

Doha Conference on
Fostering Cooperation Between Aid Agencies with Different Backgrounds

*Draft Concept Note prepared by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva
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1. Introduction

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), held in Istanbul on 23-24 May 2016 under the slogan ‘One humanity: shared responsibility’, aimed at improving and coordinating the global humanitarian effort in the 21st century. The WHS Agenda for Humanity set by the UN Secretary-General focused on five core responsibilities: (1) prevent and end conflict; (2) respect rules of war; (3) leave no one behind; (4) work differently to end need; and (5) invest in Humanity. The WHS yielded seven core commitments reflecting the increased challenges and new issues that the humanitarian work faces at the beginning of this century. The core commitments are: (1) Political leadership to prevent and end conflicts; (2) Uphold the norms that safeguard humanity; (3) Leave no one behind: a commitment to address forced displacement; (4) Women and girls: catalysing action to achieve gender equality; (5) Changing people's lives: from delivering aid to ending need; (6) Natural disasters and climate change: managing risks & crises differently; and (7) Financing: investing in humanity.

2. Building on the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit

In his report on the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit, the UN Secretary-General encouraged UN member states, humanitarian organizations and all other relevant stakeholders to “continue to make additional commitments and take initiatives to advance the Agenda for Humanity and the five core responsibilities [...] including through alignment with the core commitments, and to further support the initiatives launched at the Summit through applicable financial, political and operational support”¹.

This project aims at building on the outcomes of the WHS in order to strengthen cooperation, build partnerships, and fund joint projects in the field of humanitarian action among humanitarian organizations of different backgrounds and worldviews in Muslim and Western countries. The conference will address a number of themes that have been raised at the WHS, and which we think need further exploration in order to set a solid foundation for cooperation. These include adherence to fundamental humanitarian principles; transcending traditional silos; associating faith-based actors; Increasing and diversifying the resource base; and Islamic social finance. The conference will also explore challenges to cooperation in the humanitarian field and aim to offer practical solutions through joint partnerships in the field.

3. Conference Themes

3.1. Adhering to Fundamental Humanitarian Principles

The WHS reaffirmed the importance of preserving the vital role of principled humanitarian action and its practice, in particular in situations of violent conflict, as well as the centrality of the core humanitarian principles (Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, Independence), adopted globally and based on the fundamental principles set by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the importance of upholding them as the foundation for all humanitarian action and committing to their application in the field. In this context, “the Secretariat of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) committed to continue to promote humanitarian principles and to integrate these principles into its humanitarian policy frameworks. The OIC further committed to facilitating experience sharing on challenges facing different actors in adhering to the principles.”²

3.2. Transcending the Traditional Silos

The WHS underlined the need for a new way of working to guarantee aid to the greatest number of victims of violent conflicts and natural disasters. The UNSG called for setting up a “system that moves beyond the comfort of traditional silos, able to work across mandates, sectors and institutional boundaries, and with a greater diversity of partners, towards shared results”³ for the benefit of people affected by crises. One of the traditional silos is related to the humanitarian-development divide that the WHS urges to be transcended through the diversification of actors committed to fundamental humanitarian principles. This could be achieved by working together “toward collective outcomes that ensure humanitarian needs are met, while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability over multiple years and based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors.”⁴

3.3. Associating Faith-based Actors

Another silo that needs to be transcended is the divide between faith-based and non-faith based humanitarian action. Part of the work of the WHS focused on the need to engage a partnership with faith-based NGOs. A Special Session on Religious Engagement was organised to “seek concrete commitments from religious leaders and other humanitarian actors to increase the impact of faith-based actors in reducing humanitarian need and suffering, and their inclusion within policy- and decision-making at all levels of humanitarian response.”⁵ This Special Session acknowledged that “many religious institutions and faith-based NGOs have a unique comparative advantage in humanitarian contexts: they have an established relationship of trust and familiarity with most local communities in which they are embedded. Due to their presence before a crisis they are first responders and key providers of assistance and protection during crises, and they will stay after international organizations leave.”⁶ The outcomes of this session were the following: “(1) Commitment to the principles of compassion, humanity and impartiality in the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection; (2) Commitment to prevent and resolve conflicts, whether or not these have a religious component, and to promote peacebuilding and reconciliation; (3) Building on faith assets and faith infrastructure in communities, contribute to sustainable solutions to humanitarian crises”⁷

Among the initiatives launched during the special session on religious engagement was the Charter for Faith-based Humanitarian Action. The charter, initiated by the Sovereign Order of Malta,⁸ was signed at the WHS by more than 160 faith-based organisations and religious leaders, representing world religions and various geographical regions. The signatories of this charter affirmed that “faith-based organizations conduct humanitarian action in situations of crises, for the benefit of all people affected, those sharing their faith as well as those of other faiths and non-believers”⁹ They “call for this support to be recognized by international and national actors, and government and donor organisations, as a contribution to alleviating needs and the effects of humanitarian crises”¹⁰. Besides, the charter calls for a recognition by international organizations of the “significant, and often unique contributions of religious communities and NGOs, and to consider them to be equal partners.”¹¹ Furthermore, this initiative called “for constructive dialogue between faith and non-faith players in the larger interest of communities in need.”¹²

The signatories of the Charter for Faith-based Humanitarian Action emphasised also the role of faith-based actors as contributors to peace and reconciliation. “In a world where conflicts, violence, and natural disaster affect millions of people, faith-based entities share a critical responsibility and role in working for peace, both at local and national or international levels. [They] facilitate sustainable behaviour and relationship changes based on faith and worldview, offering mediation and sacred space for dialogue between parties”¹³. The signatories committed “to uphold and expand the significant humanitarian response of faith-based organizations and to overcome the manipulative and abusive

attempts to link religion with violence, terrorism, or exclusion of others. By so doing, [they] aim to resolve conflicts and work to promote reconciliation.”¹⁴

3.4. Increasing and Diversifying the Resources Base

In his report for the WHS, the UNSG considered that “investment will need to be increased, diversified and optimized [to] better address growing humanitarian needs.”¹⁵ and insisted on the need to increase and diversify the resource base and the fact that “greater contributions from more governments are needed; however, this must be matched by drawing on a broader and more diverse set of financial sources [including] social and faith-based financing, such as Islamic social finance, that should be better leveraged to reduce vulnerability.”¹⁶ The results of the high-level leaders’ roundtable on “Financing: investing in humanity”, underline that “significant improvements to the mobilisation, allocation, and use of resources necessary to preserve life and dignity are urgently needed for people affected by conflict and disasters. All stakeholders must act with much greater urgency, coherence and solidarity to better meet the needs of the 125 million people affected by humanitarian crises today.”¹⁷ The participants at this roundtable committed to “empower national and local humanitarian action by increasing the share of financing accessible to local and national humanitarian actors and supporting the enhancement of their national delivery systems, capacities and preparedness planning.”¹⁸

3.5. Islamic Social Finance

Islamic Social Finance for humanitarian action attracted high attention during the WHS. A special session organised on Islamic Financing focused on “securing commitments from different stakeholders to diversify the humanitarian resource base and funding architecture to include new and emerging donors from faith-based funding, specifically from Islamic Social Finance”¹⁹. During this special session, it was noted that “every year, Muslims worldwide donate generously to Islamic Social Finance mechanisms to alleviate human suffering”²⁰. In his report to the UNSG, the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing observed that “given that the vast majority of conflict-affected populations are in Muslim countries, the role of Islamic social finance is particularly important. Work is ongoing to address how *waqf*, *zakat* and other instruments such as *sukuk* bonds can be channelled effectively and efficiently to meet humanitarian needs. The potential certainly exists for Islamic social finance to provide solutions.”²¹ The panel recommended therefore “to unleash the full potential of Islamic Social Finance.”²²

3.6. Challenges to Cooperation in the Humanitarian Field

The Doha conference will also address challenges to cooperation in the Humanitarian field. The outcomes of the WHS hope to address a reality characterised by a significant lack of effective cooperation between humanitarian agencies from different backgrounds. Aid agencies often work side by side in the field but fail to engage in joint work in order to achieve real synergy which would maximize the sum of their efforts and capacities.

Non-interaction and lack of cooperation, especially between charities and humanitarian agencies from different backgrounds, reinforce mutual suspicion, preventing the common effort that would serve the interests of the beneficiaries of humanitarian work – vulnerable members of diverse societies. Among the aspects of suspicion is the negative perception of some parties towards faith-based action that is viewed as a disguised preaching, or disregarding of fundamental humanitarian principles. There is also the fear that faith-based financing could be used to support violent groups. This suspicion and fear lead to a discourse and policies, that result, for instance, in unfairly designating charities, freezing their assets and impeding their work, with negative repercussions on humanitarian action and communities in need.

4. Aim and Objectives

4.1. Aim

The conference aims at strengthening cooperation, building partnerships in the field and funding joint projects in the field of humanitarian action and peacebuilding, between organisations of different backgrounds and world views.

4.2. Objectives

- Discuss the challenges related to cooperation in the field of charity work and how to overcome them.
- Show experiences and case studies of cooperation between organisations with different backgrounds.
- Explore the possibility of launching joint initiatives by the participants.
- Launch the “Forum of the Work of Goodness”, based in Geneva, which will: (1) follow up and support the joint initiatives, (2) liaise with international humanitarian agencies, (3) contribute to international humanitarian events; (4) map NGOs interested in cooperation and partnership, (5) build the capacity of humanitarian actors regarding cooperation and partnership.

References

- ¹ See Report of the Secretary-General on the Outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit, August 2016, available online at: <http://worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/default/files/media/A-71-353%20-%20SG%20Report%20on%20the%20Outcome%20of%20the%20WHS.pdf>
- ² Humanitarian Principles. Special Session Summary. Core Responsibility Two of the Agenda for Humanity. Link: <http://worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/default/files/keydocuments/SS3%20Humanitarian%20Principles.pdf>
- ³ One humanity: shared responsibility. Report of the Secretary General for the World Humanitarian Summit. 2 February 2016. Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view>
- ⁴ Changing people's lives: from delivering aid to ending need. High-level leaders' roundtable. Core responsibility four of the Agenda for Humanity. Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/1e8a030537b584bb62c7d75f71062383e24ff542?vid=575820&disposition=inline&op=view>
- ⁵ Special session religious engagement. Relates to core responsibility #3 Leave no one behind. Link: <http://worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/default/files/keydocuments/SS11%20Religious%20Engagement.pdf>
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ See the Charter for Faith-based Humanitarian Action at <https://www.orderofmalta.int/charter-for-faith-based-humanitarian-action-order-of-malta-whs-2016/>
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ See 'One humanity: shared responsibility', Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit. UN General Assembly Doc A/70/709. 2 February 2016. Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view>
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Financing: investing in humanity: High-level leaders' roundtable. Core Responsibility Five of the Agenda for Humanity. Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/3448f690c7f5af7669205068de7a5f5b059cd58a?vid=575819&disposition=inline&op=view>
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Islamic Social Finance. Special Session Summary. Core Responsibility Five of the Agenda for Humanity. Prospectus Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/a5b8432f2b4496366284fae232a5dcb63df77887?vid=574072&disposition=inline&op=view>
- ²⁰ Islamic Social Finance. Special Session Summary. Core Responsibility Five of the Agenda for Humanity. Link: <http://worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/default/files/keydocuments/SS03IslamicFinance.pdf>
- ²¹ High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the United Nations Secretary-General. Too important to fail—addressing the humanitarian financing gap. January 2016. Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/eb90a59ea8f1c6a87f2c410c1102e286544dabb?vid=566924&disposition=inline&op=view>
- ²² Ibid.