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WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

WFP Position Paper

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As we approach the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next year, thousands of humanitarians are working diligently, saving millions of lives among populations in emergencies and protracted crises created by an ever increasing number of disasters and conflicts. Yet it is becoming more and more evident that the tools, resources and funding available to the humanitarian system are no longer adequate to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations. Trends in climate-related disasters, intra-state conflict, urbanization and displacement suggest that the world will face an increasing number of complex and protracted crises in the coming decades. At the same time, an evolving global context that includes a growing diversity of actors operating in humanitarian settings, strengthened local capacities and technological advances presents new opportunities and challenges for effective humanitarian response. The humanitarian system must develop innovative ways to overcome resource limitations¹ in order to address underlying vulnerabilities and meet increasing levels of need.

The WHS is a critical opportunity to accelerate transformation in the humanitarian system. WFP has three key priorities for the WHS:

- 1. Enhance the complementarity between humanitarian and development assistance;**
- 2. Safeguard the foundations of humanitarian action;**
- 3. Better serve people in need.**

¹ In 2014, international humanitarian assistance rose for a second year to a record US\$24.5 billion, up by 19 percent from 2013. Despite increases in humanitarian assistance, the funding gap for the UN consolidated appeals process remained at 38 percent

1. Enhance the complementarity between humanitarian and development assistance

The WHS will take place against a backdrop of unprecedented humanitarian need caused by increasing levels of conflict and displacement, more frequent and intense natural disasters, and public health emergencies that do not recognize national boundaries. At the same time, the majority of fragile and conflict-affected states will not meet the MDG targets. According to the OECD, approximately two-thirds of fragile states will not achieve the goal of halving poverty by 2015.

The transition from emergency relief to post-crisis recovery and development is rarely, if ever, linear. Effective emergency response can help protect hard-won development gains by meeting immediate needs during a crisis. Development planning must also be sensitive to the risk of humanitarian crises and be responsive to sudden shocks and changes in the needs of vulnerable populations. Adequate levels of development funding often fail to materialise in fragile and conflict settings; while the scope and duration of humanitarian funding provides limited potential for building the resilience of households, communities and national institutions.

In order to realize the ambitious vision of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, humanitarian and development funding must transcend the conventional concerns of specific actors to support the achievement of outcomes that save lives and livelihoods and build the resilience of affected populations. All actors must work more closely together beyond traditional boundaries to establish new partnerships that more effectively address fragility by strengthening institutions and reducing the risks and vulnerabilities that contribute to conflict. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development clearly recognizes the critical role of emergency preparedness and response in supporting the achievement of long-term goals, such as the eradication of poverty and hunger. The Action Agenda also emphasizes the need for investments in social protection systems and safety nets to more rapidly and effectively scale up assistance in response to shocks.

The WHS represents an opportunity to further leverage this call for system-wide coherence by promoting a business model that can deliver flexible, multi-year financing of resilience strategies at the national level. As we prepare for the Summit in Istanbul next year, we must deliver concrete and transformative change in the global financial architecture that governs the international humanitarian and development system. We must effectively define the global partnerships required to ensure that we leave no one behind.

KEY MESSAGES

- Humanitarian and development actors should develop integrated approaches to resilience building and emergency preparedness, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states.
- Funding and financing mechanisms for humanitarian and development work need to be more flexible, predictable and timely to ensure sustainable results.

2. Safeguard the foundations of humanitarian action

In the face of increasingly complex crises and a more diverse range of actors operating in humanitarian settings – from armed groups to private sector entities – the WHS offers a timely opportunity for the entire global community to reaffirm and embrace the centrality of the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law as foundations for safeguarding humanitarian space. For a variety of reasons, there have been proposals to re-examine and modify the humanitarian principles. However, WFP believes that the four current principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – are the defining features of humanitarian action that fundamentally distinguish humanitarian actors from others operators, whatever the setting. Preservation and committed confirmation of these principles is, therefore, critical to ensuring distinctly humanitarian space in conflicts and natural disasters.

In conflict settings, the WHS must insist that all parties to conflict respect international law and that all actors prioritise the centrality of protection and access to humanitarian assistance, especially for women, children and marginalized groups. Member states have a particular responsibility to facilitate humanitarian action, which includes allowing humanitarian actors to enter into dialogue with all parties to a conflict. All parties must allow humanitarian actors the access required to serve vulnerable, conflict-affected civilian populations.

The emphasis on humanitarian principles, international law, and the centrality of protection is especially critical in light of the growing politicization of assistance witnessed in recent years, particularly in conflict settings. Examples include the unwarranted obstruction of humanitarian action and attempts to link it to political and military objectives, including through counter-terrorism measures, interference in the selection of delivery modalities and the use of humanitarian assistance as a substitute for political action. On the basis of a re-affirmation of humanitarian principles, international law and the centrality of protection, the WHS can assert its clear opposition to politicization of humanitarian assistance and its consequences for access, the safety of humanitarian workers, and the protection and survival of people in need.

KEY MESSAGES

- The four humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – are defining features of humanitarian action and should be maintained.
- All actors should respect international law and facilitate – not interfere with or obstruct – humanitarian action and protection.

3. Better serve people in need

While the WHS should help preserve the ethical and legal foundations that create space for humanitarian action, it should simultaneously push for transformative change in other areas to better serve people in need. In particular, WFP suggests three, inter-related improvements to humanitarian assistance: a more holistic view; a more context-specific, agile, and flexible delivery system; and a more people-centred approach.

The international community would better serve people in need by taking a more holistic view of humanitarian assistance – both in terms of greater integration with development assistance and a more comprehensive approach to engagement. For instance, greater emphasis is often given to response preparedness in natural disaster contexts. Improved disaster preparedness reduces emergency response time and cost, saving more lives and maximizing the benefits of resources. Every dollar invested in preparedness and risk reduction generates between USD 3 and USD 5 in savings². In conflict settings, responses can contribute to addressing the underlying causes of the crises. While recognizing that humanitarian assistance is not a substitute for political solutions, responses should be conflict-sensitive and contribute to peacebuilding and self-reliance.

A holistic view of engagement means going beyond continued efforts to improve the effectiveness of the conventional humanitarian system. It also means recognizing that humanitarians are not the only actors involved in addressing needs and that humanitarian action must be as inclusive as possible. The critical roles of the private sector, government and, above all, local actors and communities should be viewed as integral to responding to humanitarian needs. Government-led approaches, including national safety nets, are an effective means for scaling up assistance in response to natural disasters. In many crises, opportunities to incorporate private sector support and remittances in response planning should be identified and encouraged. In both preparedness or response contexts, international humanitarian actors should build upon and strengthen the response capacities of local actors and communities.

At the same time, there are a number of ways to improve the delivery of humanitarian response. WFP is a leading actor in the area of cash assistance and sees this transfer modality as critical for making response more context-specific, agile, flexible and relevant. Cash and associated transfer technologies provide a significant opportunity for innovation and facilitate new and diverse partnerships, including with the private sector. WFP recognizes that cash-based transfers are not a panacea and that certain contexts may require the provision of in-kind assistance. It is critical for the choice of transfer modality be determined by context and not supply-driven.

Shared logistical services also contribute to more agile and flexible delivery while contributing to greater levels of efficiency and economies of scale. WFP envisages greater investment in common services to improve system-wide efficiencies. Through the Logistics Cluster, the UN Humanitarian Air Service, UN Humanitarian Response Depots and the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster, the humanitarian system is able to deliver assistance in a more timely and cost-effective way. Common services also provide actors with more scope for joint decision-making on delivery priorities.

² Cabot et al in 'Dare to Prepare: Taking Risk Seriously. Financing Emergency Preparedness'. ODI. 2014.

In the Ebola emergency response, for example, a 30 percent cost-saving was achieved through the use of common transport services.

The need for a more flexible and comprehensive approach to humanitarian assistance also reflects concerns expressed by affected populations. People must be at the centre of all humanitarian action. They have a right to influence decisions that have an impact on their lives. Their engagement also improves the quality of humanitarian response. 'Accountability to affected populations' means giving people greater voice and greater control over resources to enable them to shape assistance to their needs and local contexts. New technologies, such as mobile phones, also provide opportunities to complement direct interaction with affected populations.

KEY MESSAGES

- Humanitarian challenges must be evaluated and understood more holistically – breaking down the humanitarian-development divide and building more effectively on the diverse institutional landscape.
- In responding to needs, humanitarian delivery systems must be more context-specific, flexible, agile, and efficient, and the capacities of local actors and communities strengthened.
- Affected populations must be at the centre of humanitarian action.

In a rapidly evolving context, WFP believes it is critical to enhance the complementarity between humanitarian and development assistance; reaffirm and safeguard humanitarian space; and to improve the use of that space by better serving people in need. Embracing these transformations will strengthen the ability of the global community to meet the humanitarian needs of the future.