

World Humanitarian Summit

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has released his much anticipated report for the World Humanitarian Summit. Action Against Hunger welcomes the report and many of the ideas within it that place the people we seek to support at the very center of humanitarian action.

As an international humanitarian and development organisation working in over 40 countries, Action Against Hunger is all too familiar with the multitude of challenges facing the humanitarian system: the lack of political will to resolve humanitarian crises that last for decades and the inability to prevent new ones; the lack of protection for the people we support and our staff; the lack of appropriate funding to enable us to partner with local communities for the long term. The Secretary General of the UN recognised the world's collective failures to effectively respond to the growing number of crises when he proposed the World Humanitarian Summit three years ago.

A world free from suffering

Ban Ki-moon's report outlines his vision for a world free of human suffering, as well as a corresponding Agenda for Humanity. The report's title, "One Humanity: Shared Responsibility", encapsulates the essence of the vision — the world must collectively act to alleviate human suffering, ensure respect for humanitarian principles, and work with communities to ensure that the most vulnerable people receive the assistance they need. The ideas presented in the report will be taken into the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul on May 23-24, where world leaders, civil society and other stakeholders will make commitments to implement the various recommendations presented in the report.

Humanitarian action can't be a fig leaf for a lack of political commitment

The UN Secretary General outlines five core responsibilities that the world must take on in order to transform our approach to humanitarian crises. Unsurprisingly, the first responsibility focuses on the need to prevent and end conflicts. For far too long, the collective lack of political will to solve conflicts has placed an enormous burden on humanitarian actors to respond to the suffering of people living through war and violence. As protracted, sometimes decades-long, conflicts rage on and new ones begin, the humanitarian community is stretched to the point of breaking.

Action Against Hunger's mandate is to support the world's most vulnerable people to achieve nutrition security, not to solve conflicts. We welcome the recognition that political actors bear primary responsibility for ending humanitarian crises and that humanitarian action can't be a fig leaf for a lack of political commitment.

Having governments that act decisively to find political settlements is absolutely critical to our work. The humanitarian assistance we provide is a poor substitute for countries taking bold steps to prevent and resolve conflicts.

Humanitarian principles must not be overlooked

The second core responsibility focuses on the need to uphold the international laws and norms that protect people during conflict. Action Against Hunger is deeply concerned about the steady

erosion in the respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles in the past decade, with a devastating impact on the people we support and on our staff.

In conflict situations, we witness countless civilians who are subject to violations of international law. Actors with multiple interests are multiplying in the field and Action Against Hunger is especially worried about the growing confusion of the political, security and humanitarian agendas. This phenomenon is materialising, in one hand, into obstacles and routinely denials of access to the most vulnerable populations that urgently need life-saving assistance. In the other hand, our staff are harassed and killed by state and non-state armed actors with no accountability, which is why Action Against Hunger has been advocating through the World Humanitarian Summit process for the creation of specific mechanism to enhance the protection of aid workers, particularly national staff.

The success of the World Humanitarian Summit will be judged on whether states and non-state actors fully respect international law and protect civilians including humanitarian staff, and on the creation of mechanisms enabling to foster the humanitarian response capacity, including investment in emergency stocks pre-positioning that could be deployed as soon as the humanitarian space opens.

Leaving no one behind

The third core responsibility is a commitment to reach everyone in need of assistance. Action Against Hunger agrees that there must be a commitment to ensure that the world's most vulnerable people have a voice, are consulted, have access to protection and assistance, and are included in action to meet the targets of the globally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This third responsibility clearly aligns the World Humanitarian Summit with the SDGs, recognising that the humanitarian system must be inclusive if longer term development is to be achieved. The idea of leaving no one behind resonates with Action Against Hunger: the people we work with -women, children, adolescents, refugees, internally displaced - are often the most vulnerable in their communities.

The fourth core responsibility focuses on the need to reinforce local systems and capacities and to establish better linkages between humanitarian and development assistance. We believe this approach to be fundamental to sustainable impact. In humanitarian contexts, Action Against Hunger works through local health ministries when possible, building their capacity to respond to undernutrition. We work with local communities, to ensure that communities are able to prevent and treat undernutrition. We support the call for greater support to local actors, but believe that each context is unique and each response must be driven by the needs on the ground and the overarching respect of humanitarian principles.

The fifth core responsibility focuses on making political, institutional, and financial investments to deliver on the previous commitments. In this regard, Action Against Hunger is highly concerned by the rising gap between humanitarian needs and available funding, especially with regards to life-saving sectors such as water, sanitation and hygiene, health and food security. Timely supporting national actors and investing in disaster risk reduction are also critical to the success of the Agenda.

The UN Secretary General also makes several recommendations around using innovative financing mechanisms. Action Against Hunger welcomes this initiative, and would like to stress

the fact that there is an urgent need to provide the humanitarian system with an improved response capacity in critical situations, especially in violent and high-intensity contexts.

Besides more and better humanitarian funding (including preventive and flexible funding for response preparedness), there is an urgent need that stakeholders present in conflict areas commit to allow and facilitate the access of local and international humanitarian actors to victims, and that donors and crisis-affected states support the training and specialisation of humanitarian response teams. There is also a need to rethink how donors fund protracted crises through the provision of multi-year flexible funding, an issue that Action Against Hunger has been highlighting for many years.

Turning words into action

In conclusion, while Action Against Hunger supports much of what is outlined in the UN Secretary General's report, we remain deeply concerned about how governments in particular will turn these words into action. The report fails to outline a monitoring and accountability mechanism, such as a framework for action, to ensure that governments fulfill their obligations and also support existing global agreements, such as the SDGs, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We therefore call on the stakeholders present at the World Humanitarian Summit to set up a public monitoring mechanism of the World Humanitarian Summit commitments, detailing the associated indicators, modalities for multi-stakeholder participation and a calendar for implementation. We see too often that “honor systems” are not effective in compelling governments to do what they say they will do. Empty promises will lead to a continuation of the status quo—which is untenable.