



Statement by VOICE President, Nicolas Borsinger at the World Humanitarian Summit (23-24 May 2016)

check against delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are gathered here to improve the fate of victims, not only, but in particular, victims of conflict. In order to do so the hierarchy of their needs and rights is to be respected. The first need and the first right of victims is to cease being victims. This requires an unwavering commitment to article 1 of the Geneva Conventions (just article 1 - no more), political courage and strong minded action. The next burning need and right of victims is for justice for having become victims in the first place. May victims' need for justice not be the unattended item of this gathering. The third need and right of victims is for humanitarian assistance and protection, the dimension which, last of all, is within the grasp of humanitarian actors. Also one in which NGOs have, in particular, developed an expertise and track record which is respected by most, if not all.

As the European network of humanitarian NGOs, VOICE is fully aware, indeed wishes to underline and stress, that while humanitarian actors are always present in humanitarian crises, they do not take the important decisions. May we never delude ourselves, or let others delude us or themselves (generally to escape their responsibilities) to believe that humanitarian intervention is the primary response to humanitarian crisis, and may we collectively act with constancy for the misery of victims to be addressed at appropriate levels by the responsible bodies.

We thus expect in particular the European Commission and the EU Member States to lead collectively in making the *Agenda for Humanity* a reality. We call on all EU Member States to ensure that the *European Consensus on Humanitarian aid* is supported as the cornerstone of cooperation and of the promotion of needs-based and principled humanitarian aid.

With others, humanitarian NGOs have voiced many concerns about the recent EU-Turkey deal in relation to refugees, for eroding crucial international protections. This deal may be seen as leaving conflict affected people with no option other than to remain within the context of violent conflict and is a regrettable instance of short term political agendas trumping the fundamental commitment of Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions to « respect and ensure respect » of humanitarian commitments.

We expect respect for humanitarian principles and IHL in conflict to be at the centre of the *Agenda for Humanity*; despite the Secretary General's clear call –too few Heads of State are showing political leadership to take this forward. The commitments being made are inferior to our hopes in relation to the formal obligations set by IHL. VOICE fears that this gathering will not create a momentum to strengthen existing frameworks. Conflict drives needs, whilst IHL violations reduce access, and aid workers' safety lessens, thus deepening a « *spirale infernale* » in the same way that tropical hurricanes build up forces of mass destruction. Leaders are failing to effectively address the direct responsibilities of States and parties to conflict. Unsurprisingly as humanitarian actors, we dream that political leaders' decisions might be driven by purely humanitarian concerns. All things considered, we would be just as satisfied if the motivation was purely pragmatic i.e. an awareness of the increasing threat caused by growing hurricanes, which, if not handled early, will inevitably climb up the « *devastating capacity scale* » until they reach some shore where they will exert their full destructive potential. May this Summit's legacy be, at long last, a shared understanding that the peril is not that of aspiring refugees on foreign beaches, but that of nearby hurricanes' capacity to devastate. May the corresponding political will to mobilise in order to prevent and resolve conflicts emerge.

On a financial level there is a positive sign for what lies ahead: the Grand Bargain. Donor States and the UN have shown their willingness to negotiate and NGOs were represented in the early stages of this process. The challenge is now to ensure that the benefits are felt by the first responders in the field, which more than often are NGOs. VOICE calls for a henceforth systematic inclusion of NGOs in the « Grand Bargain » implementation process as well as for a level playing field in which donor expectations are the same for all, and re-granters such as UN agencies do not expect more from their grantees than they are themselves ready (or obliged) to provide to their donors.

The UN remains the main coordinator of the humanitarian ecosystem and has to be more active in pursuing a UN aid architecture reform. This summit's underlying justification is that our shared « *humanitarian building* » is in urgent need of repair. In such cases, an able architect has first to define the hierarchy of works to be undertaken; is it not senseless to address electrical issues when the roof is leaking? Is it not a shameless waste of resources to refurbish floors when the plumbing is rotten? Not alone but vibrantly, VOICE, among others, has repeatedly called for a robust analysis (others might say a clinical analysis) of the shortcomings in the humanitarian system and then for priorities to be set. By refusing to recognize that the main problem is that of a leaking roof (from which all others stem), the whole building is threatened. At present too many issues are being treated as if they were all at the same level. Painters, masons, plumbers and carpenters are all meant to make « commitments » as if all had the same importance. The way forward thus inevitably remains unclear, if not murky.

Intergovernmental follow-up to this Summit is absolutely essential. ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly might also have a precious opportunity to exert more fully their responsibilities. Many of us here have often listened patiently (and politely) to profound considerations on the sovereignty of nations. May we be numerous to hope to soon see more Sovereign Nations exerting together their full sovereign right to stop bloodshed.