

# Humanitarian Action and Sustaining Peace

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## Introduction

Humanitarian action was traditionally designed to be an emergency response—the provision of life-saving assistance when conflict erupts or disaster strikes. The idea of humanitarian action being strictly a short-term “Band-Aid” however, is increasingly perceived as inaccurate and even undesirable.

The nature of crises is changing, with violence increasingly happening in urban areas and against civilian populations, and the consequences of armed conflict and natural disasters have become more protracted. In some contexts, humanitarian actors have been on the ground for decades, dealing with the complex aftermath of crises, resurging violence, or protracted crises. Camps for refugees and internally displaced persons have become long-term temporary solutions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that the average duration of the thirty-two protracted refugee situations at the end of 2015 was twenty-six years.<sup>1</sup> Three of the four camps that constitute Kenya’s Dadaab complex, for example, were established in 1991 and 1992, and the complex today hosts over 230,000 refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>2</sup> Sudden or recurring natural disasters often lead to protracted crises in countries with insufficient capacity to respond to the ensuing impacts on their population and infrastructure. Responding to the humanitarian needs of those affected by conflict and disaster is not a short-term endeavor.

There is recognition within the humanitarian community, as reflected in the outcome of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, that there is a need to rethink the linkages between humanitarian action, development, and peace and security. Humanitarian actors increasingly perceive a responsibility to work toward bridging what has been described as the “humanitarian-development divide”<sup>3</sup> and not to overlook the nexus between addressing and reducing humanitarian needs and building the foundations for sustaining peace. This issue brief aims to explore how principled humanitarian action, in synergy with other types of responses and initiatives, can contribute to creating the conditions for self-sustaining peace.

In the dual resolutions passed by the General Assembly and Security Council in April 2016 (Resolutions 70/262 and 2282), “sustaining peace” is

1 UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015*, p. 20, available at [www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf).

2 UNHCR, “Dadaab Refugee Complex,” available at [www.unhcr.org/ke/dadaab-refugee-complex](http://www.unhcr.org/ke/dadaab-refugee-complex).

3 See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Policy Development and Studies Branch, “New Way of Working,” 2017, available at [www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/NWOW%20Booklet%20low%20res.002\\_0.pdf](http://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/NWOW%20Booklet%20low%20res.002_0.pdf).

understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account. These resolutions recognize the importance of coherence and complementarity between the UN's peace and security efforts and its development, human rights, and humanitarian work.<sup>4</sup>

As a process, sustaining peace is informed by four practical considerations. The first is that peace is local and grows from the bottom up. Top-down efforts to prevent conflict can mitigate or arrest violence and create some semblance of stability and security—what has been described as negative peace.<sup>5</sup> Rarely, however, do they lay the foundations for durable, positive peace, unless they are rooted in local communities and cognizant of local agency, needs, and potential capacities for peace.

The second consideration is that external actors should not only identify and address the factors that drive and sustain conflict; they should also analyze and strengthen what still works—the residual capacities for peace which people draw on in times of conflict.

The third is that outside interveners should ensure that their support, however well-meaning, does not unwittingly exacerbate the very conditions that brought about conflict or weaken capacities for self-recovery and peace.

The fourth, as intimated by the dual resolutions, is that international support has a better chance of creating the conditions for sustaining peace if it simultaneously addresses the humanitarian, development, human rights, and security needs of aggrieved communities. The rationale is that conflict-affected populations do not experience these needs in a sequential or compartmentalized manner, development can contribute to peace, and humanitarian action can help development efforts.<sup>6</sup>

## Humanitarian Action from a Sustaining Peace Perspective

While principled humanitarian action is neutral, impartial, and independent, it has linkages with sustaining peace and is increasingly governed by some of the same considerations outlined above. Furthermore, and without jeopardizing their neutrality, humanitarian actors can call for a humanitarian truce or cease-fire that peacemakers or diplomats can leverage to alter conflict dynamics and help parties move from violence to peaceful political dialogue and competition. UN Security Council Resolution 2401 demanding a thirty-day cessation of hostilities in Syria in 2018, for example, followed pleas by humanitarians to put an end to the unimaginable human suffering in Eastern Ghouta.<sup>7</sup> Such initiatives can, in turn, begin laying foundations, however tenuous, for a political settlement.

As the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) president recently made clear, "Peace remains the ultimate goal of neutral and impartial humanitarian work, and that goal is highly political."<sup>8</sup> It is telling that the first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Henry Dunant, the ICRC's most well-known founder, and that the ICRC has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize more times than any other recipient. Indeed, saving lives, alleviating suffering, and maintaining human dignity create the basic conditions for peace.

Humanitarian action can and increasingly does go beyond filling the gaps and addressing the immediate needs of people affected by crisis. The way in which humanitarian responses are designed has a real impact on the lives of these people and their communities. With the changing nature of today's protracted humanitarian crises, humanitarian workers should deliberately explore ways to

4 Security Council Resolution 2282 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2282; General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/262, para. 10.

5 Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969).

6 Hugo Slim, "Nexus Thinking in Humanitarian Policy: How Does Everything Fit Together on the Ground?," keynote address at World Food Programme (WFP) Annual Partnership Consultations, October 25, 2017, [www.icrc.org/en/document/nexus-thinking-humanitarian-policy-how-does-everything-fit-together-ground](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/nexus-thinking-humanitarian-policy-how-does-everything-fit-together-ground).

7 Mark Lowcock, statement to the Security Council on Syria, February 22, 2018, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-77>.

8 Peter Maurer, "Humanitarian Action and the Pursuit of Peace," speech to the Fondation Gustave Ador on the anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize, June 8, 2017, available at [www.icrc.org/en/document/humanitarian-action-and-pursuit-peace-speech-anniversary-nobel-peace-prize](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/humanitarian-action-and-pursuit-peace-speech-anniversary-nobel-peace-prize).

have a greater positive impact.

Much of the current conversation on humanitarian policy reflects this desire to think about how humanitarian action can better serve as the necessary first step in the continuous effort toward development and peace and security while ensuring its distinctiveness and upholding its fundamental principles. Ideas around conflict-sensitivity, localization, context-specificity, and sustainability are tied to the humanitarian community's desire to help achieve that first important step. When put into action, these ideas can become the building blocks for sustaining peace.

### ENSURING CONFLICT-SENSITIVE RESPONSES

When responding to crises, international actors need to have a solid understanding of the context they are operating in to avoid inadvertently exacerbating the conditions at the root of the conflict or creating new tensions that could lead to further complications. Situations of violence are diverse and complex. For example, the ongoing conflicts in Syria differ vastly from the violence in Colombia, and responding to humanitarian needs in those contexts in a way that can have a positive impact on peace will require different approaches. Furthermore, humanitarian action is often at risk of being politicized and of therefore becoming an instrument of war.<sup>9</sup>

Conflict-sensitivity is closely tied to the essential humanitarian principle of “do no harm.” This principle not only recognizes that aid can cause harm, but it also assumes it can be used to strengthen local capacities for peace in conflict-affected communities.<sup>10</sup> Ideas around conflict-sensitivity, therefore, should impact the way humanitarian as well as development and peacebuilding organizations design and deliver their interventions.

This requires in-depth analysis both of the conflict at hand and of the humanitarian program to be put in place. The Do No Harm Framework<sup>11</sup>

and the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment,<sup>12</sup> for example, are tools that can be used to conduct conflict analysis, project planning, and impact assessment. The Do No Harm Framework suggests acquiring a good understanding of the dividers and connectors that exist within a conflict-affected society to be able to assess the impact a program will have: will it contribute to existing tensions, or will it reinforce local capacities for peace?

Principled humanitarian action is not in and of itself a peacebuilding activity, but a conflict-sensitive approach to humanitarian engagement can contribute to laying a foundation on which peacebuilding initiatives can build.

### LEVERAGING LOCAL ACTORS AND CAPACITIES

Humanitarian actors should avoid creating a system that parallels rather than complements local capacities. Instead, they should identify, support, and enhance resilient local capacities within communities. In many contexts affected by disaster or conflict, much, but not everything, is destroyed.

The recognition that local capacities ought to be used as much as possible in designing and implementing principled humanitarian action is not new. As early as 1991 the UN General Assembly, in Resolution 46/182, recognized the advantages of supporting and reinforcing local capacities. The operationalization of what has come to be described as “localization,” however, has been slow. This does not mean that local and national actors are not currently playing a crucial role in humanitarian crises around the world. Indeed, they are often the first responders, and they remain active both during and after crises. However, they receive insufficient support from the international community.

Recognizing the need for greater support, in the Grand Bargain, a package of reforms to humanitarian funding launched during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, donors and international humanitarian actors reemphasized the importance

9 Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, “Conflict Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding Resource Pack,” May 2015, p. 7, available at [http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/key\\_reading/conflict-sensitive-approaches-to-development-humanitarian-assistance-and-peacebuilding-resource-pack/](http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/key_reading/conflict-sensitive-approaches-to-development-humanitarian-assistance-and-peacebuilding-resource-pack/).

10 Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, “How To Guide to Conflict Sensitivity,” February 2012, available at [www.conflictsensitivity.org/how-to-guide/](http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/how-to-guide/).

11 CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, “The ‘Do No Harm’ Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict: A Handbook,” April 2004, available at <http://cdacollaborative.org/publication/the-do-no-harm-framework-for-analyzing-the-impact-of-assistance-on-conflict-a-handbook/>.

12 Kenneth Bush, “A Measure of Peace: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) of Development Projects in Conflict Zones,” Working Paper 1, International Development Research Centre, 1998, available at [http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/other\\_publication/a-measure-of-peace-peace-and-conflict-impact-assessment-pcia-of-development-projects-in-conflict-zones/](http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/other_publication/a-measure-of-peace-peace-and-conflict-impact-assessment-pcia-of-development-projects-in-conflict-zones/).

of working with local actors. They committed to “making principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary” and to “engage with local and national responders in a spirit of partnership and aim to reinforce rather than replace local and national capacities.”<sup>13</sup>

Engaging local actors to better understand local dynamics not only assists in the conflict analysis necessary for conflict-sensitive humanitarian action, but it also enables this action to be tailored to the needs of those affected and made to complement existing structures and efforts. The fact that local actors are already on the ground, and remain after international efforts scale down or leave, also makes them key to ensuring the sustainability of international humanitarian action.

If seen as a positive move away from the top-down international aid system, efforts to localize humanitarian action may come into tension with the principle of impartiality, in particular in conflict-affected contexts. Local actors may not be able or politically willing to provide aid impartially, local authorities may be parties to the conflict, and civil society may be fractured and polarized, all of which present serious challenges for principled humanitarian actors.<sup>14</sup> In order to ensure principled humanitarian action, international actors cannot blindly pursue localization. Regardless of the situation on the ground, however, dialogue with local actors at a minimum helps ensure a better understanding of local dynamics and avoid harmful activities.

Were humanitarian actors to move beyond the rhetoric and ground their work in local capacities, resources, and contexts, they could be more accountable to aid recipients. They would also be recognizing communities’ own agency in coping with emergencies and contributing to their own recovery.<sup>15</sup> This may be key to later building a sustainably peaceful society in which people are

conscious of their potential added value and their power to assist and transform their communities.

## PROVIDING CONTEXT-SPECIFIC AND SUSTAINABLE AID

Humanitarian action can also enhance the resilience and preparedness of populations, making it more sustainable in the long term. At first glance, this may seem contradictory, as humanitarian aid is often conceived to be short-term action, and the concept of sustainability suggests more long-term thinking. However, sustainability has a central role in the humanitarian sphere and is key to thinking about humanitarian action as a first step in contributing to more peaceful societies. Increasingly, policymakers are discussing ways of strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Indeed, while humanitarian organizations provide emergency relief when crises strike, most recognize that they cannot only be thinking of the short term in designing their operations. Organizations like the ICRC describe their need to think beyond people’s essential needs about how they can strengthen resilience and sustainably improve a population’s health or food security.<sup>16</sup> This is particularly the case in protracted crises, where humanitarians are not going in and out and responding only to immediate needs, and where development continuity is essential. Even if it does not make positive steps toward development, humanitarian action can ensure development “holds” by helping maintain essential services and supporting or rebuilding vital infrastructure and can prevent development reversals.<sup>17</sup>

In order to ensure a sustainable (and conflict-sensitive) humanitarian response, humanitarian aid must be locally appropriate (see Box 1). Humanitarian actors need to understand the context and avoid going in with preconceived ideas. The point of departure needs to be the specific and concrete context that humanitarian actors are going

13 “The Grand Bargain: A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need,” May 23, 2016, available at [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Grand\\_Bargain\\_final\\_22\\_May\\_FINAL-2.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Grand_Bargain_final_22_May_FINAL-2.pdf).

14 Jérémie Labbé, “Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge et la localisation de l’aide: Vers une véritable complémentarité,” January 2018, available at [www.urd.org/Le-Comite-international-de-la](http://www.urd.org/Le-Comite-international-de-la).

15 See Ian Smillie, ed., *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*, International Development Research Centre (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001); Abby Stoddard, “You Say You Want a Devolution: Prospects for Remodeling Humanitarian Assistance,” *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, November 13, 2004, available at <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/89>; Antonio Donini et al., “Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Final Report,” Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, March 2008, available at <http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/humanitarian-agenda-2015-final-report/>; UK Department for International Development (DFID), “Business Case Intervention Summary: Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme,” April 2013.

16 ICRC, “Protracted Conflict and Humanitarian Action,” September 2016, p. 24, available at [www.icrc.org/en/document/protracted-conflict-and-humanitarian-action](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/protracted-conflict-and-humanitarian-action).

17 *Ibid.*, p. 34.



### Box 1. Mental health interventions in armed conflict

Mental health is receiving increased attention in the humanitarian community, and organizations are scaling up their activities in this area.<sup>18</sup> This attention is crucial, given that populations affected by conflict are at increased risk of depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. In fact, mental health issues reportedly affect six times more people than conflict-related wounds,<sup>19</sup> and populations living in protracted conflicts are at higher risk of developing symptoms of mental illness.<sup>20</sup> Such illnesses, if not treated, can have long-lasting consequences for individuals and communities, and their prevalence can be an impediment to peace. Individuals may turn to negative coping mechanisms, and conflict-related trauma can lead to negative social patterns, such as widespread criminality or the victimization of certain groups, which may be passed on to future generations. Investing in mental well-being will help individuals to regain a sense of dignity and societies to rebuild trust and restore the social fabric damaged by conflict.

Treatment of mental health disorders needs to be long-term and sustainable. They are not wounds that can simply be stitched up. This was a concern in North Waziristan, Pakistan, in 2014, when World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for mental health interventions were implemented. These interventions brought attention to mental health issues but did not sufficiently ensure sustainability in the longer term, as most of the psychosocial staff came from humanitarian agencies.<sup>21</sup> The International Medical Corps is one of the few organizations that has specifically focused on responding to mental health needs in conflicts and disasters. One key aspect of its work is its focus on helping to strengthen mental healthcare systems and shape national policies in the longer term.<sup>22</sup>

Mental health interventions must also be contextually sensitive. Western approaches to treatment may not fit within non-Western contexts and cultures. Humanitarian mental health interventions therefore need to be based on a good understanding of the context and substantial engagement with local actors, including traditional healers.<sup>23</sup>

If the humanitarian sector wants to effectively respond to mental health issues, it needs to commit to building programs that can be sustained in the long term, are tailored to local contexts and local sensitivities, and engage local actors. In doing so, humanitarian actors will substantially contribute to building more peaceful societies by creating healthier communities that can deal with the trauma of conflict in appropriate ways and avoid carrying this trauma across generations.

to engage in, which requires engaging with local actors. If humanitarian actors are able to provide assistance and protection that is context-specific, they will be responding to the actual priorities and needs of those affected by conflict or disaster.

A humanitarian response that is sustainable, therefore, helps ensure that people's priority needs continue to be met, particularly in protracted crises, while gradually working toward ending

dependence on humanitarian assistance. It helps strengthen the resilience of local populations and structures, making them less vulnerable to potential future shocks. There is need for realism in what humanitarian action can and should achieve, but much more can be done to ensure it is complementary with development assistance, thereby putting in place stronger foundations for peace.<sup>24</sup>

This does not come without its challenges.

18 See, for example, ICRC, "Shaping the Future of the World's Largest Humanitarian Movement," November 11, 2017, available at [www.icrc.org/en/document/shaping-future-worlds-largest-humanitarian-movement](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/shaping-future-worlds-largest-humanitarian-movement).

19 Sigiriya Aebischer Perone et al., "Non-communicable Diseases in Humanitarian Settings: Ten Essential Questions," *Conflict and Health* (September 2017), p. 10, available at <https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-017-0119-8>.

20 Tambri Housen et al., "Prevalence of Anxiety, Depression and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in the Kashmir Valley," *BMJ Global Health* (October 2017), available at <http://gh.bmj.com/content/2/4/e000419>.

21 Asma Humayun et al., "Implementing mhGAP Training to Strengthen Existing Services for an Internally Displaced Population in Pakistan," *Global Mental Health* 4, no. 6 (2017), available at [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5454790/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5454790/).

22 International Medical Corps, "Building Comprehensive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services," available at <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/program/mental-health-psychosocial-support/building-comprehensive-mental-health-psychosocial-support-services/>.

23 Lynne Jones et al., "Severe Mental Disorders in Complex Emergencies," *The Lancet* 374, no. 9690 (August 2009), p. 658, available at [www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(09\)61253-8/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(09)61253-8/fulltext).

24 Paul B. Spiegel, "The Humanitarian System Is Not Just Broke, but Broken: Recommendations for Future Humanitarian Action," *The Lancet* (June 2017), p. 1, available at [www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)31278-3.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(17)31278-3.pdf).

Particularly in responding to acute crises, the needs and conditions are often urgent and life-threatening. In these cases, humanitarian actors may not have the time or capacity to engage in long-term strategic thinking, resulting in responses focused on the immediate needs and priorities of affected populations.<sup>25</sup> Other challenges, such as rigid institutional structures and short-term funding, may hamper the ability of humanitarian actors to engage in the longer-term planning necessary for sustainable engagement. Further efforts to bridge the humanitarian-development divide will help tackle some of these challenges.

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The three considerations developed above are all interlinked, and most recognize them as the future of humanitarian action.<sup>26</sup> This is a humanitarian action that ensures, to the extent possible, that development gains are not reversed and that enables a fluid transition to development assistance. A conflict-sensitive, localized, and sustainable humanitarian response builds on local communities' resilience and works with them to at least remove some impediments to peace, or to strengthen or even create the conditions for its realization and sustainability. It must be noted, however, that these policy considerations are not new and have been a part of conversations on humanitarian policy at least since the 1990s. The real challenge, therefore, is to operationalize these ideas.

## Humanitarian Action's Contribution to Sustaining Peace

Today's protracted conflicts are leading to increasing connections between the humanitarian field and more political peacebuilding efforts.<sup>27</sup> The fact that humanitarian actors are committing to the

medium- to long-term has meant that they often share the same operational environment as peacebuilding actors. In countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, both types of actors have been present and active for many years. Although their mandates and approaches remain distinct, it is clear that humanitarian action can contribute to creating or strengthening the preconditions for development and peace. Given the circumstances in which humanitarian actors work today, humanitarian action should be seen as a building block for peace, complementing the work of peacebuilding actors.

Principled humanitarian action can improve livelihoods. It can help not only deliver basic services such as healthcare, water, or sanitation but also support lasting solutions for people to access these services. It can bring tangible development gains, or at least attempt to reduce the destructiveness of conflict. As such, humanitarian action can contribute to efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as it shares many of its intermediate objectives, such as reducing disease and improving access to clean water.<sup>28</sup> The basic sense of well-being brought by access to essential healthcare, for example, can also contribute to more harmonious coexistence.<sup>29</sup>

Conflict-sensitive humanitarian action can reduce tensions. For example, it can prevent competition over resources.<sup>30</sup> Both assistance and protection efforts, if properly designed, can help address inequities that exacerbate tensions without undermining the affected population's capacity to protect itself. They can also address conditions that threaten peace, such as the suffering of those who have missing family members, for whom the lack of answers can create not only pain but also anger and frustration, or the grievances of prisoners confronted with inhumane detention conditions and practices.<sup>31</sup>

25 Masayo Kondo Rossier, "Linking Humanitarian Action and Peacebuilding," Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding at the Graduate Institute, Geneva, 2011, p. 41, available at [http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/iheid/files/sites/ccdp/shared/Docs/Publications/WP7\\_WEB-1.pdf](http://graduateinstitute.ch/files/live/sites/iheid/files/sites/ccdp/shared/Docs/Publications/WP7_WEB-1.pdf).

26 This is exemplified by the 2017 NGO Code of Conduct for Health Systems Strengthening, which fifty organizations have signed on to and which promotes principles of sustainability and localization. Available at <http://ngocodeofconduct.org/>.

27 Claude Bruderlein, "Challenges and Dilemmas in Frontline Negotiations," ICRC Humanitarian Law and Policy blog, January 4, 2018, available at <http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/01/04/challenges-dilemmas-in-frontline-negotiations-interview-with-claude-bruderlein/>.

28 See Goals 3 and 6 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (April 27, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/262.

29 Kondo Rossier, "Linking Humanitarian Action and Peacebuilding," p. 62.

30 UNDP, "Commitments to More Effective Synergies among Peace, Humanitarian and Development Actions in Complex Humanitarian Situations," May 2016, available at [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/the-peace-promise.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/the-peace-promise.html).

31 Bruderlein, "Challenges and Dilemmas in Frontline Negotiations." ICRC, "Strengthening coordination of UN humanitarian and disaster relief assistance: ICRC statement to the United Nations," December 2017, available at <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/strengthening-coordination-un-humanitarian-and-disaster-relief-assistance-icrc-statement>.

Humanitarian actors can also create space for dialogue and engagement among different groups or communities that would not otherwise necessarily interact. Humanitarian negotiation on questions of humanitarian access, or humanitarian dialogue relating to prisoner exchanges or refugee returns can serve as confidence-building measures

between parties to a conflict, which can be valuable for peace (see Box 2).<sup>32</sup> They can provide a way to begin dialogue when other methods are unavailable or impossible in a particular context. This can create a basis for understanding and respect by developing a culture of dialogue and mutual benefit, which is a potential resource for peace.<sup>33</sup>

### Box 2. Humanitarian negotiation

The objective of humanitarian negotiations is to obtain access to and enhance the protection of vulnerable populations.<sup>34</sup> UN guidelines have described the goal of a humanitarian negotiation as to arrive at the best humanitarian outcome.<sup>35</sup> Such negotiations are different than traditional negotiations, whose tactics can come into tension with the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality, and neutrality.<sup>36</sup> For some humanitarian negotiators, these principles are absolutely nonnegotiable. For others, they should guide and frame the negotiation, allowing for some degree of flexibility and compromise.

One of the biggest challenges of humanitarian negotiations is that humanitarian actors do not have much to offer to the parties to the conflict they are negotiating with. They are not coming from a position of force.<sup>37</sup> As such, a key principle of humanitarian negotiation is to build a relationship with the other party and create a sense of respect. Common humanity should come first and should be the driving force.<sup>38</sup> Negotiating with armed groups also poses its own particular set of challenges. For example, negotiations with entities included on terrorist lists may have legal consequences for humanitarians.<sup>39</sup>

Much more attention has been paid to the field of humanitarian negotiation in recent years. Up until now, however, little has been done to capture past experiences, and there is no system in place for existing knowledge and tools to be transferred to operational settings.<sup>40</sup> Aiming to remedy this gap, the ICRC, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue launched the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation in 2016.

Despite its specificities, humanitarian negotiation may also be interesting to look at within the wider negotiation landscape. It can be a good test for negotiation theories, given the urgency of the situations that negotiators deal with and the drastic consequences of a failed negotiation. In this sense, it pushes theories to their limits.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, there is increasing awareness of the connections between political mediation and humanitarian negotiations and the need for mutual understanding between the two fields of their mandates, objectives, and challenges.<sup>42</sup>

32 Bruderlein, "Challenges and Dilemmas in Frontline Negotiations."

33 Slim, "Nexus Thinking in Humanitarian Policy."

34 Bruderlein, "Challenges and Dilemmas in Frontline Negotiations."

35 Gerard McHugh and Manuel Bessler, "Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups: A Manual and Guidelines for Practitioners," United Nations, January 2006, pp. 25–29.

36 Rob Grace, "Humanitarian Negotiation: Key Challenges and Lessons Learned in an Emerging Field," Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, available at [http://atha.se/presentations/negotiation/1\\_challenges\\_a\\_negotiating.html](http://atha.se/presentations/negotiation/1_challenges_a_negotiating.html).

37 Alain Lampereur, Humanitarian Negotiation in Practice podcast, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, June 25, 2015, available at [www.atha.se/webcast/humanitarian-negotiation-practice](http://www.atha.se/webcast/humanitarian-negotiation-practice).

38 Ibid.

39 See Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University, "Humanitarian Action under Scrutiny: Criminalizing Humanitarian Engagement," February 2011, available at [www.eisf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2166-HPCR-2011-Humanitarian-Action-under-Scrutiny-Criminalizing-Humanitarian-Engagement.pdf](http://www.eisf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2166-HPCR-2011-Humanitarian-Action-under-Scrutiny-Criminalizing-Humanitarian-Engagement.pdf); Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University, "Countering Terror in Humanitarian Crises: The Challenges of Delivering Aid to Somalia," July 2012, available at <https://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/countering-terror-humanitarian-crises-challenges-delivering-aid-somalia>; and Naz K. Modirzadeh, Dustin A. Lewis, and Claude Bruderlein, "Humanitarian Engagement under Counter-terrorism: A Conflict of Norms and the Emerging Policy Landscape," *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 883 (September 2011), available at [www.icrc.org/en/international-review/article/humanitarian-engagement-under-counter-terrorism-conflict-norms-and](http://www.icrc.org/en/international-review/article/humanitarian-engagement-under-counter-terrorism-conflict-norms-and).

40 Lucio Melandri, Humanitarian Negotiations in Practice podcast, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, June 25, 2015, available at [www.atha.se/webcast/humanitarian-negotiation-practice](http://www.atha.se/webcast/humanitarian-negotiation-practice).

41 Ibid.

42 Bruderlein, "Challenges and Dilemmas in Frontline Negotiations."

The neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors are crucial to building trust with the involved parties in this way. Furthermore, humanitarian actors often have a wide reach, as they engage with many different parts of a society and different stakeholders on the ground. Peacebuilders could leverage these comparative advantages through increased exchange with humanitarians.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, principled humanitarian action, through both protection and assistance, puts people's humanity at the center. In responding to vital human needs and ensuring people's safety and protection, it promotes the dignity of every individual and can create a space in which everyone's humanity is recognized.

## Conclusions

The UN sustaining peace resolutions recognize the role that humanitarian action can play in safeguarding or strengthening the preconditions for peace. Indeed, when possible, conflict-sensitive, localized, and sustainable humanitarian action can have a positive impact on communities' resilience and capacities for peace. Peacebuilding and humanitarian actors should keep the following in mind in order to engage in complementary efforts that contribute to sustaining peace:

- **Humanitarian action must remain guided by the principles of neutrality and independence.** Political objectives should not be mixed into humanitarian interventions. The linkages identi-

fied between humanitarian action and peace efforts do not suggest that they should be intertwined. Peacebuilding efforts or processes should be developed in parallel to humanitarian activities.

- **Policies that address the humanitarian-development divide will help ensure humanitarian action that helps build sustainable services and resilient communities.** Given the prevalence of protracted crises, achieving a meaningful and sustainable impact requires that humanitarian actors engage in longer-term planning to find more durable solutions.
- **Humanitarian and peacebuilding actors should more closely interact.** Respecting humanitarian principles and interacting more closely with peacebuilding actors are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There should be more coordination between the two spheres to ensure not only a good understanding of their respective mandates and objectives, but also complementarity in their efforts. This would help in particular when it comes to developing a shared understanding of the context.
- **Both humanitarian and peacebuilding actors would benefit from exploring further how humanitarian action can contribute to creating the conditions necessary for sustaining peace.** A good example to follow would be the ICRC's initiative on international humanitarian law (IHL) and peacebuilding, which aims to explore whether respect for IHL during a conflict strengthen the foundations on which peace can be built.<sup>44</sup>

43 Kondo Rossier, "Linking Humanitarian Action and Peacebuilding," p. 43.

44 Juliane Garcia Ravel and Vincent Bernard, "Changing the Narrative on International Humanitarian Law," ICRC Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog, November 24, 2017, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/changing-narrative-international-humanitarian-law>.



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