Improving Humanitarian Response to a World in Crisis

The world is in crisis. Civilians are fleeing conflict in numbers not seen since the end of World War II. Global pandemics such as Ebola and Zika continue to emerge. Weather hazards are occurring more frequently. Humanitarian action is central to alleviating the suffering of populations caught in these evermore numerous and enduring armed conflicts, as well as those who find themselves and their assets affected by recurring natural disasters.

More than ever, U.S. leadership is needed to address these growing humanitarian challenges and needs, encouraging others to join in the defense of the essential values that are embodied in international humanitarian law.

Humanitarian action is distinct from development assistance as it is provided specifically to save lives affected by conflict and natural disasters. While humanitarian and development actors can and should coordinate their efforts, humanitarian aid assists people in meeting their basic needs (such as food, water, shelter, and health care) and provides specific protection for the most vulnerable. Humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) adhere to overarching foundational principles that guide their daily operations:

- **Humanity:** Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and to ensure respect of human beings;
- **Impartiality:** Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, regardless of nationality, race, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions;
- **Neutrality:** Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature; and
- **Independence:** Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, and military objectives of any other actor in areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

Humanitarian action is, however, itself under attack, not only in its founding principles, but also through the repeated targeting of its personnel and programs. Governments, led by the U.S., need to recommit to supporting the daily delivery of life-saving assistance, making it more effective, accountable, and safe, while also ensuring it is resourced commensurate with need.

**InterAction Recognizes**

- **The United States government has been the main provider of financial resources to respond to humanitarian crises around the world and has increased its contributions in the face of proliferating crises.** The chasm between need and funding is however still growing year after year, and the U.S. administration needs to be bolder in its financial commitments and continue to forcefully advocate on the global stage for more support to humanitarian crises.

- **The United States government played a pivotal role in the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit, held in May 2016, a meeting that committed nations and organizations to more effective and modern means to provide humanitarian assistance in the years to come.** One of the concrete outcomes of the summit is the Grand Bargain between donor states, UN organizations, and NGOs: a list of 10 simple yet transformative joint-commitments that the U.S. government should strive to implement within its own structures.
The United States took on a leadership role at the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, pledging to do more to address the three pillars of the summit: resettlement, funding, and livelihood opportunities.

Upcoming Opportunities

- **Implementation of the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing [Ongoing]**: The process has now begun in earnest. We call on the United States to implement its commitments and continue the process of maintaining a unified U.S. government voice on humanitarian issues.

- **The anniversary of the World Humanitarian Summit [May 2017]**: This anniversary will provide an opportunity to reflect on the commitments made by the U.S. government on increasing funding, investing in system reform, and upholding international humanitarian law.

- **Develop a monitoring framework for commitments made at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees [Ongoing]**: The Leaders’ Summit opened new avenues for increasing refugees’ self-reliance and inclusion through opportunities for education and legal work. It is essential that the new administration, with the support of civil society, develops a monitoring framework to support nations’ commitments to refugees.

- **The change in UN overall leadership and the expected change of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator [Early 2017]**: A turnover in leadership at the United Nations marks an opportunity for the U.S. to demonstrate its commitment to the humanitarian agenda by ensuring that the most qualified candidates get the jobs and to provide inspiring leadership in a world of ever-growing humanitarian need and challenges to the humanitarian community writ large.

Additional Materials

- The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need, 2016, bit.ly/2d3Rg8J
- U.S. NGO Commitments for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016, bit.ly/2cFPYIo