, assistance, rights and development in the short and in the long term. This includes using development cooperation to eradicate poverty, and humanitarian action to provide assistance and protection to reduce human suffering. Beyond encompassing various EU instruments, a human security-centred approach will also make clear the strengths that Member States have to bring to the mix, ensuring the Global Strategy's impact becomes bigger than what the sum of its parts could achieve.

❖ **Conflicts and crises:**

Political leadership and the political will to end conflicts by identifying political solutions, alongside the strengthening of conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts at community and civil society level are urgently needed. The EU Council conclusions for the World Humanitarian Summit state that conflict prevention and resolution are primary objectives of EU external action. The Global Strategy would be strengthened by reflecting the following issues raised in the conclusions:
- The need for a renewed **political commitment** to tackling and **resolving conflict** and building peace,
- The need for **community resilience** – addressing the root causes of crisis and vulnerability as well as securing sustainable development outcomes for all,
- All of the above must be underpinned by a renewed **commitment to International Humanitarian Law**, refugee law and human rights law.

As first responders in humanitarian crises, VOICE members, and European humanitarian NGOs, recognise and experience the increasingly complex political and fragile environments in which humanitarian action takes place. Actors in today's conflicts too often target civilians and humanitarian workers. **Constant violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and impunity for those violations are unacceptable** and have to end. Humanitarian NGOs are on the frontline across the world bringing relief to people in times of crisis, and now even in the EU, as people escaping conflicts and crises arrive on the shores of Europe.

Humanitarian workers have increasingly been paying the price of this global insecurity with their lives as they try to access and support crisis affected people. Extremist violence – by a growing number of state and non-state actors, which affects civilians everywhere - also shrinks the space for humanitarian workers to provide assistance and protection to those in greatest need. **Without security, access to the people most at risk of being left behind in conflict settings is limited**, and effective outcomes of either humanitarian and development work are less likely.

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Therefore, we welcome a focus on conflicts and crises and an EU investment in peacebuilding in the Strategy. The humanitarian community has been more or less unanimous in highlighting the prevalence and complexity of conflicts as a key challenge. The bulk of humanitarian assistance is provided in fragile and conflict affected countries, and much of it has become longer term assistance in response to protracted crises. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the international community to support international, regional, national, and local initiatives to meet the needs of people. The humanitarian system is overstretched in treating the symptoms of political failures. Reducing needs and vulnerabilities by making a commitment to preventing and resolving conflict and investing in peacebuilding in the long-term have also been identified by the UN Secretary General as a priority outcome for the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit and confirmed by the Council in the recent Council conclusions. **Without resolving conflict, reducing needs is impossible**.

The experience of humanitarians is that each crisis is different. At EU institutional level, the EU has recognised this and in its methodology for addressing external conflicts and crises, the 'EU Comprehensive Approach', has built on the diverse instruments and resources at its disposal to have a case-by-case response that is built on common analysis. The Comprehensive Approach foresees humanitarians being able to contribute their specific expertise from the field on risks and vulnerabilities, and allows for each institutional actor and its partners to then respond to crises in accordance with their distinct mandate, role and added value. Throughout the cycle of conflict, from prevention to resolution, acting from the **community level to the international level, taking a case by case and context-based approach**, being as local as possible and as global as necessary, all strengthen the response to people's security, basic needs, resilience and development. This cannot be achieved without the strong involvement of civil society.

In the original documents launching the debate on this EU strategy review, development and humanitarian aid appeared to be understood as synonyms, missing that both have different objectives, methodologies and tools suited to the achievement of their specific objectives. **Humanitarian aid's objectives are saving people's lives and addressing their immediate basic needs.** Development aid's primary objective remains contributing to the reduction of global poverty. Conflating development and humanitarian, risks missing out on the achievement of their distinct objectives.

The EU's humanitarian aid has the strength of being needs-based and delivered according to humanitarian principles. As a reflection of the Lisbon Treaty's recognition of this, the EEAS and Member States ensure that the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which states that the EU's humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool, is respected. The Global Strategy should reaffirm this approach. Experience from the field is that humanitarians can best contribute to people's protection, basic needs and their human security by remaining distinct and clearly distinguishable from the EU's political foreign policy interests. By respecting the **complementarities of roles, mandates and expertise of instruments**, their distinct objectives can be retained and attained.

For example, humanitarians and the military have developed guidelines which reaffirm their distinct roles but allow for co-operation in response to disasters. For the purposes of developing foreign policy, coordination with humanitarians should be sought but should not be understood as meaning the integration of humanitarian aid and humanitarian partners into foreign policy and crisis management response.

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❖ **Resilience and civil society:**

The WHS consultations have also reconfirmed the relevance of looking at **people and communities' resilience.** The Global Strategy also usefully identifies resilience as relevant to the changing global context. This can help ensure development gains are not lost when there are shocks to the community and households, and it helps build the bridge between a short and often repeating cycle of humanitarian assistance and longer term development investment in communities' futures.

In line with Europe's experience, **civil society is the basis on which community resilience can take root and grow.** When civil society has the space to act and to flourish, it helps secure people's access to assistance and protection, build solidarity and resilience and create conditions for sustainable development.

However, **resilience has its limits**. State resilience and community resilience are not the same. Prioritising the former puts an emphasis on security and stability that can limit legitimate grass-roots movements for development and change, opening the door to civil society repression. From a human security angle, broadening the understanding of security to include community resilience for development, and creating the space for non-governmental organisations to contribute to inclusive development or principled humanitarian response is the best approach.

For example, from a state's perspective, a person migrating inwards could be considered a threat to state security. However, from the individual's perspective, migration might be a resilient response to deteriorating security and development perspectives. It is often a proactive approach to survival and reflects weakened community resilience.

The EU should be cautious in translating 'resilience' as an objective in conflict situations: it should not inadvertently imply that individuals and civilians should become resilient to violations of their rights and protection needs.

❖ **Rules based international order:**

A key message in the EU Council conclusions on the World Humanitarian Summit of 12 May is the need to redouble efforts to ensure respect for and compliance with International Humanitarian Law and Refugee Law and the need to reaffirm the humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality). By allowing systematic IHL violations to continue unchallenged, the international community is eroding some of the basis of international law. The **active promotion and implementation of this body of law by the EU** at home and abroad would go a long way to support our collective humanity and human security.

The series of international frameworks and commitments agreed through Summits in 2015 (mentioned above) and the upcoming WHS in 2016, as well as the ongoing global discussions on refugees and migration, all reconfirm the relevance and importance of a rules-based international order and international cooperation. The EU should consistently push for the implementation of these agreements, and a reinforced global commitment to humanity. Respect for IHL, and refugee law, are core components of global human security. The Global Strategy must reconfirm a rules-based global order as a policy priority for the EU.

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