

Roundtable on Humanitarian Aid
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Rome, 10 October 2014

This Roundtable on Humanitarian Aid, held during the Italian EU Presidency brought together NGOs active in humanitarian aid from Italy and Europe, as well as academia, civil protection, ministries and European institutions. In addition to furthering debate on humanitarian topics, this event presented a good opportunity to examine links between EU and national realities as relates to humanitarian policy and practice. As stressed by many speakers, 2014 has been the *annus horribilis* for the high number of crises – Syria, Iraq, CAR, South Sudan and Ebola just to mention some, and the need for political solutions to ongoing crises was raised repeatedly. Discussions also focused on the collaboration between NGOs and civil protection and military actors. A further panel highlighted strategies and challenges regarding funding, and NGOs’ experiences of using communication to increase support for their work and make humanitarian work more visible.

Introduction:

Nino Sergi, Link 2007, INTERSOS President and Nicolas Borsinger, VOICE President

During his introductory remarks, **Mr. Sergi** stressed that in the last decade humanitarian action has changed as a response to security issues and difficulties reaching those in need. He added that humanitarian action is and should always be people-centered, and this feature makes humanitarian work different from many other sorts of work. Current challenges also require coherence, both from NGOs and institutions. Europe, for instance, should not stop saving the lives of migrants reaching our continent by sea while continuing to deliver humanitarian aid in their country of origin. Apart from being incoherent, this attitude weakens core European values.

Mr. Borsinger highlighted the key role Italy is playing in the humanitarian field at the European level. Italy currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It also has a nominee for the High Representative of the European Union. Last, but by no means least, Italy is about to adopt a new law on international cooperation, which is expected to simplify administrative processes and enhance humanitarian work. This is an example that many other states should follow.

He added that humanitarian actors often work in extremely difficult conditions and NGOs are playing a major role in the humanitarian field. NGOs are also a valuable source of information and knowledge for policy makers. Strengthening the relationship between institutions and NGOs is therefore crucial to strengthening decision-making.

First session: Humanitarian Aid in Europe – Challenges in 2014 -2015

Lapo Pistelli, Vice Minister of International Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy
Claus Sørensen, Director General, DG ECHO, European Commission

Minister Pistelli defined 2014 as the “*annus horribilis*” of international politics, because of the many crises and emergencies that have occurred: Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, CAR, Ebola are just some examples. In this context, one of the major challenges for the people working in international politics is to bring and maintain attention to humanitarian crises. He also stressed that political actors face many difficulties in carrying out humanitarian advocacy. Politics has the duty of pursuing both political and humanitarian goals, and its actions should reflect a moral mandate. In this particular moment, one major challenge that humanitarian workers are facing concerns access to crisis zones. In this regard, Italy, during its Presidency of the Council, is engaging as much as possible to bring public attention to current crises and conflicts.

He highlighted the importance of 'law 125' that Italy is about to adopt. This law recognizes that in today's complex framework of humanitarian intervention it is crucial to combine different resources. However, in doing so, humanitarian principles such as neutrality, independence, and impartiality should be strengthened. He added that private-public partnerships are another key issue in the humanitarian field, saying that the coordination of resources and capacities, including a focus on innovation, is of vital importance for the humanitarian field.

Mr. Sørensen agreed that coordination and communication are fundamental for humanitarian aid. There is no organization able to face current humanitarian crises alone and responses should come as concerted action from all EU Member States and international organizations. This means that real solutions to humanitarian crises should be the result of international alliances involving developing countries and taking full advantage of the different perspectives of the actors involved. For this reason, bringing all relevant actors to the table for discussion is of crucial importance. In this regard, the World Humanitarian Summit will be a good opportunity to involve not only international actors and stakeholders, governments, NGOs and international organizations, but also victims of crises and beneficiaries.

He added that preventive diplomacy and development policies should be strengthened to prevent humanitarian crises. He underlined that the current humanitarian situation is terrible as the number of refugees is higher than at any time since 1945 while 8000 children die every day because of malnutrition. In no time in history have there been so many simultaneous level-3 crises: CAR, Iraq, Syria, Ebola in addition to the situation in the Sahel which is causing a huge number of deaths.

He also spoke about the importance of channels used to communicate crises and humanitarian action. In particular, the media has a responsibility to revive public awareness and interest in the so-called "forgotten crises", such as in Myanmar, Colombia, and Yemen where people's rights are constantly violated and report on them without distortion or manipulation. He reiterated the EU's commitment to be there and support their protection, even when nobody talks about it.

Second session: A national and European NGO perspective

Sandro De Luca (Link 2007), Kathrin Schick (VOICE Director), Giampaolo Cantini, (Italian Directorate for International Cooperation)

Mr. De Luca focused on the national NGO perspective. Italian NGOs share many characteristics. For example, many of them work both in humanitarian aid and development aid and cannot rely on big amounts of resources coming from the private sector - Italian NGOs are financed through a diversity of financial resources. However, he stressed that 'law 125 is' expected to help resolve many of the difficulties/challenges that Italian NGOs currently face in that regard. He also added that Italian NGOs strongly support the values of independence and neutrality, especially because they often work in crises caused by political interests.

Ms. Schick focused on NGOs from a European perspective. She stressed that diversity is one of the major features of the NGO sector in Europe and this enables NGOs to have different strengths, address different challenges and provide a high-level of expertise. Despite their diversity, NGOs are deeply connected and therefore often share the same views on many issues. She also spoke about the policy framework and political environment for European humanitarian aid, with a special focus on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises, as these are of particular interest to NGOs. She stressed that humanitarian principles remain fundamental but their implementation and respect remains a challenge. She concluded her speech underlining that political solutions are necessary to current crises and that military operations should complement the work of humanitarian actors and respect humanitarian principles.

Mr. Cantini stressed the urgency of the current humanitarian situation. Conversely to the past, current humanitarian crises are prolonged and continuous and are not limited to national boundaries. He stressed that this situation needs high levels of resources. Considering that only 1% of public aid to development funds go to humanitarian aid, it is easy to understand that governments should engage more in order to find political solutions to humanitarian crises.

Furthermore, he argued that a strong partnership between governments, institutions, international organizations and NGOs is needed to face current humanitarian challenges.

Panel A: Greater needs – Closer collaboration? With whom?

Marco Rotelli (INTERSOS), Luigi D'Angelo (Italian Department of Civil Protection), Dominic Crowley (Concern Worldwide), Peter Runge (Care Germany)

Given the complexity of current crises coordination of actors and effective collaboration and mutual understanding between NGOs and other actors in humanitarian crises is necessary. The discussions on this panel reflected on the challenges of such collaboration with a particular focus on the coordination between humanitarian actors on the one hand and civil protection and military actors on the other.

In emergencies, the coordination between NGOs and civil protection is very often difficult. According to Italian law, civil protection has the responsibility to plan and coordinate strategies after natural disasters occur on the Italian territory. In addition, if requested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Italian civil protection can be called to work in situations of crisis abroad. In this framework in Italy, the Italian civil protection has developed over the years an inclusive approach with the Red Cross, volunteers and associations. However, apart from having different legal bases, a major difference between civil protection and humanitarian organizations concerns the different roles in their work abroad. In particular, the role of the civil protection is not to coordinate but to cooperate in the response to humanitarian emergencies. From a European perspective, being part of the European mechanism, civil protection can be activated on request of a number of different actors (Member States, the UN etc).

Given such a framework, how far can the cooperation between NGOs and civil protection go? Two examples were discussed during the panel. 1) In Haiti, the distinction between the work carried out by NGOs and the Italian civil protection was blurred. Eventually this was resolved through dialogue to ensure collaboration between humanitarian actors and the civil protection. 2) Conversely, in the case of Afghanistan, some degree of collaboration was established prior to the intervention itself facilitating better cooperation and mutual understanding. As demonstrated by these two cases, collaboration between NGOs and civil protection can function. However, in order to be efficient and significant, roles and modalities of work should be clear before the intervention.

Cooperation between actors in the field during a humanitarian crisis, but especially in areas of conflict, is not always easy to establish. Should NGOs distance themselves from military actors or should they cooperate and should military actors have a humanitarian role? NGO experience raises two crucial points. Firstly, militarized humanitarian interventions are likely to fail because they become a legitimate target for the conflicting parties. In addition if a single NGO decides to collaborate with military actors taking on a humanitarian role this decision might have repercussions on the perception that people have on *all* NGOs as humanitarian actors, making their acceptance by and access to local people much less likely.

The discussion under this panel also raised the question of whether humanitarian actors can escape that donors do not always have a needs-based approach to their funding but can rather be driven by their political and security interests. Some NGOs have developed internal guidelines regarding the types of donation they can accept.

Panel B: Greater Needs - fewer resources?

Nada Ziwawi (GVC), Lorena D'Ayala Valva (CESVI), Ester Asin Martinez (Save the Children), Marek Stys (People in Need)

Humanitarian aid actors are currently facing challenges, both in terms of human and financial resources. On this panel, participants highlighted the challenges that raising funds can present. In addition, the impact of the EU economic crisis compounded by unpredictable EU humanitarian funds in 2014 was discussed. The Italian Presidency was asked to ensure a successful outcome of the 2014 and 2015 EU budget negotiations for humanitarian assistance, and to ensure that the

Emergency Aid Reserve remains outside the EU budget ceilings. The EU budget difficulties have negative repercussions on the EU's credibility as humanitarian donor, and also affect its partners, NGOs.

The importance of NGO investment in communication and visibility to raise public awareness, establish trust and increase donations for humanitarian work was underlined. Many NGOs also establish partnerships with the private sector in order to raise funds. The establishment of partnerships between public and private is also included in the Italian 'law 125', although the roles and modalities of such partnerships are not yet clear.

The panel also discussed the diversity of crises and the impact they can have on public opinion and public financial support. In contrast to long-term and complex crises, natural disasters have a high emotional impact on people and therefore donations are boosted when such disasters occur. NGOs struggle more to raise money for conflict situations and need sophisticated communication channels to raise donations for long-term crises.

Referring back to the discussion on the first panel, it was said that because of the high number of humanitarian crises, and need for resources to face them, NGOs cannot refuse resources coming from institutional donors. NGOs need to invest in strategies that involve an evaluation of beneficiaries' needs and matching financial sources from a diversity of donors to ensure there is no conflict of interest. This can help align the donors' priorities with the beneficiaries' needs. By diversifying financial sources, in terms of a variety of institutional donors and broadening the contribution of private donors this can be managed.

Conclusions: Mario Baldi, Chair COHAFA

Mr. Baldi remarked on the traditions of solidarity expressed through Italian NGOs. He also highlighted the importance of the new Italian law on international cooperation. This law is expected to simplify the administrative procedures needed to intervene and collaborate with NGOs. He added that public opinion is often unaware of the work carried out by humanitarian actors. NGOs, governments and media should come all together and spread one single message on the objectives of humanitarian activities and the use of funds.

<p>VOICE (<i>Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies</i>) is a network representing 82 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. It represents and promotes the values and specific features of humanitarian NGOs.</p>	<p>EUROPEAN COMMISSION</p>  <p>Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection</p> <p><i>This event is supported by the European Commission through its Humanitarian Aid department</i></p>
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