

# Humanitarian Action – Whose Business is it anyway?

## Good Humanitarian Action needs strong roots in society

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### Chairs' Summary

1. „Humanitarian Aid is what everybody can do“, giving in rich countries for poor people in need was so beautifully simple. It was not as complicated as development policy which increasingly identifies changes needed in the rich global North. This simplified view does not take the **practical challenges and ethical dilemmas** into account which arise when attempting to put into practice the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.
2. **Humanitarian crises have political causes.** The European crisis aimed at preventing, protecting and receiving refugees impacts on humanitarian action far beyond Europe: So far the EU and its members were considered the defenders of International Humanitarian Law. “Which party to a conflict would take the international legal framework – Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law – and the humanitarian principles seriously if the EU flouts those rights out of political opportunity?”
3. **State and society bear responsibility** for the basic conditions of good humanitarian action. “How can state and society be guarantors of humanitarian action without infringing its independence and its principles? In what way can judiciary and media serve as models?”
4. **„Humanitarian Action is an imposition** for partners”, with its high claim, to act on the basis of need alone. To care not only for the “good” ones but also for the “enemy” is hard to accept for partners in politics and society, which pursue other well justified interests and goals. Humanitarian action is an imposition for humanitarian organisations as well, because it hardly can be done as it should be. To share such burden over more shoulders can only succeed, if humanitarian action is moved in the centre of society and politics and is linked with a broader debate on limiting violence.



5. Humanitarian action depends on private donations and public funding. **“Media attention and public perception strongly depend on political interests.”** This is one of the causes of “forgotten crises”, where humanitarian aid and political efforts are particularly weak. This is where it comes full circle: Societal interest and pressure can influence political interests in order to raise awareness to “forgotten crises”.

Out of these analyses and requests the conference has identified some signposts for next steps:

- The challenges of humanitarian action require us to deepen our analysis, reflect and debate humanitarian policy in an independent and continuous manner.
- On this base we strive for new linkages with other policy arenas and actors (diaspora, domestic refugee aid) as well as periodic exchanges.
- Tangible activities such as an award for principled humanitarian action or campaign days as well as a specific workstream with media could facilitate a broader public discussion on humanitarian action.
- In concrete political decision processes we need committed humanitarian advocates, whom we have to hold accountable.
- Only our increased public interest and political pressure can prevent humanitarian crises and ensure the basic conditions for good humanitarian action.

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