

This event brought together 77 people from the humanitarian sector, many of whom attended the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul.

Summary of discussion:

Positives of the WHS

- WHS symbolises growth and maturing of the humanitarian sector, bringing it on a par with development and human rights sectors.
- Generating momentum on humanitarian issues (particularly education, disability, localisation and protracted crises)
- Grand Bargain agreement
- Multi-stakeholder discussions

Negatives of the WHS

- Commitments are not binding
- Questions around implementation and monitoring remain
- Absence of emerging donors, also due to the multi-stakeholder approach
- Lack of engagement with business
- Many issues overlooked or insufficiently addressed – e.g. migration, UN reform, humanitarian principles, International Humanitarian Law, political leadership

Suggested recommendations for next steps:

Process:

- Maintain a multi-stakeholder approach where it has worked
- Identify/create fora that can bring in emerging donors or member states who did not like the multi-stakeholder approach
- return to stakeholder groups in the process of identification of next steps, *OR*, seize momentum to bring in new stakeholders around key initiatives
- ensure monitoring processes around the outcomes of the Summit

Political level:

- leadership and political will to implement commitments
- Increase states' engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding
 - Start with UN security council – no veto in situations of mass atrocities
- Discuss options for UN reform

New approaches to aid financing and programming:

- System change, e.g. push for multi-annual financing and strategic planning
- At UN level, explore the possibility of 'assessed contributions' as a means of funding humanitarian assistance
- Potential for private sector: in innovation and to look for business continuity in armed conflict (focus on SMEs)
- Work with development:
 - but not to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals: humanitarian principles must be preserved. Rather talk about what development needs to do (differently).

EU should:

- simplify aid processes
- lead and invest in system change
 - including on new IHL mechanisms to bring member states globally on board
- adapt and implement existing channels, initiatives, roadmaps, rather than reinvent the wheel (e.g. Consensus, resilience, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), forced displacement, gender...)

VOICE President Nicolas Borsinger opened up the panel discussion by outlining VOICE's commitment to the WHS over two years and referring to [his speech at the Summit](#), stressing the importance of assessing problems in the humanitarian sector so as to address them based on their priority. The moderator **Gie Goris** then introduced the panel and led into a discussion on the successes and failures of the Summit.

THE PANEL GENERALLY agreed that the WHS was successful in generating discussion around various humanitarian issues, including education, protracted crises and disability. The Grand Bargain agreement is considered by many the major success of the Summit, though it was pointed out that it was but one aspect of the WHS and a broader humanitarian financing discussion. All panellists were critical of the fact that while the Summit led to many commitments being made, these are non-binding and questions around implementation and monitoring remain.

Florence Daunis, VOICE Board Member and Deputy Executive Director at **Handicap International**, argued that a major success of the process leading to the WHS was the push for collective thinking which created innovative opportunities to build new dynamics around forgotten issues. Yet there are some major shortcomings: namely the absence, or low participation, of emerging donors such as Saudi Arabia and China, and the structure of the Summit itself which put the business sector in one corner and NGOs in another, effectively maintaining existing siloes instead of encouraging a multi-stakeholder approach.

Anke Reiffenstuel, Deputy Head of the Division of Humanitarian Assistance and Humanitarian Demining at the **German Federal Foreign Office** in Berlin, saw the consultation process as a great opportunity to communicate what needs changing in the system and to put relevant issues on the table. Although some had considered the WHS as a "talk shop", it should rather be understood as an appeal to ambitiously implement the commitments made. This point was later picked up in the panel discussion, where some participants criticised the fact that discussion at the Summit itself bordered on boring, as most panels were composed of people who already agreed. In the follow-up of the summit, Ms Reiffenstuel stressed the value and importance of maintaining a multi-stakeholder approach to put the commitments into practice.

According to **Jules Frost**, **Medair's** International Director, it was perhaps too early to discuss outcomes, though education and persons with disabilities were clear winners: education is now seen as a humanitarian need, and the [humanitarian disability charter](#) garnered much attention at the Summit. Other issues were discussed during the 2-year process leading to the WHS, but then lost momentum, such as urban response and public-private partnerships. One of the big objectives of the summit was to bring outsiders to the table in an inclusive dialogue and integrate them into the humanitarian "ecosystem". But the WHS didn't manage to get many non-traditional donors involved due to the multi-stakeholder structure of the Summit which failed to address governments sufficiently. As a result the engagement of the P5 and G77 as well as many other states was lacking. The need for UN reform was another issue which was not addressed in the Summit. Ms Frost also identified a lack of traction on the humanitarian principles and on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and noted that Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)/refugees issues were somewhat left out – or rather left waiting until the upcoming September 2016 Refugee Summit.

Dr Hugo Slim, Head of Policy at the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** in Geneva, added protracted crises to Ms Frost's list of winners and argued that the WHS process continued the ongoing recognition that respect for IHL is a global political issue. He agreed that progress on this still needs to be made and a process to do this needs to be developed further. On the positive side, the WHS generated a new understanding of humanitarian action as part of a long-term process. However, he was concerned that humanitarian action tends to get lost in other UN priorities, especially development. He agreed with Ms Reiffenstuel on the importance of system change, highlighting the need for multi-year financing and strategic planning in particular to fix both short- and long-term issues.

The discussion then turned to the main **challenges and follow-ups to the Summit that the EU and other big players need to address**, and what issues they should focus on. The panel agreed that political will and leadership are needed to turn the commitments into a reality. In particular, the EU is in a position to lead the way and invest into systemic change, which might include the creation of new mechanisms for member states in relation to IHL, or to bring on board other member states in relation to other humanitarian commitments. The general consensus was that it would be challenging to "move from ambition to action", as Dr Slim put it.

Ms Frost identified **three points of action to improve humanitarian assistance** in the aftermath of the Summit. Firstly, she stressed the importance of states' engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding to prevent crises from escalating and generating more humanitarian needs, and secondly called for a discussion on a UN reform and what it could look like. Thirdly, she argued that 'assessed contributions' from the Member States' (MS) to the UN as a means of funding impartial humanitarian action (which would be a system of obligatory contributions similar to how UN funding for peacekeeping works) could go a long way to de-politicise and de-instrumentalise humanitarian action.

Her points were picked up by Ms Daunis, who reiterated that states need to concretely engage in the resolution of conflicts, particularly in the UN Security Council, e.g. by explicitly saying they will not use their veto in situations concerning mass atrocities (France is the only country to have done so). She also called for a simplification of the aid process, saying that the Grand Bargain was a first step but donors needed to ensure humanitarian actors could focus their energy on delivering aid, instead of financial audits and admin. Mr Slim was inclined to agree, but saw problems with the implementation of this as donors have a right to know how money is being spent.

Seizing the topic of a multi-stakeholder approach, Mr Goris steered the discussion towards the **involvement of the private sector** in the WHS and humanitarian action, wondering aloud at the absence of private actors throughout most of the Summit and during this event.

Several panel members took different approaches to the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the process. Ms Reiffenstuel proposed that the post-WHS months should be used for stakeholders to discuss outcomes and commitments within their groups and identify next steps. She acknowledged the risk of retreating into siloes, but argued that taking into consideration the relevant mandates of the various actors was a useful step before returning to multi-stakeholder discussions for the actual implementation

of the Summit. Ms Daunis, on the other hand, suggested seizing the momentum to bring more stakeholders to the table.

The panel welcomed the fact that dialogue did take place prior to the WHS although opportunities to mix were lacking at the Summit itself. Ms Daunis felt the discussion seemed to centre more on the private sector's capabilities in replacing (inter)national NGOs as humanitarian actors, rather than on collaboration. Ms Reiffenstuel suggested this might stem from confusion or disagreement within the humanitarian sector as to what role to expect from the private sector in humanitarian contexts. Consequently, further dialogue is needed on working with the private sector. Dr Slim highlighted the example of insurance companies being vital in crisis situations. The main area for potential contribution and collaboration from and with the private sector was in innovation and in ensuring as much as possible business continuity in areas of armed conflict. However, some perceive global reputational risks to working with large international companies, which is another reason why engaging with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) might be more interesting.

In the following **Q&A with participants**, the question was raised whether the **private sector** can ever be a genuine partner to humanitarian aid despite having a fundamentally different goal of generating profit. The agreement was that public-private partnerships could be beneficial, and a focus on bringing innovation to specific contexts and projects was the best approach. However, these partnerships can be difficult to promote without the support from donors. The [Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week](#), now in its second year, was highlighted as a platform to bring the public and private sectors together. At the Summit itself an information platform/website was also launched for private companies to register their interest.

On the long-term success of the Summit: A senior representative from the European Commission likened the WHS process to Sisyphus, saying that the process had to keep going or risk rolling back downhill. As the very first humanitarian summit, it shows that the humanitarian sector has reached age and is now on par with development and conflict; and will keep growing to maturity. Monitoring is essential to achieve the change hoped for. Others agreed that humanitarian aid had come a long way and the Summit was a confirmation of the progress in the last decades.

Another participant said that the successes of the Summit would have to be discussed in 2-3 years, once it becomes clear whether the WHS had generated momentum for change. Some of the failures on the other hand are already apparent, for instance responsibility for conflict and risk sharing disappeared from the agenda. There was a clear focus on commitments but that is not enough, especially since many organisations just translated their strategic objectives into commitments. Perhaps these shortcomings were due to a lack of strategy that is still apparent: weeks after the Summit, no monitoring process or implementation plan has been decided. Someone shared their observation that there is a tendency after the summit to start new multi-stakeholder initiatives. Post-WHS, they wondered whether it would not be most efficient to use and adapt existing EU channels, initiatives and roadmaps, rather than trying to re-invent the wheel.

On humanitarians and advocacy for conflict prevention: A participant questioned whether the prevention of conflict was truly a task for humanitarians. Increasingly, humanitarian NGOs are politicised, have peacebuilding agendas mixed with development agendas, which raises the question of how to maintain the principle of neutrality. Another participant said partnerships with other (and development) NGOs can be a response. Dr Slim said that the prevention of human suffering was a humanitarian responsibility, part of the core of the ICRC's mission and did not necessarily compromise neutrality. Through dialogue with states and other parties, humanitarian NGOs can remind them of their responsibilities and encourage them to implement rules of war, minimising violations and reduce the consequences of armed conflict.

A participant argued that the objectives of development and conflict prevention were being used by donors to put conditions on humanitarian aid – e.g. in EU efforts to tackle the root causes of migration and the recent EU-Turkey deal. This approach goes against the principles of humanitarian aid, including neutrality. Ultimately, conflict prevention remains a state responsibility and states should make use of existing mechanisms that have nothing to do with humanitarian aid to prevent conflicts and should respect and enable a principled humanitarian response.

On development and humanitarian aid: Ms Frost pointed out that humanitarian action cannot ignore development needs in situations such as protracted crises, but cannot take responsibility for them or be used to achieve development goals such as the SDGs. Robust dialogue and partnerships are the key to striking this balance. Ms Reiffenstuel agreed that active contribution to the SDGs went beyond the scope of humanitarian work and risked endangering the principles. The goals and aims of humanitarian aid have to be clear within the community.

A participant commented that in the last years, the concept of humanitarian aid had been repeatedly broadened and come closer with development. She suggested that perhaps now is the time to talk about changes in development as well (certainly within the new European Consensus on Development), and talk about how close the two should get. Certainly the two cannot simply be combined. A good first step might be to return to the operational level, see what practical steps are needed to address difficulties in the field, and build from there.

VOICE President Mr Borsinger concluded the panel discussion by saying that while it is beyond the scope of humanitarian NGOs to stop conflicts, they can raise their voice. He identified some action points for the future, including UN reform, simplification of the financing process, and the need for further attention from states to ensure conflict prevention, including prosecutions for war crimes.

VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing 85 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. 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.



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