



# AP R2P

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## SPOTLIGHT ON R2P

### Will the World Humanitarian Summit “Grand Bargain” deliver?

*REFLECTIONS ON THE INAUGURAL WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT*

More than 8,000 representatives from 164 countries attended the inaugural World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul at the end of May. They came from UN agencies, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), crisis-affected communities, academia and the private sector. The delegates were joined by 55 heads of state and government, with the notable absence of all G7 leaders except for German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The summit, organised by the United Nations, was convened in response to a mounting global humanitarian crisis. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General, noted in his framing report that the overwhelming majority (over 80%) of humanitarian funding requests are generated by violent conflicts and war. He outlined five key areas, collectively referred to as a ‘agenda for humanity’, that guided the talks:

- Working to prevent and end conflict
- Respecting the rules of war
- Ensuring that marginal and vulnerable groups are protected and empowered
- Changing the international aid paradigm
- Investments in humanity, including local capacities and inclusive institutions.



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visiting the 'Innovation Marketplace'.

#### Side Events:

- Responsibility Not to Veto (Hosted by the Government of Liechtenstein & Global Centre for R2P)
- Realities and Challenges of Providing Humanitarian Aid in Insecure Locations (Hosted by Humanitarian Outcomes, Conflict Dynamics Institute & Global Public Policy Institute)

- Targeting of Health Facilities (Hosted by RedR K & Safe-guarding Health in Conflict Coalition)

#### Special sessions:

- Humanitarian Principles
- Protection of Journalists in Conflict Zones and Non-Conflict Zones

#### Innovation Marketplace:

- Stalls show-casing work of research organisations and the private sector in developing new and innovative solutions (including media/technology such as geo-mapping and use of social media for tracking/monitoring)

### Summit Effectiveness

Despite fears that it would be little more than a 'talk shop', the summit has contributed to positive developments, elevated the profile of some good ideas and generated a number of concrete commitments. Over thirty pre-commitments were laid out in advance for sign-off and included in the 'Agenda for Humanity' outcome, but reports immediately after the summit spoke of hundreds of commitments flowing from the meeting.

Perhaps the most tangible achievement of the WHS, and potentially the most important, is the 'Grand

Among the topics on the table were building increased capacities for local organisations to recognise and respond to situations; taking urgent action to achieve gender equality; and fostering respect for international humanitarian law. To discuss these, the primary programme for the summit was broken into two main components. There were roundtable discussions with high-level leaders, concerned with tackling priority action areas identified by the Secretary General, and special sessions that focused on thematic issues like inclusion of people with disabilities, the role of faith and the protection of journalists. In addition to these, numerous side events displayed the work already being done by charities and NGOs in the field, including the Exhibition Fair and Innovation Marketplace.

After two days of deliberation, the Commitment to Actions document was formalized. This outlined the pledges and promises made over the three days, and concrete ways to implement these going forward. These commitments will be gathered online and UN member states will then be able to register their own commitments or join existing initiatives.

### Pre-Summit Expectations

Despite Ban Ki-moon's call to *"stand up for our common humanity and take action to prevent and reduce human suffering"*, word around the WHS was that people

were not particularly hopeful. This was partly because it was already clear what was and was not likely to emerge. However, it was never meant to have an outcome equivalent to the Sustainable Development Goals in the development sphere or the Paris Climate Change Conference of Parties, and was therefore not afforded the same status as the events that produced those.

The withdrawal of leading NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) from attendance at the summit added to the sense of failure even before the summit commenced. MSF expressed disappointment about shortcomings in terms of addressing systematic attacks on civilians and humanitarian personnel, impeded humanitarian access, and inadequate assistance and protection for refugees and migrants. The MSF statement described the summit as a 'fig leaf of good intentions' that would fail to hold states accountable for starting and perpetuating crises and stated their belief that there was no feasible way to meaningfully achieve its goals.

### Summit sessions and meetings attended

APR2P Centre Research Fellow Dr Charles Hunt attended the summit. He participated in a number of 'side events' co-hosted by a range of UN agencies, NGOs, think tanks and civil society organisations; observed two of the high-level 'special sessions'; and took in some of the larger plenary sessions, as well as



Bargain' agreed between 18 governments and 16 humanitarian organizations. In short, the Grand Bargain comprises a set of reforms to humanitarian financing and holds that: (1) donors will increase their funding, relax some of the conditionality on how it is spent and commit it for longer periods of time; and (2) humanitarian organisations will be more transparent and accountable in the way they utilise those resources.

Three key areas of potential reform were identified, including:

•**Localisation of aid:** Going into the Summit, only 0.2-0.4% of the \$25 billion humanitarian budget goes directly to local organisations. The Grand Bargain attempts to increase the proportion of direct funding to national and local organisations and reduce the overheads of the UN and large international NGOs. The signatories, among them the US and UK governments, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, have now committed to increase direct funding to local organisations to 25% by 2020.

•**Reduce bureaucracy:** Multiple reporting mechanisms and de-

mands drain and divert the resources of NGOs towards auditing and reporting on expenditure of funds to different donors. A recent study estimated that a uniform reporting template/format could save an astounding 11,000 hours in annual staff time for the biggest NGOs. A formal commitment made in the Grand Bargain to 'simplify and harmonise reporting requirements by the end of 2018' – promoted by, inter alia, the German government – is an important step.

•**Move to cash:** At present, too much aid is earmarked for particular projects, comes in the form of pre-purchased goods and services and is restricted in various other ways. Among other hindrances, this stops much-needed investment in local markets that are sometimes quite functional and already stocked with necessary goods. The Bargain – albeit without specific targets or timeframes – supports a shift towards 'cash', demanding a move away from goods and services delivery to providing financial resources to those who can identify and procure necessary items locally.

Even the success of drawing up the

Grand Bargain has met with criticism for only involving the 'humanitarian oligopoly' of the top donors and top recipients of humanitarian funds, and thereby failing to live up to the Summit's core message of inclusivity and localised responses.

Notwithstanding these potential improvements in technocratic matters, it is evident that there has been no real breakthrough on the big political issues. While the focus of the Summit was on reimagining the humanitarian system, in the lead up it was hoped that the WHS could provide a good opportunity to strengthen civilian protection across the board. For example, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson stated that *"protecting civilians in armed conflict will be one of the central themes of the World Humanitarian Summit ... We must seize the opportunity to make progress on the serious challenges we face today. Respect for the norms that are to safeguard our humanity will be one of the priorities."* However, there was little appetite for firm commitments on preventing or resolving the conflicts that lead to much suffering, and therefore little, if any, progress on respecting the norms that safeguard humanity, such as upholding



WHS session on restraint of use of SC veto in cases of mass atrocities

the laws of war. The harsh reality is that in an era of fiscal austerity and geopolitical uncertainty, elevating support for the humanitarian sector is not considered a priority by many of the world's governments

Another example of limited progress on the political side relates to the bridging of development and humanitarian responses to avoid shortfalls in both sectors. Going into the Summit, many advocates were calling for longer-term thinking in humanitarian responses and more holistic approaches in development programming to ensure development gains are resilient. However, the convergence of emergency and development funds and agendas - for instance, linking crisis response with intrinsically political development objectives such as the SDGs agenda - proved controversial. The politicisation of aid through the promotion of deeper involvement of international financial institutions was seen by some as a threat to humanitarian principles. Furthermore, most of the improvements promised are based on voluntary commitments, not binding decisions. Many of the proposals and reform initiatives lack an institutional 'home' or organisational lead, and very few specific targets or timeframes were agreed upon. In the absence of clear ownership or accountability, there is a real danger that momentum could fade.

## Summary

The commitments made by governments at the WHS were feeble and displayed a lack of ambition. It was often commented that the displays of what Sarah Pantuliano from the Overseas Development Institute called "*great energy, entrepreneurship and appetite for change*" were downstairs in and amongst the side events, rather than at the set-piece



of delegations.

As a result, many believe that the summit will not lead to the major renovation of the humanitarian system that was hoped for and arguably required. Instead, the pledges made constitute tinkering around the edges - incremental steps towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system, rather than overhauling it.

Ultimately, the test of the Summit's impact should be evaluated over the coming months and should closely track the implementation of reform and delivery of commitments, as well as following up on their efficacy.

In the lead up to the WHS, a number of clocks (like the one pictured above) were installed around the streets of Istanbul - counting down the weeks, days and hours until the beginning of the summit. It might have been a good idea to keep them there, both as a permanent reminder, and to monitor how long until some of the pledges made at the summit come to fruition. They should ensure the commitments undertaken by the world's elite do not simply turn into rhetoric and platitudes.

**"The WHS was not an endpoint, but a turning point."**

**- Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**

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