



Road to the World Humanitarian Summit

Workshop on

Reaffirming Global Solidarity, Restoring Humanity

Casina Pio IV, 22 February 2016

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Eminences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues, friends,

After a two-year consultation process, a true multi-stakeholder process, a large number of consultations and an SG report, it feels more like a final sprint towards Istanbul.

Humanitarian needs are unprecedented since the Second World War. 125 million people require assistance. Over 60 million people have been forcibly displaced. Armed conflicts, violent tensions and hostilities are resurgent, often drawing entire regions in to turmoil. Extremist actors cause suffering and fear through brutality and inflict immense suffering. These conflicts are characterized by massive displacement; brutality against civilians and an utter disregard for international law and human life. They are protracted and become more and more complex. It's a worrying reminder of the state of the world's humanity.

Beyond conflict, we must not understate or relegate the impact of natural disasters. And an Earthquake could strike any moment. With climate change extreme weather events will become more frequent and more severe. Often, more people are affected by disasters than conflicts. We heard earlier of 100 million climate refugees by 2020. A climate phenomenon, El Niño causes devastating drought, food insecurity and flooding affecting millions of people. Later in the year, La Niña has the potential to cause havoc and exacerbate humanitarian needs in countries already battered by El Niño.

That is why we need the World Humanitarian Summit, taking place on 23 and 24 May in Istanbul, Turkey.

A few weeks ago, the Secretary-General launched his well-received, ground-breaking report: "One Humanity, shared Responsibility", which together with the "Agenda for Humanity" stresses the urgent need for us to come together to put vulnerable people at the heart of our politics, our behavior, our decisions and our actions.

The Summit is the moment for all of us for hope and to make change happen. We need to secure bold, collective agreement for political solutions to crises, for a greater focus on prevention and preparedness, for more emphasis on local capacity to respond and building the resilience for people and communities to cope with crisis and disasters.

This builds on the will, commitment and momentum of the Agenda 2030 to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first. It is to start in 2016 delivering on those 2015 promises, which also include the Sendai framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, the peacekeeping and financing reports, the Paris agreement, as well as the migration and displacement events.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of the roles that religious leaders and faith-based groups play in contributing to these efforts simply cannot be over-stated. Faith-based organizations are amongst the oldest institutions providing the global public goods of saving lives, protecting people and reducing suffering. For centuries, temples, mosques, churches and chapels have not only been places of worship, but spaces of public service: Schools, hospices, orphanages and clinics. And amongst this work is – as Cardinal Tagle encapsulated – the spiritual, emotional and – I would add – practical first aid.

Today across the world, faith-based organisations promote resolution and social cohesion. They are present long before a crisis breaks out and long after international agencies have left. They are often both the first to respond, with ties to the local community - strong supporters of resilience and long-term recovery.

In West Africa during the Ebola outbreak, it was religious leaders who went door to door to spread awareness of safe behaviour practices. In parts of Central African Republic, nuns, priests and imams are providing the bulk of the shelter and protection for frightened community-members fleeing violence. In remote parts of Afghanistan faith-based groups are the only organizations that have built up enough trust and respect to access vulnerable people in need.

This is testament to the unique relationship that faith-based groups have built with communities, which makes them well-equipped to contribute to the shifts required to put vulnerable people at the centre of global decision-making.

In his vision – ‘One Humanity: Shared Responsibility’ – the Secretary-General lays out five core responsibilities, which provide the framework for our future progress. These are: showing global political leadership to prevent and end conflict; upholding the norms that safeguard humanity; leaving no one behind; moving from delivering aid to ending need; and investing in humanity. I believe that faith-based organizations can play an instrumental role in bringing each of these responsibilities to life.

For political leadership to preventing and ending conflict, the Secretary-General highlights the role of faith-based groups in promoting dialogue; strengthening social cohesion; and community reconciliation. In the preparatory consultations held for the Summit, faith-based groups stressed their value added in this area as well as highlighting their role in reducing the risk of violence, in preaching tolerance and in fighting religious fanaticism. They have called for the international community to recognize and support them in these areas so that they can reach their potential. It is up to each of us to find ways to enable this.

It is crucial that we uphold the norms that safeguard humanity. We are guided by the principle to serve all in need with no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. Faith-based groups have access to populations in need in many contexts and act with authority on the norms of humanity that transcended communities. We particularly support and welcome their collective call for all religious groups to promote the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law.

As I said earlier, in September 2015, World Leaders committed to leaving no one behind by reaching everyone in situations of conflict, disasters, vulnerability and risk. To leave no one behind we must aim not only to meet needs in times of crisis but to move people out of crisis altogether. I am incredibly proud of the amazing work the United Nations delivers, but as was said, none of us meet the needs on our own. This will involve a number of changes in practice, including much deeper collaboration to maximize the comparative advantage of different actors at the table, including faith-based groups in certain contexts. We must not just aim for it, we must make it happen.

None of this will be possible unless we invest in humanity. We must invest in peaceful and inclusive institutions and in fragile contexts. There is also a need to find smarter ways of financing. Faith-based groups already mobilize resources on a massive scale in response to crises - now we must identify innovative ways to extend this to reducing vulnerability and shoring up resilience.

And you can see that, far from remaining on a shelf, the excellent report of the High-Level-Panel on Humanitarian Financing is already being fed directly into the World humanitarian Summit through the report of the Secretary-General and we hope to deliver in Istanbul the Grand Bargain.

The World Humanitarian Summit provides multiple ways in which world leaders and all of us can act on these core responsibilities and express concrete commitments to taking forward the Agenda for Humanity.

At the Summit in Istanbul, there will be Special Event for religious leaders and faith-based organisations to engage on humanitarian work. The event will examine better collaboration between faith-based organisation and other humanitarian responders, and we aim to secure commitments to more effectively and through innovative means address the needs of people caught in crisis together.

The Summit is the opportunity to re-inspire and reinvigorate our common and shared commitment to humanity and the universality of the humanitarian principles. To ensure we re-commit to impartial and neutral humanitarian aid. At the heart of the vision for the Summit is to have people at the centre of global decision making – especially those who have lost everything and need our solidarity.

Your active engagement in the preparations for the Summit is and will be crucial. Your evident leadership is vital. Your presence at the Summit is urged – and at the highest level. We are now three months from the opening of the first ever World Humanitarian Summit. And what an opportunity to make a difference to the lives of millions of people! Let us work together to embrace this opportunity. I look forward to a deep and really worthwhile collaboration and partnership for years to come.

Thank you.