



INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON MULTILATERALISM

Humanitarian Engagements

Executive Summary

The preservation of human dignity and the desire to reduce human suffering are at the core of the multilateral system anchored in the UN and underpin its three pillars: peace and security, human rights, and development. Yet never before has the world witnessed humanitarian needs on such an epic scale and in so many simultaneous crises around the world. And never before has the gap between those needs and the international capacity to deliver an adequate humanitarian response appeared greater than it does today.

This paper aims to identify the main reasons underlying this reality and to trigger a discussion on how the multilateral system anchored in the UN can better prevent and respond to humanitarian crises in the twenty-first century. Contemporary challenges in humanitarian action are threefold and relate to the international community's capacity to (1) stem the needs arising from humanitarian crises, (2) reach the victims of these crises and deliver relief, and (3) provide for an adequate, timely, effective, and sustainable response to humanitarian needs. In each of these areas of work, the paper poses a set of questions to trigger discussions and help identify recommendations for action. Many of the challenges and questions addressed in the paper will also be the subject of discussion at the World Humanitarian Summit later this month. The paper concludes with a set of conclusions and draft recommendations that can feed into the discussions at and following the summit.

Most of the challenges discussed are far from new and have affected the international community's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises for quite some time. Yet the inability of the multilateral system to adjust adequately to these challenges has more likely than not contributed to the protracted and recurrent nature of many humanitarian crises and the increased strain on the international humanitarian response system. That said, many of these questions and challenges—both old and new—cannot be easily answered. Most of them are dilemmas and tensions inherent in today's and tomorrow's humanitarian landscape that need to be addressed and navigated to the best of our ability and according to the opportunities, risks, and constraints of each specific context.

The paper submits a number of recommendations to the UN, its member states, donors, and civil society to address the various challenges and manage the dilemmas and tensions described above:

1. The paper urges the UN and its member states to invest heavily in conflict **prevention**, disaster risk reduction, and compliance with international law. This is not only the most humane course

of action but also the most efficient and cost-effective way to stem humanitarian needs, relieve the strain on the humanitarian sector, bridge the humanitarian financing gap, and mitigate the long-term impact of crises on lasting peace and sustainable development.

2. The paper calls on the UN and its member states to take adequate measures to facilitate **access** and the delivery of a timely and adequate humanitarian response to people in need. It underlines the importance of overcoming legal, political, and security obstacles to principled humanitarian assistance and engagement on protection.
3. The paper lays out specific recommendations to ensure that the collective **response** of the humanitarian sector to actual needs is adequate, timely, effective, and sustainable. The paper stresses the crucial need to ensure that humanitarian action is people-centered rather than process- or status-centered and stresses the centrality of protection. It also puts forth recommendations to adapt to the reality of protracted and complex humanitarian crises and the diversity of humanitarian actors on the ground.