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REGIONAL CONSULTATION MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

JORDAN, 3-5 MARCH 2015

CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) regional consultation for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was held at the Dead Sea, Jordan, from 3-5 March 2015. It was hosted by the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and co-chaired by the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

In the spirit of the summit's multi-stakeholder approach, the meeting brought together 180 participants from 17 countries¹ representing Member States of the United Nations, regional organizations, civil society, affected communities, national and international non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the private sector, academia and religious leaders, as well as observers from five countries that have hosted or will host World Humanitarian Summit consultations. The meeting was preceded by preparatory stakeholder consultations with 1,230 individuals representing their wider constituencies.²

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

² The preparatory stakeholder analysis report can be found at <http://goo.gl/FnHmOv>.

The majority of participants at the regional consultation reaffirmed the sentiment of stakeholders consulted in the preparatory process, expressing outrage at the level of human suffering in the region. The current situation was deemed unacceptable and there were calls for global leaders to take necessary measures to reverse this tragic situation and address the root cause of people's suffering. **There are no humanitarian solutions to political problems.** This was a key message of the regional consultation with many highlighting the protracted plight of the Palestinian people as a central example, calling for an end to occupation and for the fulfillment of their inalienable right to self-determination.

The WHS regional consultation for the MENA region focused on six key issues that emerged from the preparatory stakeholder analysis. These were Protection of Civilians, Humanitarian Access, Protracted Crises and Displacement, Emergency Preparedness, Localizing Humanitarian Response and Humanitarian Financing. A number of other issues will be considered in the course of further stakeholder consultations in the region.

The main findings and recommendations were as follows:

1. Protection of Civilians

The increasing scale and severity of attacks against civilians in the region led to calls for greater respect of international laws that govern the protection of civilians. The primary responsibility of states in this regard was emphasized with strong calls for accountability and the implementation of these laws. These included the requirement to:

- Ratify international instruments pertaining to the protection of civilians, in particular the second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions and the 1951 Refugee Convention;
- Establish national committees on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), where these were not yet in place, to bring relevant national legislation into conformity with international law;
- Provide IHL training for armed and police forces, as well as other relevant officials, with the support of donors and participation of humanitarian actors where relevant;
- Monitor the application of IHL and hold perpetrators of violations accountable through the establishment of national or international mechanisms or to activate those that are already in place.

Participants urged **regional organizations**, such as the League of Arab States (LAS), Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to **strengthen their role in the protection of civilians**. This could include the adoption of regional instruments that protect and assist internally displaced persons (IDPs), building on the experience from other regions; the establishment of mechanisms to monitor violations of IHL, civilian casualties and access issues; and fostering consensus among Member States on concrete measures to protect civilians in conflicts.

The **international donor community** was requested to ensure sufficient funding for protection activities and to support initiatives aimed at promoting respect for IHL and human rights throughout the region.

Parties to conflicts, including armed groups, were urged to meet their obligations in the respect of IHL and facilitate the work of humanitarian actors, including by ensuring access and lifting restrictions that preclude their work. This requires humanitarian actors to engage in dialogue with all parties to a conflict, including armed groups. In line with IHL, this engagement for legitimate humanitarian purposes should be encouraged and not criminalized.

Protection should be at the heart of humanitarian action with mechanisms for achieving this objective appropriate to each organization's mandate and strengths. Monitoring violations of IHL is required from the outset of a crisis. Addressing protection concerns should constitute an integral part of humanitarian needs assessments, including tackling the protection needs of specific groups, such as women, children, displaced persons, migrants and those with disabilities. It also requires effective coordination among different sectors. Humanitarian organizations need to enhance their capacities on protection through training and mentoring of their staff.

Participants recognized the **critical role played national authorities and civil society organizations**, including the National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in protecting civilians, including through applying and promoting local customs and practices in protecting civilians and disseminating information on international law to IDPs and refugees, as well as to their host communities. The media is also a powerful tool to be harnessed to raise awareness about IHL violations and calling for its respect.

The protection of civilians was deemed a universal principle, with **frameworks and practices existing in religious and other traditions and norms** from the region. There were calls to explore the synergies between these and international legal protection frameworks with the aim of developing context-specific practices and interventions that can better protect civilians on the ground. The role of religious leaders in providing protection and facilitating assistance was emphasized.

2. Humanitarian Access

Whilst re-affirming the principle of state sovereignty, the lack of access to people in need was highlighted as a significant obstacle in the region. Governments and other **parties to conflicts, including armed groups, should facilitate unimpeded access** of humanitarian assistance and staff to affected people, which is critical to understanding the numbers of people affected and their needs.

Humanitarian access requires humanitarian organizations to negotiate with concerned parties with the objective of reaching affected people. In this regard, the **principles of humanitarian action were widely re-affirmed** and were deemed important in facilitating the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate in conflict areas.

There were repeated calls to **de-politicize humanitarian action**, and ensure assistance was provided in a transparent manner and on the basis of need alone. The UN Security Council was seen as a forum in which humanitarian issues are frequently politicized with the use of the veto highlighted in resolutions pertaining to humanitarian action.

While the importance of **countering terrorism** in the region was recognized, the negative impact of laws and related measures on humanitarian negotiation, financial transfers and access should be mitigated, with many humanitarian actors calling for greater clarity of the implications of these laws and for their legal protection to safeguard their ability to operate.

Attacks against humanitarian workers and property were condemned with more action demanded to protect those providing humanitarian assistance. The international community has to install a process or a mechanism by which it can hold states and non-state actors accountable and financially-liable if they deliberately cause unjustified economic or financial loss to the humanitarian sector. This, for example, should cover medical, educational and other facilities.

The importance of **close proximity of humanitarian organizations to the people they serve** was deemed essential for building trust and acceptance with these communities. International humanitarian organizations should ensure local partners are provided with access to adequate financial resources, assets and insurance schemes to ensure staff safety and security.

3. Protracted Crises and Displacement

Recognizing the needs of displaced people, including for durable solutions, and the burden placed on host governments and communities, there was a call for **increased burden sharing** of hosting refugees by the international community and the need to ensure a **holistic approach to the management of crises**, including planning for future displacement. Actors should address the needs of host communities in response planning and use humanitarian and development approaches, in line with national and local priorities. Development interventions should come at an early stage and include support to the local economy and making investments in basic services and infrastructure that benefit both the displaced and their hosts.

Participants called for the scaling up of efficient and coordinated **cash-based programming** to provide people with greater choice and for including **temporary employment opportunities** as part of response programming. These were deemed necessary to ensure service delivery that preserves the dignity of displaced people. When appropriate, priority should be given to voluntary return programs.

International finance institutions were encouraged to provide investments under favourable terms to help middle income countries rapidly shoulder the burden of refugees.

A **network of academic and training institutes** should be established and supported within the region to develop management and technical expertise in crisis management.

The **psychosocial impact of violent conflict** and protracted displacement was recognized and targeted support needed to be integrated in the response, in particular for women, the elderly and children.

4. Localizing Humanitarian Response

The importance of national and local authorities and organizations taking the lead in humanitarian response was widely affirmed, as was accountability to and participation of affected people. International humanitarian actors need to include **local capacity building measures** as an integral part of their programming, which will help facilitate a timely and planned exit.

Local organizations should receive a greater portion of humanitarian **funding and be able to access these directly**. This requires decreasing inefficiencies by removing the multiple levels of sub-contracting and intermediaries, and increasing the contribution of country-based pooled funds, such as Emergency Response Funds, to national and local actors.

Humanitarian **coordination mechanisms should be made more inclusive**, complementary and accessible to local organizations. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee should be reviewed and adapted to better reflect the diversity of humanitarian actors and the challenges faced within specific regions, including through its possible decentralization. To encourage greater trust and collaboration between local and international organizations, the latter should demonstrate greater transparency in their operations and criteria for selecting partners.

5. Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness and **understanding of risk** should be prioritized in the region, taking into consideration vulnerabilities and specific contexts, including differences of urban and rural settings. Common, multi-hazard risk analysis should be encouraged, including through greater links with academia, research and development and the private sector to allow for more informed **early warning and early action**, both for natural and conflict related crises.

Participants called on national governments to **develop and implement national legislation on emergency preparedness**, including contingency plans and early warning systems, and identify the roles and responsibilities of government ministries, civil society, National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the private sector amongst others. Integrating emergency preparedness in education curricula at all educational levels was deemed important to instilling a culture of prevention and rapid response.

Governments should commit a certain percentage of their budgets to emergency preparedness, informed by the cost efficiency of disaster preparedness versus response. They should also endorse regional instruments and mechanisms on emergency preparedness, building on lessons learnt within and outside the region.

The capacity of civil society organizations should be strengthened to better prepare for emergencies. This includes supporting more **institutionalized forms of youth engagement**, whose role and contribution to humanitarian action, recovery and development was widely acknowledged and commended.

6. Humanitarian Financing

There were wide calls to address the **funding gap between increasing humanitarian needs and available resources**. Humanitarian organizations need to make concerted efforts to improve their efficiency, such as through greater use of cash-based programming and minimizing overhead costs. This would benefit from engagement with the private sector to leverage innovation, resources and expertise. Moreover, private sector engagement in humanitarian action was encouraged with tax breaks as possible incentives.

Following major pledging conferences or appeals for funding, **follow up mechanisms**, such as the top donors group for the Syria crisis, should be established to ensure pledges are fulfilled in a timely manner.

The **culture and traditions of Islamic giving** should be leveraged to support regional and local humanitarian organizations' work in the region, with several mechanisms suggested. This requires concerted dialogue with existing institutions and experts on the subject to draw up concrete proposals on how this could be achieved.

Understanding the extent of the funding gap requires a more comprehensive picture of humanitarian funding in the region. Thus, **national and regional mechanisms** should be established, with the aim of collecting information on funding by the diverse range of actors that work and operate in the region. The League of Arab States' resolution passed in March 2014 calling for the establishment of a coordination mechanism is one avenue for taking this forward.

Addressing the funding gap also requires more sustainable interventions that focus on building resilience and development objectives in addition to meeting people's immediate needs. This will necessitate more **predictable and longer-term humanitarian financing** as well as better leveraging of **development financing**. There were some calls for mandatory financial contributions for the most severe humanitarian crises.

Conclusions

The main findings and recommendations pointed to an overall sense that **global humanitarian efforts are failing to cope** in effectively addressing the scale and nature of current humanitarian crises. There were calls to **reform the current humanitarian architecture** and its ways of operating to ensure greater protection and assistance to people in need. Participants expressed hope and expectation that the

WHS would be an important process to put these changes into effect, which are essential to reaffirming the humanitarian imperative of saving lives and alleviating human suffering. Equally important is the need to **ensure that humanitarian aid is not used as substitute for political action**.

The WHS MENA regional consultation brought together a unique network of humanitarian actors in the hope that it would set the foundations for broad partnerships that can take forward these recommendations.

The Co-Chairs' summary was endorsed by the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It is not a consensus document but rather captures the main findings and recommendations articulated by participants at the regional consultation. A more detailed report will follow and can be found on www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_mena.

The Co-Chairs encouraged all actors from the region to champion the recommendations, turn them into specific actions and share lessons on their experience.