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HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES



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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted for approval by the Executive Board.

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Humanitarian principles are based on the belief that we all have a responsibility “to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level”, as stated in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. These ideals have been set out in international humanitarian law and provide a framework to guide humanitarian action. They help to justify why an agency works in a particular way and ensure quality of assistance and accountability.

Drawing on international efforts to standardize principles and on WFP’s experience, the Secretariat has selected ten principles that guide WFP’s work, for the Board’s endorsement. They are consistent with the statement in the Millennium Declaration that “we have a duty to all the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable, and in particular the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.”

DRAFT DECISION*

The Board takes note of the information contained in the document “Humanitarian Principles” (WFP/EB.1/2004/4-C) and endorses the WFP Statement of Humanitarian Principles contained in paragraph 13, requesting the Secretariat to add it to the Consolidated Framework of WFP Policies.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the Decisions and Recommendations document issued at the end of the session.



INTRODUCTION

1. The level of human suffering in the world today is unacceptable: one in five people survive on less than US\$1 per day; 842 million people do not have enough food; over 30 percent of the world's children are malnourished. Wars have forced over 25 million people to flee their homes and an additional 16 million to seek refuge in other countries. Drought, floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters affected over 600 million people in 2003. HIV/AIDS claims an estimated 6,500 lives each day; 42 million people live with the disease. Millions more are affected by HIV/AIDS, including 13.4 million orphaned children.
2. Faced with such hardship, there is no option but to act. This is the spirit of humanitarianism: compassion towards fellow human beings combined with the responsibility to help people when they have nowhere else to turn. It is this spirit that drives WFP to use the instrument it was established to provide — food aid — when it is best suited to meeting humanitarian needs. The world's leaders reinforced these ideals in the Millennium Declaration, stating: “We have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders, we have a duty therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.”
3. At the Third Regular Session in 2003, the Board asked the Secretariat to clarify the humanitarian principles that guide WFP. The proposed statement of humanitarian principles provided in paragraph 13 reflects the belief that the global community must act when families and local and national institutions are unable to meet the needs of vulnerable people. It recognizes the importance of ensuring that aid builds on the capacities available in communities and nations and that assistance is appropriate and well coordinated. The statement is consistent with international humanitarian law and other institutional efforts to standardize humanitarian principles.

STANDARDIZING PRINCIPLES

International Humanitarian Law

4. Humanitarian ideals are delineated in international humanitarian law,¹ which limits the right of belligerents to cause unnecessary suffering; it describes the situations in which states must allow assistance to be provided to civilians and permit relief agencies, abiding by certain conditions, to access and assist civilian populations.
5. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions allows for an “impartial humanitarian body ... to offer its services to the Parties to the conflict” and Additional Protocol II states that “if the civilian population is suffering undue hardship owing to a lack of the supplies essential for its survival, such as foodstuffs and medical supplies, relief actions for the civilian population which are of an exclusively humanitarian and impartial nature and which are conducted without any adverse distinction shall be undertaken subject to the consent of the High Contracting Party concerned.”² The emerging cornerstone

¹ The series of declarations and treaties that followed the first Hague Peace Conference in 1899 and the 1949 Geneva Conventions and 1977 Protocols.

² Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions is applicable in all non-international armed conflicts, regardless of state ratification; it has become part of customary international law. Additional Protocol II only applies where it has been ratified by a government, and only to specified types of armed forces.



humanitarian principles that all actors, including warring parties, must abide by are: humanity, impartiality and “absence of adverse distinction”.

6. The international humanitarian community has expanded the notion of humanitarian principles to serve as a code of conduct for agencies providing assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters, man-made crises and wars. In December 1991, the United Nations General Assembly agreed that the principles listed in Box 1 would guide the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance.³

The Sphere Project

7. Other notable efforts to standardize humanitarian principles include the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief. Signed by 200 organizations in 1994, the code outlined the principles of conduct listed in Box 2.
8. The Code of Conduct was recast as the Humanitarian Charter to underpin the Sphere Project, which sought to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian work. Launched in 1998, The Sphere Project involved representatives from over 300 national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies and academic institutions to set out minimum standards of food aid, nutrition, water supply and sanitation, shelter and site management, and health services. Currently in its third phase, the Sphere Project has just revised its handbook and is piloting the application of the Humanitarian Charter and minimum standards in three regions.
9. In 2000, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) endorsed the Sphere handbook as an important tool for working with populations affected by disaster. It called on all IASC members to promote use of the Humanitarian Charter and minimum standards in disaster response in their organizations. WFP has provided technical support since the inception of the Sphere Project, most recently in the development of the new food security and nutrition chapter. WFP’s standard field-level agreement with implementing partners encourages adherence to the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and standards.

Good Humanitarian Donorship

10. In June 2003, representatives of governments, multilateral donors, WFP and other United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other organizations met in Stockholm to endorse the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship. These reaffirmed that humanitarian action should be guided by humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. They also stressed the need to:
 - respect and promote international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights;
 - ensure stable, flexible and timely funding to meet humanitarian needs;
 - allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments;
 - involve beneficiaries in monitoring and evaluation and, where possible, the design and implementation of humanitarian response;
 - strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises;

³ UNGA Resolution 46/182, 19 December 1991.



- provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development and to ensure support, where appropriate, to facilitate transitions from humanitarian relief to recovery and development activities; and
- promote the central and unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action.

Box 1

- Humanitarian assistance is of cardinal importance for the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies.
- Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.
- The sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of states must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In this context, humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country.
- Each state has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected state has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.
- The magnitude and duration of many emergencies may be beyond the response capacity of many affected countries. International cooperation to address emergency situations and to strengthen the response capacity of affected countries is thus of great importance. Such cooperation should be provided in accordance with international law and national laws. Inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations working impartially and with strictly humanitarian motives should continue to make a significant contribution in supplementing national efforts.
- States whose populations are in need of humanitarian assistance are called upon to facilitate the work of these organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, in particular the supply of food, medicines, shelter and health care, for which access to victims is essential.
- States in proximity to emergencies are urged to participate closely with the affected countries in international efforts, with a view to facilitating to the extent possible the transit of humanitarian assistance.
- Special attention should be given to disaster prevention and preparedness by the governments concerned, as well as by the international community.
- There is a clear relationship between emergency, rehabilitation and development. In order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development, emergency assistance should be provided in ways that will be supportive of recovery and long-term development. Thus, emergency measures should be seen as a step towards long-term development.
- Economic growth and sustainable development are essential for prevention of and preparedness against natural disasters and other emergencies. Many emergencies reflect the underlying crisis in development facing developing countries. Humanitarian assistance should therefore be accompanied by a renewal of commitment to economic growth and sustainable development of developing countries. In this context, adequate resources must be made available to address their development problems.
- Contributions for humanitarian assistance should be provided in a way which is not to the detriment of resources made available for international cooperation for development.
- The United Nations has a central and unique role in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community to support the affected countries. The United Nations should ensure the prompt and smooth delivery of relief assistance in full respect of the above-mentioned principles, bearing in mind relevant General Assembly resolutions. The United Nations system needs to be adapted and strengthened to meet present and future challenges in an effective and coherent manner. It should be provided with resources commensurate with future requirements. The inadequacy of such resources has been one of the major constraints in the effective response of the United Nations to emergencies.



Box 2

- The humanitarian imperative comes first.
- Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.
- Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious stand point.
- We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.
- We shall respect culture and custom.
- We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.
- Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.
- Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerability to disasters as well as meet basic needs.
- We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.
- In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects.

Field-Level Principles

11. In addition to these global efforts, there have been several field-level attempts to reach agreement on humanitarian principles, most notably in Liberia, Somalia and Sudan in 1995 and in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone in 1998. These have resulted in agreements that set out in operational terms principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, capacity building, transparency, accountability and coordination. A more modest effort in Afghanistan in 1998 focused on equal access by men and women to health and education and on participation of women staff in United Nations assistance. There has been mixed success in implementing the agreements, but they have served as important advocacy tools for agencies faced with operational constraints in the field.
12. The IASC has not reached an agreement among international humanitarian assistance agencies on a set of common principles. With regard to integrating a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance, the IASC has agreed that agencies should:
 - embrace gender equality and the equal protection of women's and men's human rights in carrying out humanitarian and peace-building activities, paying special attention to the violation of women's rights and the provision of appropriate remedies;
 - ensure equal representation of women and men in peace mediation and decision-making at all levels and stages of humanitarian assistance; and
 - guarantee participation of women's organizations in capacity-building for humanitarian response, rehabilitation and recovery.



WFP STATEMENT ON HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

13. WFP is driven by compassion for the world's most vulnerable people, particularly women and children, and the responsibility to use food and related assistance to save lives, relieve suffering and improve food security. It is committed to the values and principles expressed in the Millennium Declaration. WFP will adhere to the principles set out below when providing food aid, non-food assistance and technical support in response to humanitarian needs.

| CORE HUMANITARIAN VALUES | |
|--|---|
| I. | Humanity. WFP will seek to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it is found and respond with food aid as appropriate. It will provide assistance in ways that respect life, health and dignity. |
| II. | Impartiality. WFP's assistance will be guided solely by need and will not discriminate in terms of ethnic origin, nationality, political opinion, gender, race or religion. In a country, assistance will be targeted to those most at risk from the consequences of food shortages, following a sound assessment that considers the different needs and vulnerabilities of women, men and children. |
| III. | Neutrality. WFP will avoid taking sides in a conflict and will not engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. Aid will not be provided to active combatants. |
| IV. | Respect. WFP will respect local customs, traditions and the sovereignty of the state in which it is working, upholding internationally recognized human rights. |
| FOUNDATIONS OF EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION | |
| V. | Self-reliance. WFP will provide humanitarian assistance with the primary objective of saving lives, in ways that support livelihoods, reduce vulnerability to future food scarcities and support durable solutions. Food aid should not undermine local agricultural production, marketing or coping strategies, disturb normal migratory patterns or foster dependency. |
| VI. | Participation. WFP will involve women and men beneficiaries wherever possible in all activities and will work closely with governments at the national and local levels to plan and implement assistance. |
| VII. | Capacity-building. Within its own capacity and resources, WFP will strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises. WFP will ensure participation by women's organizations and will integrate a gender perspective in capacity-building activities. |
| VIII. | Coordination. WFP will work at the request of the host government or the United Nations Secretary-General and within established United Nations coordination structures at the global and field levels. This will include working with other humanitarian actors such as NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. |
| STANDARDS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONALISM | |
| IX. | Accountability. WFP will keep donors, host country governments and beneficiaries informed of its activities and their impact through regular reporting. |
| X. | Professionalism. WFP will maintain the highest standards of professionalism and integrity among its international and national staff to ensure that its programmes are carried out efficiently, effectively, ethically and safely. All staff will adhere to the <i>Standard Code of Conduct for the International Civil Service</i> and the Secretary-General's <i>Bulletin on Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Humanitarian Crises and Other Operations</i> . |

