I. About the Human Rights Committee

The United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) is an organ of the United Nations. Its essential function is to uphold the human rights of all individuals, as mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly on December 1948. All member nations are under the obligation to report to the HRC on the implementation and application on a regular basis. (Full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be found here: www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/)

The Committee encourages all member states to preserve the laws which improve the enjoyment of the human rights, and take the necessary constructive actions when a country has failed to promote and safeguard the rights. It is the member nations’ responsibility to address the human rights violations across the world and establish a course of action to tackle the issue in an efficient way.

II. Brief Background Information on the Implications of Humanitarian Aid

*Humanitarian action- quick, simple, and specific, at least when compared to the political treatment given to faraway problems- appears easily accessible and allows immediate assessment: the victim-helper partnership has become one of the emblems of the end of the [twentieth] century.*

R. Brauman, 1993

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1 Orford, p.S.
Humanitarian aid, often thought to be benevolent if not entirely beneficial, has become a contested issue over the past few decades. The weak aspect of humanitarian aid is that it is given voluntarily, and therefore is accepted without asking any questions regarding neither the quality nor the quantity of the aid. However, there has to be in depth analysis of humanitarian aid. This is partially as a result of the growing “business” of donation, and partially as a result of the uyumsuzluk of the aid framework in different situations. Humanitarian aid is not merely raiding a region in need with social workers, excessive amounts of food and medical supplies. Any form of humanitarian aid has to be planned, monitored and evaluated- otherwise the aid carries the risk of causing more damage.

“Any humanitarian aid or accompaniment must begin by understanding how people experience, interpret, and react to disasters,” suggests Carlos Martin Beristain, a psychologist who has worked with refugees for decades now. Humanitarian aid, accompanied by sustainable development, strives to alleviate the people’s suffering, but the work of cooperation has immense psychological side effects. One of the most important things that should be kept in mind is that the priorities of the giving end are usually different from those that are on the receiving end. Deciding whether it is more important to provide economic resources or qualified works, or whether informing the families of fatalities is more urgent becomes the biggest question of humanitarian aid, and needs to be addressed within the context of each case.

The role of media in delivering the humanitarian aid is too great to ignore. Many have critiqued the role of the media in crisis situations and how overseas workers fulfill a symbolic function in their societies of origin that contributes to a particular representation of reality. It is quite often the case that the media alters the representation of “humanitarian,” and this makes the job of assistance workers much more difficult.

Looking at the numbers on humanitarian aid, it can be seen that there has been an enormous increase in refugees from 1975 to 1991: the approximately three million refugees becoming almost nineteen million over the course of a mere 16 years. On the other hand, since 1991, the number of refugees has declined to less than nine million in 2005. Total emergency relief aid appears to have increased significantly over the whole period, beginning its rise in the 1980s. What is striking is that despite the almost fifty percent decline in the

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2 www.alnap.org/pool/files/24_background.pdf
3 Beristain, p.23.
4 Orford, p. 68.
5 Beristain, p. 81.
6 Barnett and Weiss, p. 49.
7 Ibid.
world’s refugee population, emergency aid has continued to increase in real terms. So what do these numbers tell us? The trends appear to be contrary to common instincts. Barnett and Weiss have two possible answers to this question: First is that “the total number of internally displaced persons has increased rapidly in the last twenty years and that the rise in emergency aid simply reflects real-world change,” and second they propose that “the sharp rise in emergency aid may reflect a change in major-power foreign policies after the end of the cold war... rise of emergency aid looks like a reflection of policies of “postmodern imperialism””.

After examining both possibilities and comparing the two on empirical terms, the authors come to the conclusion that the latter possibility is more likely to be the reason for the drastic rise in humanitarian aid.

III. Key Players

Increasing involvement by states in humanitarian action presents challenges and opportunities for aid agencies at the same time. Many agencies perceive states as governments that will help them realize their ambitions of saving lives and addressing the central reasons of suffering, yet states arrive at the table with their own agendas. The international humanitarian aid platform is a highly politicized one, and it “[hinders] aid agencies from pursuing their own do-no-harm strategy.”

A few recent examples on humanitarian aid will be introduced in this section.

• Afghanistan: Lessons learned in Afghanistan are similar to those learned from Kosovo. In the absence of NATO, aid agencies were following the policy of do-no-harm kind of humanitarian aid. But following the realization of Afghanistan’s geopolitical importance by global powers such as the US, the country became even more torn apart. The US “…pledged comprehensive peacebuilding, and then supported the regional warlords in return for their assistance in fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda.” The broad and contradictory strategies risked the ability of the aid agencies to work in the field. In a matter of time, the UN entered the scene and announced that the goal in the country was” stability over progressive change”. One of the most characteristic principles of the UN was to ensure that humanitarian and human rights concerns were subordinated to political decisions such that security and stability would prevail. However, there was much debate on whether cultural impunity was being sustained and whether the basic considerations of the rule of law and human rights were being lost.

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 50.
10 Barnett and Weiss, p. 159.
11 Chaulia, p. 74.
12 Chaulia, p. 75.
13 Ibid.
• Kosovo: Gaining independence from Serbia in late 2008, Kosovo had a rough way to normalization. It represented a moment when “aid organizations were willing to align themselves with states”\textsuperscript{14}. What happened was that NATO initiated a humanitarian war. A military intervention was launched, in which protection of human rights was the main objective. However, that humanitarian war contributed to a humanitarian emergency and consequently NATO became even more aggressive in its actions in order to maintain public support\textsuperscript{15}. Most aid agencies accepted and internalized this increased support, and it could be said that there was a certain level of cooperation between the aid agencies and NATO. However this collaboration “affected which strategies were available to aid agencies and potentially diminished the protection of refugees”\textsuperscript{16}. The “coordination” between the aid agencies located within the country and NATO deceived the fact that they had a combination of motives, and that it might have compromised the protection of some victims\textsuperscript{17}.

• Syria: Certainly the most recent (in fact, still unresolved) case on humanitarian aid is the situation of Syria. It is widely known that neighboring countries, as well as a number of non-governmental organizations are making great efforts to help the citizens of the country. Unfortunately, according to Valerie Amos, there has been no progress in even the basic conditions of the 9.3 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance. Refugees are being hosted in the neighboring countries, especially Jordan, however the conditions remain dire\textsuperscript{18}. Although the humanitarian assistance efforts of the surrounding countries cannot be missed, the passiveness of the Western world is striking. As the political situation continues to be difficult to predict, the humanitarian situation as getting worse every day. Syria stands as the current day example of how politics and humanitarian aid are intertwined.

**IV. Main Problems and Existing Solutions**

An independent institution which works to strengthen humanitarian action through evaluation and learning has come to the conclusion that “evidence-based policy combined with methodological advances for assessing and attributing impact... [has resulted in] a shift in focus

\textsuperscript{14} Pampel, p.165.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 166.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
from process and on how funds are spent, to what effects interventions”\textsuperscript{19}. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of the limitations on what outsiders can accomplish is no excuse for avoiding strategic and comprehensive thinking. In this section, observed failures of humanitarian aid will be explained, and solutions that have been presented will be analyzed.

Main Problems

• Victimization of population: Communities that are torn apart by displacement, violence and/or political reasons suffer from trauma. In many countries, anyone opposed to the established regime is considered an internal enemy and is subject to torture, murder and/or religious or political harassment\textsuperscript{20}. The communities that have faced any of these are considered to be victimized. They stand as a challenge to humanitarian aid, mainly because the individuals cannot isolate themselves from their previous conditions. Working with these victimized groups entail more than dealing with the aftermath of victimization; work models, therapeutic approaches and cooperation all gain a different importance when working with the aforementioned kinds of groups.

• Misrepresentation of media and other information channels: It is significantly likely that humanitarian aid workers will lose perspective while working on the field. The media The workers have to remain focused on what is urgent, and not let themselves be swayed by public opinion, collective emotions and short-lived and self-interested policies\textsuperscript{21}.

Existing Solutions

• The aid workers’ approach has to focus on the external conditions rather than assume that the conflicts relate to some personal characteristics of individuals or to a condition of the particular group.

• One of the ways of offering humanitarian assistance is to allow in refugees. Many countries, however, treat asylum seekers as a security problem. “Respect for human

\textsuperscript{19} \text{www.alnap.org/pool/files/24\_background.pdf}
\textsuperscript{20} Beristain, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{21} Lischer, p 105.
rights has a direct effect on people’s well being, and it is therefore a basic requirement for any type of action”\textsuperscript{22}.

V. Questions to Consider

• Most national and international parties believe that humanitarian aid is a matter of moral duties, responsibilities and obligations. To what extent is humanitarian aid a duty?

• A great variety of agencies play a part in the humanitarian aid cycle. What could be done to prevent these agencies from misinterpreting the information they acquire from others, to enhance communication?

• It is impossible to ignore the political side of humanitarian aid. Is there a way to separate politics, the issues of dominance and dependency, and national propaganda from humanitarian assistance?

VI. Additional Online Sources

http://www.cdham.org/ Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine

http://reliefweb.int/ The central aim of this organization is to provide the latest information on disaster-struck locations around the world. They offer thorough analysis of the pressing humanitarian situations.

http://www.atha.se/ Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action is a Sweden-based non-profit organization which works around the globe. The vision of the organization is to train the humanitarian assistance workers on both technical and emotional levels.

http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/ “The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance promotes the rapid exchange of new ideas, previously unpublished research, and the critical write-up of field experience by field workers and researchers in humanitarian assistance.”

www.humanitarianoutcomes.org This relatively small organization comprises of five partners who draw on a wider network of independent consultants. The overarching objective

\textsuperscript{22} Orford, p.12.
of their work is to provide agencies with information and analysis on regions that are in need of humanitarian aid.

http://www.akdn.org/default.asp “The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of development agencies with mandates that include the environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalization of historic cities. AKDN agencies conduct their programs without regard to faith, origin or gender.”

http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/57jpcj.htm This is a comprehensive report on the process of humanitarian aid, written by Pierre Perrin, who is a medical doctor and works for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

VII. Works Cited


