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Chasing the Humanitarian Ideal:

Principle versus Practice
in the United Nations Response to the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti

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ABSTRACT

This thesis sought to examine the challenges in upholding the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence. Abiding by these principles is considered an essential component of humanitarian response. The principles provide a code of conduct for actors. They also serve a pragmatic function; they legitimize intervention in disasters by distinguishing humanitarians from actors with political affiliations. The conundrum is that the principles were designed to secure a “Humanitarian Space” that is apolitical, yet they must be applied in a political context.

Focusing on the response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the thesis inquires into the limitations inherent in the principles and explores the motives that drive the humanitarian agenda in the country. Original questionnaire interviews were conducted on 40 United Nations employees directly involved in relief work in Haiti. The study focuses on the humanitarian operations during the first year after the earthquake.

The author concludes that the humanitarian principles cannot be practiced as preached. The research proved that, while UN agencies want to alleviate human suffering, they also want to advance their institutional ambitions and will therefore abide by the principles when it is in their best interest to do so. Humanitarians walk a tight rope of multiple -- and often conflicting -- accountabilities to donors, organizational interests, recipients and public opinion. Confronted by the dilemmas inevitable in emergencies, there are too few incentives to uphold the humanitarian principles, yet too many disincentives.

PREFACE

Since 2009, I have served as a humanitarian worker for the United Nations. First, I joined the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When an earthquake hit Haiti in 2010, I was part of the staff brought in to reinforce the UN response in the country. During the course of my work in both these missions, I became preoccupied with the question of how closely intertwined politics and humanitarianism were. Was the alleviation of human suffering really neutral, impartial and independent? The seeds for the genesis for this thesis were planted.

Living in a high profile emergency environment, I did not have to satisfy myself with conclusions drawn in books. In dialogues I began to have with Professor Schütz-Müller, he encouraged me to investigate the situation on the ground. In our long distance conversations between Port-au-Prince and Vienna, he prompted me to seek answers from aid workers in the forefront of the international response to one of the worst disasters in recent memory. This thesis is the outcome of that research. I am grateful to all the participants who so openly shared their insights. I hope this thesis, an honest examination of the work to which I have dedicated my life, adds value to a better understanding of some of the dilemmas that humanitarian workers face.

CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 7 |
| 1.1 Overview | 8 |
| 1.2 Rationale | 9 |
| 1.3 Scope of Research | 10 |
| 1.4 Research Questions | 11 |
| 1.5 Hypotheses | 11 |
| 2. METHODOLOGY | 12 |
| 2.1 Design and Content | 13 |
| 2.2 Questionnaire Construction | 13 |
| 2.3 Procedure | 14 |
| 2.4 Participants | 14 |
| 2.5 Data Analysis | 15 |
| 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND | 16 |
| 3.1 Overview | 17 |
| 3.2 Institutionalism | 17 |
| 3.3 International Regime Theory | 21 |
| 3.4 Neo-Realism and the Humanitarian Government | 22 |
| 4. EXAMINATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES | 24 |
| 4.1 Definition of Humanitarianism | 25 |
| 4.2 History of Humanitarianism | 26 |
| 4.3 Overview of Principles | 30 |
| 4.4 The Principle of Humanity | 30 |
| 4.5 The Principle of Neutrality | 32 |
| 4.6 The Principle of Impartiality | 36 |
| 4.7 The Principle of Operational Independence | 39 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 5. THE POLITICIZATION OF AID | 42 |
| 5.1 Two Faces of Humanitarianism | 43 |
| 5.2 Conditional Donor Funding | 43 |
| 5.3 Survival of the Fittest | 46 |
| 6. HAITI SITUATION ANALYSIS | 49 |
| 6.1 Haiti Pre-Earthquake | 50 |
| 6.2 Haiti Post-Earthquake | 51 |
| 6.3 The UN Response in Haiti | 54 |
| 7. RESULTS OF SURVEY | 57 |
| 8. DISCUSSION | 71 |
| 8.1 Overview | 72 |
| 8.2 External and Internal Pressure | 72 |
| 8.3 Neglect of Local Perspectives | 75 |
| 8.4 Lack of Coordination | 77 |
| 8.5 Blurring of Military and Aid Agencies Lines | 79 |
| 8.6 A Crisis within a Crisis | 80 |
| 8.7 Incompetence of Humanitarian Workers | 82 |
| 8.8 Poor Capacity of the Haitian Government | 84 |
| 8.9 The Emergency Context | 86 |
| 9. CONCLUSION | 88 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 91 |
| APPENDIX | 97 |
| I. Research Questionnaire | 97 |
| II Abstract Deutsch | 99 |
| III Resume | 100 |

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

| | | <u>Page</u> |
|----------|--|-------------|
| Table 1 | Schools of Thought in the Study of International Regimes | 22 |
| Table 2 | Overview of the Humanitarian Principles | 29 |
| Table 3 | UN Actors in Haiti | 55/56 |
| Table 4 | Major Challenges of Operating in Disasters | 58 |
| Table 5 | Primary Motivating Factors | 59 |
| Table 6 | Do Humanitarians abide by Principles? | 60 |
| Table 7 | Challenges to the Principle of Humanity | 61 |
| Table 8 | Challenges to Principles Neutrality/Impartiality | 62 |
| Table 9 | Challenges to the Principle of Independence | 63 |
| Table 10 | Do you agree Rule of Law is the Most Pressing Need? | 65 |
| Table 11 | Do Haitians agree Rule of Law is the Most Pressing Need? | 66 |
| Table 12 | Most Pressing Needs in Haiti | 67 |
| Table 13 | Major Successes of the UN in Haiti | 68 |
| Table 14 | Major Shortcomings of the UN in Haiti | 69 |
| Table 15 | How Can the UN Better Serve Haitians? | 70 |
| Figure 1 | Strongest Drivers of the Humanitarian Agenda | 64 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems.”¹

¹ Sadako Ogata, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees

1.1 Overview

Haiti consistently ranks as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. The country suffers limited public administration capacities, vulnerability to political instability and food insecurity. Despite its numerous challenges, Haiti had made strides towards economic development and stability since 2004.

The January 2010 earthquake that hit Port-au-Prince and surrounding cities compounded the fragile developmental and humanitarian situation. The disaster also created new obstacles. Over 220 000 people died and more than a quarter of a million more were displaced. The earthquake destroyed or damaged infrastructure and public institutions necessary for social welfare, development and security.

In the disaster's wake, humanitarian and development organizations poured into Haiti, adding to a significant prior existence of similar entities. The United Nations, as the premier multi-lateral world body, buttressed its presence. The stabilization mission, MINUSTAH, and 16 agencies, funds and programmes (jointly known as the UN System) undertook a major humanitarian relief effort and expanded its field presence.

These efforts, however, were often fragmented and inefficient, resulting in duplication and operational ineffectiveness. Never has it been more urgent, with the global economic crisis and shrinking budgets, for the UN System to ensure a coherent delivery of services focused on results, efficiency and accountability. Despite the incentives to do away with redundancy and reduce transaction costs, cooperation is often hindered by competition for funding, protection of territory and conflicting policies.

The catastrophe in Haiti provides an excellent opportunity to assess the strengths and limits of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence. Confronted by the donor pressure, organizational interests, the breakdown of infrastructure and any semblance of normality, unleashed by disasters of massive proportions, the cracks in the core humanitarian ethos start to show. This thesis seeks to examine the major dilemmas that confront humanitarian actors and how these dilemmas tarnish the integrity of the four codes of conduct.

1.2 Rationale

This study comes at a time when humanitarian organizations find themselves facing an existential crisis. Confronted with a global economic meltdown, compounded by unprecedented disasters (due to climate change and other forces), humanitarianism is under pressure. Donor countries are cutting down on their own domestic budgets, while demanding that multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, tighten their belts. This pressure to do more work with fewer resources is redefining the humanitarian arena. The notion of humanitarians as saviours of the less fortunate is fast changing. The saviours are now forced to fight for their own survival.

In this environment of uncertainty, it is critical to understand how the founding principles of humanitarianism are being impacted. What becomes of this noble ethos as humanitarian actors are forced to make difficult decisions? If organizations are expected to first serve the needs of the poor, but they are now seen as primarily existing to fight for their own survival, what does this mean for the credibility of the institution?

It is therefore important to study the relevance of the principles in this era of financial constraints and multiple humanitarian crises. Humanitarian workers need to understand how the landscape has changed and in turn its guiding principles, and whether these principles are still relevant. This will help to either adjust the principles to the new reality, or to reconsider how they are employed on the ground. Rethinking the value of humanitarian principles is necessary for rendering humanitarian assistance more efficiently and credibly in the future.

Original research in Haiti will contribute valuable new insights into how the UN responded to one of the biggest disasters in recent history. What were the shortcomings of the response? What can be done in the future to avoid the same mistakes? Overall, this thesis will make a significant contribution by examining the firsthand testimony of humanitarian workers who are right in the middle of responding to a high-profile crisis. Understanding the perspectives of the custodians of the humanitarian principles and the challenges they face in their work will help to find appropriate solutions to addressing major shortcomings in aid efforts.

1.3 Scope of Research

This thesis seeks to examine the challenges in upholding the core humanitarian principles when responding to disasters. The study focuses on the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The country was chosen because it is one of the gravest humanitarian disasters in recent history. Haiti is also ideal because the researcher, at the time of writing, worked for the UN in the country and could therefore conduct first hand research. The review will restrict itself to the first year following the earthquake.

While recognizing that there are many organizations operating in Haiti, this research will solely focus on the UN, as it is the premier multilateral actor in the country. The UN in Haiti is comprised of a peacekeeping and stabilization mission known as MINUSTAH and 16 specialized agencies, working on a range of social, economic and political issues.

1.4 Research Questions

The central research questions of this paper are:

1. While noble in theory, in practice are there limitations to the core humanitarian principles?
2. Are the UN humanitarian agencies motivated purely by the desire to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found?
3. In assisting people affected by disasters or crises, do UN agencies remain neutral, impartial and independent at all times?

1.5 Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, this paper's hypotheses are:

1. If the humanitarian principles are too idealistic, then UN agencies will face considerable limitations practicing them.
2. If UN agencies seek to alleviate human suffering, then they are more likely to do so when this also advances their self-interest.
3. If UN agencies remain neutral, impartial and independent, then they do so only when feasible and strategic.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

“It’s been a year that we live in this tent. All these people in Haiti to help us and still we live here like animals. More questions? What are you going to do for my family?”²

²Interview with Haitian man living in Carradeux camp, Port-au-Prince

2.1 Design and Content

A questionnaire field survey was conducted with UN humanitarian workers based in Haiti. The survey questions targeted the central themes of the thesis: challenges inherent in the humanitarian principles; successes and failures of the UN response; and key factors that drive the humanitarian agenda.

The majority of the questions were open-ended to benefit from in-depth answers, while not limiting the responses. The open-ended method was chosen to allow a full expression of the participants' opinions, rather than forcing them to select an answer from a pre-determined set of responses. Respondents could offer their true perspective, without being steered in a pre-determined direction.

Please see original questionnaire attached in Appendix I

2.2 Questionnaire Construction

The literature review provided an overview of the main challenges humanitarian agencies face in relief operations. Based on insights from the literature review, an unstructured discussion was carried out with five UN staff members in order to determine the major concerns and issues they face in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Haiti. Information obtained from the discussion, as well as the literature review, was used to construct the first draft of the structured questionnaire.

This set of questions was then piloted on five different employees to evaluate clarity and viability. A few alterations were subsequently made. Though Haiti is a French-speaking country, the questionnaire was in English to ensure consistency. This did not pose any problems as UN employees have at minimum a working command of the language.

2.3 Procedure

To obtain the highest information pay-off, the questionnaires were answered anonymously through an electronic system. This method allowed the participants to speak honestly, without fearing for the security of their jobs when answering sensitive questions that require evaluating the performance of the UN response in Haiti.

Informed consent was sought from participants after they were identified as meeting the criteria (please see participants section below for profile requirements). Full explanation of the project was given to them. Participants were told not to feel pressured to answer any questions with which they were not comfortable. They were assured their identities would be kept anonymous.

2.4 Participants

Forty UN employees directly involved in implementing relief work were interviewed. They were therefore able to speak to the issues under consideration with expertise. Given the study's focus on the relief operations during the first year after the earthquake, participants had to meet the condition that they were present during that period.

The participants were sampled to ensure an equal representation of all the 16 UN agencies and the civil component of the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSTAH, present in post-earthquake Haiti. This covered the full spectrum of the work the UN is undertaking in Haiti, from reconstruction and relocation, peacekeeping to basic needs, such as health and nutrition.

In total, 50 questionnaires were sent out; all potential people approached agreed to participate in the survey. Of these, 43 people responded. This translates to an 86-percent response rate, which is considered a very good outcome for surveys of this nature that required careful thought. In the final analysis, three questionnaires were discarded because of too many incomplete answers.

2.5 Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis was carried out to identify patterns in the answers given by respondents. Answers to each question were analyzed to identify common themes, which were then categorized. The grouping allowed for identification of main trends.

The following steps were taken in analyzing the data:

1. Review of all responses to get a sense of the overall answers given. This helped to get a feeling for the data and to make preliminary observations of common themes.
2. For each individual question, categories were created for similar themes in the participants' answers. Noteworthy exceptions to trends were also acknowledged.
3. Each response, by question, was assigned at least one category (data coding). In some cases participants gave more than one response.
4. The coded data was then double checked for errors. When errors were found, they were corrected. A few categories that were repetitious were eliminated.
5. The final step was to closely examine the categories, across all questions, in order to identify major trends and patterns in the responses.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

“Humanitarian Governance may have its heart in the right place, but it is still a form of governance, and governance always includes power.”³

³ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p .12

3.1 Overview

Humanitarianism has transformed into a field of global governance by becoming increasingly public, hierarchical and institutionalized.⁴ Institutionalism is the most suitable theory to explain the workings of international organizations, such as the UN. Specifically, the neo-realist approach to the international regime theory best supports the hypotheses for this paper.⁵ The international regime theory emerged as part of the theory of international institutionalism. This chapter will examine the political science theories that help shed light on the workings of humanitarianism.

3.2 Institutionalism

Immanuel Kant was among the first philosophers to theorize about institutionalism. In his essay, “Perpetual Peace”, he tackled the idea that peace might be established through the creation of a trans-European federation.⁶ Traditional institutionalists define institutions as formal or informal procedures, routines, conventions and norms integrated into the structure of the political economy or polity. They generally see them as organizations.⁷

States are inclined to join institutions when they expect these to fulfill important functions from which they will ultimately benefit.⁸ Members of institutions follow their rules, because they believe them to be appropriate and legitimate.⁹ In the 1950’s, historical institutionalism evolved into new institutionalism.

⁴ Rivas, Darlene, “Humanitarian Intervention and Relief,” in: DeConde, Alexander/ Dean Burns, Richard/ Logevall, Fredrik Charles (eds.): *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy*, Volume 2. New York: Scribner’s Sons, 2002, p. 151,

⁵ Peters, Guy, *Institutional theory and political science*, New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2005, p. 19-21.

⁶ Kant, Immanuel, “A Philosophical Sketch,” in: Reiss, Hans, (ed.): *Kant: Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p 93- 130

⁷ Thelen, Kahleen/ Steinmo, Sven, *Structuring politics: historical institutionalism in comparative analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press 1992, p. 2-3

⁸ Jönsson, C./Tallberg, J. *Institutional Theory in International Relations*. In J. Pierre, B. G. Peters and. Stoker (eds) *Debating Institutionalism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 118

⁹ March, James G./Olsen Johan P., *The Logic of Appropriateness*, University of Oslo: Arena Centre for European Studies, 2009, p.1

New Institutionalism is based on different strands:¹⁰

- *Normative institutionalism*, which claims that the behavior of members is defined by norms and values of the institution.
- *Rational Choice Institutionalism*, which sees state's behavior as defined by rules and regulations.
- *Historical Institutionalism*, which builds on the concept of "path dependency", claiming early policy choices in specific domains affect future decisions.
- *International Institutionalism*, the foundation of the international regimes theory.¹¹

Keohane, a representative of the neo institutional school, argues that members of institutions mainly benefit from the reduction of transaction costs and the fact that institutions make it easier to exercise influence on other states.¹² This mutual influence can contribute to creating peace and stability. Nation states, interlinked in the framework of an institution are able to engage in relationships of trust, minimizing risks for conflicts and facilitating the solving of shared problems.¹³

Humanitarianism as an idea is based on the alleviation of shared problems in the world, and a sense of global solidarity. Scholars argue that humanitarian action has become more and more institutionalized.¹⁴ It is defined by providing aid across national borders.¹⁵ To be able to do that it requires an international mechanism, in other words an international community with shared values standards and interests. Fassin summarizes this system as an international humanitarian government.¹⁶

Some authors, such as David Rieff, claim that there is no such thing as an international community and therefore no unbiased humanitarianism; individual self-interest is always

¹⁰ Peters, Guy, *Institutional theory and political science*, New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2005, p. 19-21.

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Keohane, Robert, *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*. Boulder: Westview, 1989, p. 150-155.

¹³ Keohane, Robert/Martin, Lisa, "The Promise of Institutional Theory," in: *International Security*, Vol. 20. No.1. MIT Press, 1995, p. 49-50

¹⁴ Walker, Peter/Maxwell Daniel, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 73

¹⁵ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p.21

¹⁶ Fassin, Didier, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2012, p. 1-7

present. The lack of shared values among the countries of the world stands in direct opposition, to the idea of a community of states, striving for the same goals.¹⁷

Franck supports Rieff's point when he describes the idea of an international community as "traces of community in a world of nations"¹⁸ and as a "metaphorical negotiation of representatives of governments"¹⁹, who secretly meet to discuss how to best justify non-intervention in humanitarian crises.

Hart is more specific in his criticism, comparing the international community to a primitive society lacking a judicial system to challenge the sets of customary rules it is based on: "The rules for states resemble that simple form of social structure, consisting only of primary rules of obligation, which when we find it among societies of individuals we are accustomed to contrast with a developed legal system."²⁰

Even those who have dedicated their lives to institutes that advance the ideals of an international community, the UN, question its effectiveness. Brian Urquhart, former head of the Department of Political Affairs, echoes views of a lawless community. He once said: "If there is a world community, then who is the sheriff?"²¹

The theory of institutionalism also claims that, while states can profit from cooperation, each member has the right to self-determination and.²² This suggests that individual concerns will always over-ride the greater good.

Some scholars argue that members will follow the rules of institutions because deviation will make them worse off than compliance.²³ Members are also reluctant to change the given rules to their immediate advantage, because they do not know what impact their changing of the

¹⁷ Rieff, David A *Bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p. 8

¹⁸ Franck, Thomas M., *The power of legitimacy among nations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 182

¹⁹ Franck, Thomas M., *The power of legitimacy among nations*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.182

²⁰ Hart, H.L.A., *The Concept of Law*, 10th impression, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 209

²¹ As quoted in: Rieff, David A *Bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p9

²² Gareis, Sven B./Varwick, Johannes, *Die Vereinten Nationen: Aufgaben, Instrumente und Reformen*, Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2007, p. 62-63.

²³ Calvert, Randall L., *The Rational Choice Theory of Social Institutions*, in: Banks, Jeffrey S./Hanushek, Eric A., (eds.) *Modern Political Economy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 216-266

rules could have on future decisions.²⁴ In the case of the UN, member states generally follow decisions taken by the Security Council. As the most powerful organ of the UN, it decides over crucial issues, such as humanitarian interventions.

Humanitarianism depends on the institute of the international community to provide it with the framework to operate in. However, scholars argue that humanitarianism has turned into an institution itself-- a humanitarian government. For Fassin, the humanitarian government is, “the administration of human collectivities in the name of a higher moral principle, that sees the preservation of life and the alleviation of suffering as the highest value of action”.²⁵ Barnett adds that it was born through, “a cosmopolis of morally minded militias supported by international law, norms and institutions that reach out to suffering strangers around the world”. He argues that the concept of humanitarian governance is problematic due to its various approaches to alleviating suffering.²⁶

A growing amount of stakeholders, with different ambitions make relief work highly political. Some stakeholders try to use aid as a proxy, to camouflage their political ambitions in certain regions of the world. In addition, it is the members themselves who decide how much power they are willing to cede in favor of an institution’s legitimacy.²⁷ Against this backdrop, the neo realist approach to international regime theory seems best suited to describe the institution of the humanitarian government.

²⁴ Shepsle, Kenneth A., Institutional Equilibrium and Equilibrium Institutions, in: Weisberg, Herbert (ed.): Political Science: the Science of Politics, New York: Agathon, 1986, p. 51-81

²⁵ Walters, William, Foucault and Frontiers: Notes on the Birth of the Humanitarian Border, in: Broeckling U./Krasmann, S./ Lemke T. (eds.), Governmentality: current issues and future challenges, New York: Routledge, 2011, p143,144

²⁶ Barnett, Michael, Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 220-221

²⁷ March, James G./Olsen Johan P., The Logic of Appropriateness, University of Oslo: Arena Centre for European Studies, 2009, p.1

3.3 International Regime Theory

The international regime theory has its roots in the neo realist branch of international institutionalism.²⁸ Stephen Krasner defines international regimes as “principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area.”²⁹ His definition has become one of the most often cited for the international regime theory.³⁰

Regimes are widely regarded as “social institutions governing the actions of those involved in specifiable activities or sets of activities.”³¹ International regimes can either be formal or informal. They can appear in the form of international organizations, legal conventions or treaties. Hartmann states that international regimes are comparable to an international society. Their primary objective is to unite states in cooperation toward specific goals, with all members abiding by a fixed set of rules.³²

Joennsen and Tallberg argue that the significance of a regime depends on its robustness and effectiveness; determined by the extent to which its members abide by the rules and norms. Robustness is also demonstrated by the resistance of international institutions in the face of external challenges and the extent to which their objectives are achieved.³³ Scholars mainly identify three thought schools for international regime theory.

²⁸Peters, Guy, *Institutional theory and political science*, New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2005, p. 19-21.

²⁹ Krasner, Stephen, D. “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,” in: Krasner Stephen (ed.) *International Regimes*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 2

³⁰ Jönsson, C./Tallberg, J. *Institutional Theory in International Relations*. In J. Pierre, B. G. Peters and. Stoker (eds) *Debating Institutionalism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 125

³¹ Young, Oran A., *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 12

³²Hartmann, Jürgen, *Internationale Beziehungen*, Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2001, p. 55.

³³ Jönsson, C./Tallberg, J. *Institutional Theory in International Relations*. In J. Pierre, B. G. Peters and. Stoker (eds) *Debating Institutionalism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 125

Table 1:

Schools of Thought in the study of International Regimes:³⁴

| | REALISM | NEOLIBERALISM | COGNITIVISM |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Central Variable | Power | Interest | Knowledge |
| "Institutionalism" | Weak | Medium | Strong |
| Meta-theoretical orientation | Rationalistic | Rationalistic | Sociological |
| Behavioral Model | Concerned with relative gains | Absolute gains maximizer | Role-player |

3.4 Neo-Realism and the Humanitarian Government

Only the neo-realist approach will be examined in this thesis. Neo-Realism or Structural Realism is a theory outlined by Kenneth Waltz. It is based on the idea, that the international system is anarchic and each state pursues its personal gain. However, states do ally themselves with others, recognizing that certain goals are easier to achieve together.³⁵

Neo-Realism builds on the assumption that certain power relationships between states create stability or instability.

The theory sees three different power balance structures in the international system: a hegemonic system with only one great power, a bipolar system with the power shared between two states and a multipolar system with more than two great powers.

For neo-realists, only the balance of power between two dominating states in an international system, promises to secure peace.³⁶

³⁴ Source: Hasenclever Andreas/Mayer Peter/ Rittberger Volker, Theories of International Regimes, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 6.

³⁵ Waltz, Kenneth, Theory of International Politics, Addison-Wesley Publishers Co.,1979, p.8-15.

³⁶Waltz, Kenneth, Theory of International Politics, New York: Addison-Wesley Publishers Co.,1979, p. 132-133

States and aid organizations demonstrate neo-realist behavior when they engage in relief work. Humanitarian governance cannot function outside the established socio-economic rules of the world. It is contingent upon the pragmatic political mechanisms of the existing international community. The hypotheses for this thesis suggest that the UN, when engaging in humanitarian action, is not always motivated by alleviating human suffering wherever it may be found. It gives preference to some crises and neglects others.

The functioning of the Security Council, the UN's most powerful organ, explains part of this problem. The Security Council is ruled by the five permanent member states that have veto power.³⁷ Five members – the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China -- are not representative of the entire international community. They are heavily western. Decisions taken ultimately favour the most powerful governments and the veto power has been used to protect their allies.

Neo-realist behavior is also traceable in the actions of aid agencies and bilateral donors. Aid agencies increasingly jeopardize the rules of engagement by politicizing aid. They curve in to political pressure for their own survival, and at the expense of alleviation of suffering.³⁸ Donors can pressure agencies to focus on specific crises, or even regions, to the detriment of others.³⁹ This departure from the neutral, impartial and independent view of humanitarian assistance, gives more room to the interests of the powerful. Agencies in turn demonstrate neo-realist behavior when they compete against each other in pursuit of personal gain, cooperating only when it is easier and to their ultimate benefit.^{40, 41}

³⁷ Krasno, J./Mitushi D., "The Uniting for Peace resolution and other ways of circumventing the authority of the Security Council," in: Cronin, Bruce, Hurd, Ian (eds.) *The UN Security Council and the politics of international authority*, New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 175

³⁸ OCHA, Thematic Areas, Humanitarian Engagement, United Nations Integrated Presence, Operating in Complex Security Environments, <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/policy/thematic-areas/humanitarian-engagement> [last accessed 2 January 2012]

³⁹ Smillie, Ian, Minear, Larry, *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarianism in a calculating world*, New York: Kumarian Press, 2004, p. 136

⁴⁰ Wakolbinger, Tina B./Toyasaki Fuminori, "Impacts of funding systems on humanitarian operations," in: Christopher/Tathemeds, *Humanitarian Logistics: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing for and responding to Disasters*, Kogan Page Publishers, 2011 p. 3

⁴¹ Waltz, Kenneth, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Publishers Co., 1979, p.8-15.

CHAPTER 4

EXAMINATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

“To promote visibility you don’t see the human being anymore. The only motivating principle that’s left is the goal of the organization.”⁴²

⁴² Participant in survey, UN humanitarian worker

4.1 Definition of Humanitarianism

The instinct to help someone in need is as old as humanity itself. Humanitarianism distinguishes itself through its being organized. Barnett asserts that three main characteristics distinguish humanitarianism from general acts of charity: that it is organized, part of governance and directed to people living in countries other than one's own.⁴³ A number of authors concur that for aid to be termed "humanitarianism", it must transcend national borders. A father who assists his sick child or a government its people in need cannot be defined as humanitarianism. This is their expected responsibility.

Barnett further defines humanitarianism as the institutionalization of the concept of helping one another as human beings. This institutionalized system provides states and international organizations a framework through which to provide aid to those in need. Didier Fassin calls this a humanitarian government.⁴⁴ Later in the thesis we will examine how humanitarianism, like any other form of government is shrouded by power dynamics despite having its heart in the right place. Maxwell and Walker call this a "people-to-people structure with governments, agencies and aid organizations as the go-betweens."⁴⁵

In the aid business, there is a term commonly referred to as "Humanitarian Space".⁴⁶ This term is synonymous with access. It refers to an apolitical space that is accorded to humanitarian agencies to their work without interference from belligerent parties. This space is accorded because of the noble ideal of humanitarianism. The most basic characteristic of humanitarianism is that it seeks to alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. This is at the heart of what defines humanitarianism.

⁴³ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p21

⁴⁴ Fassin, Didier, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2012, p 1-7

⁴⁵ Walker, Peter/Maxwell Daniel, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 2

⁴⁶ Leader, Nicholas, *The Politics of Principle: "The principles of humanitarian action in practice,"* Humanitarian Policy Group Report, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, p.8

4.2 History of Humanitarianism

There were many forms of people assisting each other, long before humanitarianism was formalized.⁴⁷ Religious believes were a critical factor in the proliferation of the idea to help fellow human beings. Religion continues to influence humanitarianism today.⁴⁸

Scholars agree that the first institutionalization of humanitarianism was the establishment, in 1863, of the International Confederation of the Red Cross.⁴⁹ The organization has its roots in the inspiration of Henry Dunant who in 1859 witnessed a battle between the French and Austro-Hungarian troops in the Italian town of Solferino.⁵⁰ Shocked by the plight of the wounded soldiers left behind on the battlefield, he joined the local population to provide relief, laying the foundation for the Red Cross.⁵¹

Following the Red Cross, the end of the first world war spun the first of many international aid organizations; the High Commission for Refugees and the International Relief Union among them. During the Second World War, governments and private relief organizations further expanded relief work across Europe.⁵² After the Second World War, the new socio-political context of decolonization expanded the humanitarian idea beyond the frontiers of Europe, into Africa. Humanitarian agencies originally created for relief and reconstruction in Europe now saw themselves as global relief organizations.⁵³

This expansion of humanitarianism led to a need to try to define the rules of engagement in international efforts to alleviate human suffering. The Red Cross, in 1965, came up with a set of principles to codify humanitarian action. This was the birth of the now universally accepted principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

⁴⁷Ferris, Elizabeth, "Faith-based and secular humanitarian organizations," *International Review of the Red Cross*, Volume 87, Number 858, 2005, p. 311-312

⁴⁸Snyder, Jack, *Religion and International Relations Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 96-99

⁴⁹Oberleitner, G, *Global Human Rights Institutions: Between Remedy and Ritual*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007 p24, 25

⁵⁰Walker, Peter/Maxwell Daniel, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 22

⁵¹Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p.1

⁵²Macalister-Smith, Peter, *International Humanitarian Assistance: Disaster Relief Actions in International Law and Organization*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985, p. 17-21/ 35-36

⁵³Macalister-Smith, Peter, *International Humanitarian Assistance: Disaster Relief Actions in International Law and Organization*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985, p. 35-66

Authors, such as Leader, argue that what is now commonly referred to as humanitarian principles, were in fact conditions imposed on humanitarian agencies by belligerent parties. These conditions were imposed in exchange for access to wounded soldiers and other people in need of help, as long as they did not interfere in the conflict.⁵⁴ Today humanitarian actors utilize these principles to self-police.

The historical period determines how humanitarianism is applied. Three distinct eras are seen as key in the evolvement of humanitarianism: The post-colonial era, the end of the cold war and the advent of globalization.⁵⁵ With the end of the cold war, the new wars of the 1990s created more complex, often conflict related humanitarian crises, that were now covered by 24-hour news agencies, transporting shocking real time images right into the world's living rooms.⁵⁶ These changes called for new forms of humanitarianism.

Traditional humanitarianism focused purely on providing relief to immediate suffering. Over time, many actors grew discontent with this narrow interpretation and added the ambition to address the root causes of the human suffering.⁵⁷ These two dominant branches of humanitarianism have different understandings of the meaning of humanitarianism and its role in the political arena.

In reviewing the history of humanitarianism, it is critical to understand who funds this multi-billion dollar empire. Knowing who is bankrolling the aid business gives us valuable insight into who shapes the agenda. The total aid budget grew from 2 billion dollars in 1990, to over six billion in 2000. Today it stands at a staggering 18 billion.⁵⁸ Who is behind this money?

⁵⁴ Leader, Nicholas, *The Politics of Principle: "The principles of humanitarian action in practice,"* Humanitarian Policy Group Report, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, p.12

⁵⁵ Leader, Nicholas, *The Politics of Principle: "The principles of humanitarian action in practice,"* Humanitarian Policy Group Report, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, p.11

⁵⁶ Rotberg, Robert, Weiss, Thomas.G, *From massacres to genocide: the media, public policy, and humanitarian crises*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Brookings Institution Press, 1996, p. 171-175

⁵⁷ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p10

⁵⁸ Harvey, Paul/ Stoddard, Abby/ Harmer, Adele/ Taylor, Glyn, *The State of the Humanitarian System: Assessing Performance and Progress, A pilot Study*, London: ALNAP/Overseas Development Institute, 2010, p. 19-22

Governments contribute 80 percent of the humanitarian budget.⁵⁹ A variety of private actors, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have also redefined the landscape. In addition, religious and corporate organizations make their contribution. The internet-boom, with its social media component, has tapped directly into individual donations from ordinary citizens, multiplying available funds.

These billions of dollars have turned a relatively small movement into a gigantic business. The mushrooming of aid agencies demonstrates this expansion. There were only a handful of agencies in Somalia in 1992. In 1999, there were about 250 in Kosovo. Hundreds assisted in the aftermath of the Tsunami in Indonesia in 2004. Close to a thousand organizations descended upon Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake.⁶⁰

Despite a global economic meltdown that has driven households to the very brink of poverty, the aid business is here to stay. In fact, some argue that the growing financial divide between rich and poor augurs well for humanitarianism. Capitalism needs humanitarianism to placate the frustrations faced by the poor.⁶¹

It therefore becomes more vital for humanitarians to do some soul searching. The four principles that govern humanitarianism are a good place to start.

⁵⁹OECD, DAC1 Official and Private Flows. <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLE1> [last accessed December 27 2011]

⁶⁰ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 3

⁶¹ De Waal, Alex, *Famine Crimes: Politics & The Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*-(African Issues), Oxford: African Rights % The International African Institute in association with James Currey and Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 221

4.3 Overview over the Humanitarian Principles

Table 2:

Overview over the Humanitarian Principles

HUMANITY

Human suffering must be addressed wherever it may be found; this is the fundamental principle that humanitarian efforts must put the needs of people first.

NEUTRALITY

Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities, or engage in controversies of a political racial, religious, or ideological nature.

IMPARTIALITY

Humanitarian assistance must be delivered on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress without discriminating on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

OPERATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Humanitarian action must be autonomous; and implementation must be independent from the political, economic or military objectives.

The principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence are the pillars of UN humanitarian efforts. The General Assembly mandated in 1991 the first three principles [resolution 46/182]⁶². It added the fourth principle, operational independence, in 2004 under resolution 58/114.⁶³ The vast majority of humanitarian organizations also commit themselves to these principles.

Abiding by these four principles is considered an essential component of humanitarian response. The principles provide a code of conduct for actors, which is vital when operating in fragile or chaotic environments where governance structures are weakened. This serves as a way to self-police. By putting humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational

⁶²General Assembly Resolution 46/182 Dec 19th 1991

⁶³General Assembly Resolution 58/114 Feb 5th 2004

independence at the center of their work, humanitarian actors distinguish themselves from entities motivated by questionable interests.⁶⁴

The principles also serve a pragmatic function. They legitimize an aid organization's intervention in disasters. By rendering them neutral and impartial, they give aid organizations the unique privilege to go to places where actors with political affiliations could not go. Aid organizations are free to go to crises providing relief under the protective umbrella of these principles.⁶⁵ The following is an examination of each principle in detail.

4.4 The Principle of Humanity

The principle of humanity states that human suffering must be addressed wherever it may be found; this is the fundamental principle that humanitarian efforts must put the needs of people first.⁶⁶ The principle of humanity hence permeates every aspect of humanitarian intervention. This is the very humanitarian imperative that the global community must take the necessary steps to end all human suffering, and that all civilians affected by conflict and calamity have a right to protection and assistance.

Whereas the other three principles define specific parameters of engagement, humanity is the core ethic from which the desire to assist stems.⁶⁷ However, a closer look suggests humanitarian actors respond inconsistently to global crises.

Alleviating human suffering wherever it may be found is therefore not always the deciding factor for where to provide relief. UN spending on emergency response clearly shows that political considerations take center stage in deciding where to provide relief or not.

⁶⁴OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles

ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf [last accessed 2 January 2012]

⁶⁵ Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons: International Development Committee, *The Humanitarian Response to the Pakistan Floods: Seventh Report of Session 2010-12 Volume 1* p.61

⁶⁶OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles

ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf [last accessed 2 January 2012]

⁶⁷Provost Rene, *International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 197- 201

CASE STUDY: Humanity

While donor governments provided the UN with \$207 to spend per person in Kosovo in 1999, only \$16 per person was granted to Sierra Leone and \$8 per person in the Congo.⁶⁸ Donors to the UN have a say where they want their money to be spent. It is their checkbooks that ultimately decided that the crisis in Kosovo was more important than the one in the Congo.⁶⁹ Thompson argues that large powers, especially Europeans, had a close interest in helping Kosovar refugees in Macedonia and Albania. Their fear was that they would try to immigrate to other countries in Europe. By providing them with what they needed in Albania and Macedonia, this risk was lowered. Apart from national interests, the Kosovars also had the advantage to be in the center of media attention, bringing their plight to the forefront of events. The crisis in the Congo, however, was not on the radar. Scholars call this the ‘CNN effect’ and argue that highly publicized disasters tend to get more assistance from donors.⁷⁰ Another aspect that might have played to the advantage of the refugees in the Kosovo is that they share race and ethnicity with the biggest donors to the UN. Scholars and practitioners such as Rieff and Thompson find that race and ethnicity influence the level of response. People generally empathize more with those they share similarities.⁷¹ The biggest donors to the UN are western countries. The United States alone contributes a quarter of the UN’s budget-- no prizes for guessing whose agenda dominates.⁷²

Walter and Maxwell argue that humanitarian agencies are caught between those who are suffering and those who have the means to end the suffering. They are pulled among their various, often conflicting, accountabilities. This is compounded by demands to satisfy their own organizational agendas and standards.⁷³ (This will be examined in detail in chapter 5). Aid organizations grapple with the obstacles of finite resources and conflicting agendas in often highly politicized emergency contexts. It is impossible to address all suffering in the world simultaneously.

⁶⁸ Jefferys, Anna, "Giving Voice to Silent Emergencies," Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute, London: 2002

⁶⁹ Thompson, Larry, "Humanitarian Emergencies: Why Does Kosovo Get More Aid than the Congo?" Geneva: Paper for the ICVA Conference on NGOs in a Changing World Order: Dilemmas and Challenges, 2003 p.1 <http://www.icva.ch/doc00000937.html> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

⁷⁰ Thompson, Larry, "Humanitarian Emergencies: Why Does Kosovo Get More Aid than the Congo?" Geneva: Paper for the ICVA Conference on NGOs in a Changing World Order: Dilemmas and Challenges, 2003 p. 2 <http://www.icva.ch/doc00000937.html> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

⁷¹ Rieff, David, *A bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p.

7

⁷² Top Ten Contributors to the UN regular Budget <http://www.un.org/geninfo/ir/index.asp?id=150#q4> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

⁷³ Walker, Peter/Maxwell Daniel, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 3

4.5 The Principle of Neutrality

The principle of neutrality stipulates that humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities, or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.⁷⁴ This is the assurance given by humanitarian agencies that their efforts are not in support of any side to a conflict.

Neutrality is perhaps the most debated of humanitarian principles. Questions abound, whether neutrality is in practice attainable, or even desirable as a moral imperative. Anderson argues that “neutrality involves a willful silence as to rights and wrongs of a conflict, and because, sometimes, there are right sides and wrong sides, neutrality cannot be the end of the moral discussion.”⁷⁵ He further postulates that neutrality and impartiality are adjuncts to the main question of justice, which they often refuse to address for pragmatic reasons.

Being neutral in conflicts is a particularly delicate balance for the UN. Its comparative advantage is based on a broad perception that it is neutral and does not take sides in a conflict. Its credibility in humanitarian contexts rests on the notion that it is concerned with alleviating human suffering, not serving as the judge of right or wrong.

On the other hand, the UN is expected to serve as the moral conscience of the world. People, particularly those afflicted, expect the UN to take a stance against perpetrators of human rights violations. They expect the UN to be the voice of the voiceless, which in itself is a direct affront to neutrality. It is also difficult for the world body to break the code of silence, as they are bound by political considerations. The UN is governed by the very member states that it is, at times, supposed to condemn.

The question is, how far can the UN remain neutral at the risk of losing relevance as the premier champion of those in need? Not speaking out in the face of gross violations of human rights chips away at the UN’s credibility. Yet speaking out jeopardizes access to people in need, the security of UN staff, and indeed its legitimacy as a neutral broker.

⁷⁴OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf [last accessed 2 January 2012]

⁷⁵Anderson, Kenneth, “Humanitarian Inviolability in Crisis: The Meaning of Impartiality and Neutrality for U.N. and NGO Agencies Following the 2003-2004 Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 2004, p. 69

Among the most interesting of the many ambiguities entwined around the principle of neutrality, is the very functioning of the United Nations and the contradicting responsibilities of its most powerful organ, the Security Council. This single body authorizes both military and humanitarian interventions.

A recent example is Libya and the events that followed the revolution that began in February 2011. On March 17th 2011 the Security Council passed resolution 1973 authorizing airstrikes, which resulted in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombings effectively bringing an end to the 42 year long rule of Colonel Muammar Gadaffi.⁷⁶ Subsequently, the Council mandated, in resolution SC/2009 from September 16, 2011,⁷⁷ a humanitarian support mission to the country.

It is difficult to fathom that the people on either side of the conflict in Libya, would deem the humanitarian mission one hundred percent neutral; a mission authorized by the same Security Council that only a few months before authorized a military action. The organizational structure of the UN, from the beginning, places it at odds with the principle of neutrality.

The UN was well aware of this potential trapping. This is the reason why it has distinct bodies responsible for political or peacekeeping operations (The Department of Peacekeeping Operations) and humanitarian affairs (Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and various specialized agencies such as UNICEF). These intricate distinctions may be apparent to the UN itself. For the people in the countries where the UN operates, there is no distinction between the humanitarian and political branch of the UN. All these entities are seen squarely as a single UN body.

A study conducted by the Integration Steering Group, which is comprised of a range of UN entities and other stakeholders, demonstrate this point.⁷⁸ A statement made by a political mission can compromise the neutrality of a humanitarian mission.

The UN is increasingly aware that the blurring of lines between political/ military missions hampers relief activities. OCHA, the UN departments of peacekeeping operations (DPKO)

⁷⁶ UN Security Council Resolutions: http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions11.htm

⁷⁷ UN Security Council Resolutions: http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions11.htm

⁷⁸ Philpott, Daniel/Powers Gerard.F., *Strategies of peace: transforming conflict in a violent world*, Oxford: New York: University Press, 2010, p .279-284

and for political affairs (DPA) jointly commissioned in 2011 a study to look into how to effectively protect Humanitarian Space in joint missions.⁷⁹

Safeguarding the Humanitarian Space is a practical and strategic necessity for the United Nations. In instances where the UN is, justly or unjustly, perceived as taking sides, the consequences have been dire. Iraq is a case in point. On August 19, 2003, a truck on a suicide mission bombed the UN Headquarters in Baghdad, killing twenty-two lives and injuring many more.⁸⁰

The Humanitarian Policy Group investigated the possible reasons for the outbursts of violence against aid workers. One of the main findings was that “the increase in violence against aid workers seen during the past three years is at least partly politically oriented.”⁸¹ The researches note that humanitarian actors find themselves as targets because they are perceived as collaborating with the enemy. The blurring of lines between political UN missions and UN agencies with entirely different mandates can jeopardize both their work and put their staff lives at risk.⁸²

Organizations, such as the Red Cross, are purists in defending the principle of neutrality. Others, such as Médecins Sans Frontières, are outright rejecting the principle of neutrality where it is seen to enable continued human rights violations. They deem it their humanitarian duty to denounce such atrocities.

The Biafra war in Nigeria is cited as a defining moment in breaking with the principle of neutrality. David Rieff explores Médecins Sans Frontières’ break with the model of silence,

⁷⁹ OCHA Thematic Areas: Humanitarian Engagement, UNITED Nations Integrated Presence, <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/policy/thematic-areas/humanitarian-engagement> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

⁸⁰ Allphin/Pubantz, *Encyclopedia of the United Nations*, Volume 2, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008, p. 254

⁸¹ Stoddard/Harmer/DiDomenico, *Providing aid in insecure environments: 2009 Update, Trends in violence against aid workers and the operational response*, HPG Policy Brief 34, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2009, p. 1-12

⁸² Mackintosh, Kate, “Beyond the Red Cross: The Protection of Independent Humanitarian Organizations and their Staff in International Humanitarian Law,” in: Heintze, Hans-Joachim/Zwitter Andrej (eds.) *International Law and Humanitarian Assistance: A Crosscut Through Legal Issues Pertaining to Humanitarianism*, Heidelberg, New York: Springer, 2010, p45, 46

stemming from the Biafra war, adopting instead a model of delivering humanitarian aid while bearing witness publicly to what it saw.⁸³

CASE STUDY: The Biafra War

The Biafra war refers to the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970 and is considered a critical turning point in humanitarianism. The conflict put the Biafra region a secessionist part of Nigeria under blockade by the Nigerian government. Resulting In large numbers of people being internally displaced on the Biafran side and threatened by starvation, the conflict triggered a massive media campaign to provide support to victims.⁸⁴ While humanitarian organizations, such as UNICEF and OXFAM, engaged in distribution of supplies, the Red Cross is widely credited for leading the relief efforts. UNHCR at that time only assisted refugees and did not get involved in issues regarding internally displaced populations.⁸⁵ The Red Cross provided relief, remaining silent, in the name of neutrality, despite witnessing forced starvation and migration.⁸⁶ Disapproving of the silence in the face of injustice, Bernard Kouchner and other doctors split from the Red Cross and founded Médecins Sans Frontières.⁸⁷ They were convinced that remaining silent would make them responsible for the killings.

The Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières illustrate two different approaches to the principle of neutrality. While the Red- Cross strictly defends the principle of neutrality including the ideal of silence, Médecins Sans Frontières has its roots in breaking with this ideal as part of the principle. The NGO finds it unconscionable to remain silent in the face of blatant violations of human rights. Kenneth Anderson argues that the decision to speak out on human rights violations did not strictly constitute a break with the ideal of neutrality. It represented a break with the ideal of silence in order to have access to suffering people.⁸⁸

Others have gone even a step further by questioning if neutrality has a place in humanitarianism. While recognizing that neutrality is a tool to get access, is it morally

⁸³ Rieff, David A bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p. 82,83

⁸⁴ Suhrke, Astri, "From Relief to Social Services: An International Humanitarian Regime Takes Form," in: Juma, Monica/ Suhrke, Astri, Eroding local capacity: international humanitarian action in Africa, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002, p. 24

⁸⁵ Goetz, Nathaniel.H., Humanitarian issues in the Biafra conflict, New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper No. 36, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, 2001, p. 6

⁸⁶ As quoted in DeChaine, D.R., Global humanitarianism: NGOs and the crafting of community, Lexington Books, Oxford, 2005, p 70

⁸⁷ Rieff, David A bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p. 83

⁸⁸ Anderson, Kenneth, "Humanitarian Inviolability in Crisis: The Meaning of Impartiality and Neutrality for U.N. and NGO Agencies Following the 2003-2004 Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts," Harvard Human Rights Journal, 2004, p. 68

defendable to hold on to this principle when faced with crimes against humanity?⁸⁹ The answer is complex. By putting themselves beyond the sovereignty of states, when they judge it morally justified, humanitarians might be able to save more lives. In some cases, however, they risk losing access to crisis zones under the control of those they denounce.

Sudan offers a perfect example. In 2009 the International Criminal Court publicly thanked aid agencies operating in Darfur for providing critical information that led to the indictment, for genocide, of several Sudanese leaders. Soon after the president of Sudan evicted a dozen aid agencies for “colluding with the country’s enemies”.⁹⁰ It has also been alleged that Médecins Sans Frontières’ report on the atrocities committed by the Serbs was used to legitimize the NATO airstrikes in Kosovo.⁹¹

O’ Brian argues that this is nothing new. Humanitarianism has always been a political ideology.⁹² This would seem to suggest that neutrality was never achievable in the first place. It was rather a useful smokescreen to appear “non-political” and therefore gain the advantages of the Humanitarian Space.

In short, neutrality is the most controversial of the humanitarian principles.

4.6 The Principle of Impartiality

The principle of impartiality stipulates that aid must be delivered on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress without discriminating on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.⁹³ Impartiality goes to the heart of the UN charter, which affirms faith in the inalienable worth of every human being.

⁸⁹ Terry Fiona, *Condemned to Repeat? The paradox of humanitarian action*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 21

⁹⁰ <http://www.crimesofwar.org/commentary/the-icc-bashir-and-the-immunity-of-heads-of-state/> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

⁹¹ Fassin, Didier/ Pandolfim Mariella (eds.): *Contemporary states of emergency: the politics of military and humanitarian intervention*, New York: Zone Books, 2010, p. 15

⁹² O’Brian, Paul, “Politicized Humanitarianism: A Response to Nicolas de Torrente,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, Vol 17, 2004, <http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/hrj/iss17/obrien.shtml> [last accessed January, 2 2012]

⁹³ OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf [last accessed 2 January 2012]

Humanitarian emergencies often occur in context of conflict between two or more parties. In order to implement its work effectively, the humanitarian community must have the trust of the people it seeks to serve. In many cases, the cooperation of belligerent sides is necessary to provide life-saving services.⁹⁴ All parties must have the confidence that humanitarian workers remain impartial in conducting their work. Impartiality hence means the non-judgmental delivering of aid to the population of both sides of a conflict on the sole basis of need.

This is especially challenging in conflict contexts, as aid organizations have to try to get access to all sides of the conflict to negotiate their assistance. In conflicts, aid organizations run the risk of being blamed for going beyond their humanitarian mandate, if one party feels that an opponent has received preferential treatment. The United Nations handbook on Multidimensional Peacekeeping offers a practical example of why it is important to observe the principle of impartiality:

CASE STUDY: Impartiality

A conflict between the Lendu and Hema ethnic groups, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1999, displaced over 140,000 people. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and a group of NGOs mobilized to respond. Both ethnic groups rushed to accuse the humanitarian community for taking sides and favoring the other ethnic group. In particular, the Hema community accused Médecins Sans Frontières of only treating the Lendu community. This led to an attack on the Médecins Sans Frontières team.⁹⁵ The issue was resolved and the humanitarians were able resume their work, providing relief to both sides of the conflict.

Some of the charges leveled against the principle of neutrality apply to the problems humanitarians face implementing the principle of impartiality. As these points have been adequately discussed in the previous section, this section will not repeat the discussion. The main issues include: Is impartiality desirable in the face of grave human rights violations? Should humanitarian actors equally give aid to the perpetrators of injustice as well as victims? As Bernard Kouchner and his colleagues asserted, in breaking away from the Red Cross, are humanitarians complicit in the killing of innocent people when they feed and clothe the perpetrators?

⁹⁴ Barakat, Sultan, *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005, p. 56

⁹⁵ UN, *Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations*, Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit Department of Peacekeeping Operations United Nations, New York, 2003, p.165

The violation of the principle of impartiality is not only a problem in conflict settings. Preferential distribution of aid can also occur in disaster contexts, such as Haiti. The author during his time as a humanitarian in Haiti witnessed first hand the violation of this principle. Aid was not always distributed on the basis of need alone. Infrastructure projects were sometimes built in areas directly benefitting the elite and government officials, excluding the poor, the very people who needed these services most.

Pressure to violate impartiality can come from local stakeholders, on whose collaboration humanitarians depend to fulfill their mandates.⁹⁶ Those stakeholders can pressure aid workers to give assistance for their political or economic gain. Maintaining principled humanitarian action against these kinds of pressure is an essential, but not easy task. In some cases compelling operational circumstances can make it necessary to make concessions for a more efficient humanitarian action.

Moral considerations are not the only factors pressuring humanitarian actors to compromise the humanitarian principles.⁹⁷ Donors, with their thick wallets, are a far bigger challenge to impartiality. They can channel funds towards some emergencies and neglect others according to their political preference and prospects for socio-economic gains, together with opportunities for increased political leverage. Ferris argues that political interests are detrimental in determining where to give help and how much. She finds that disasters situated geographically closer to donors, are likely to get higher funding than far away crises.⁹⁸

Though not easy to withstand the pressure, by showing active commitment to honor the principle of impartiality, humanitarians can prevent donor influence from becoming a convenient excuse for jeopardizing their integrity.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Barakat, Sultan, *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005, p. 56

⁹⁷ Ronalds Paul, *The Change Imperative: Creating the Next Generation NGO*, Sterling, Virginia, Kumarian Press, 2010, p.103,104

⁹⁸ Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p. 77

⁹⁹ Smillie, Ian, Minear, Larry, *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarianism in a calculating world*, New York: Kumarian Press, 2004, p. 136

4.7 The Principle of Operational Independence

The principle of operational independence stipulates that humanitarian action must be autonomous. Its implementation must be independent from the political, economic or military objectives.¹⁰⁰ Demanding that humanitarian actors take their decisions freely and independently from any other motives, the concept of independence seeks to strengthen the principles of neutrality and impartiality.

It is debated whether operational independence is attainable when agencies receive the majority of their funding from governments.¹⁰¹ These governments often have clear interests and consider aid an extension of their foreign policy. The proliferation of government-affiliated funding mechanisms, such as the United Nations Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency is a concern. Government-affiliated aid is often considered an extension of a country's foreign policy.

This trend strengthens the hand of individual governments in the operational decisions taken by humanitarian agencies. Elizabeth Ferris observes that some donor governments explicitly use humanitarian assistance to pursue their own political interests.¹⁰² It also disregards the multilateral system, through which funds should primarily be channeled.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles; ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf [last accessed 2 January 2012]

¹⁰¹ Walker, Peter/Maxwell Daniel, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p.3/137

¹⁰²Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p.77

¹⁰³ Leader, Nicholas, *The Politics of Principle: "The principles of humanitarian action in practice," Humanitarian Policy Group Report*, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, p.8

CASE STUDY: Operational Independence

Former USAID administrator Andre Natsios in Iraq, made it very clear to US NGOs receiving government funding for their work there, that their efforts had to be in line with US government objectives: “If you even mention your own organization once when you’re in the villages, I will tear up your contract and fire you.... You are an arm of the U.S. government right now, because we need to show the people of Iraq an improvement in their standard of living in the next year or two. And I have to have it clearly associated with the U.S. government.”¹⁰⁴ In a similar case in Afghanistan, USAID contracted a private company to rehabilitate the education sector with the goal to bring children back to school but also to make children learn about democratic practices and attitudes.¹⁰⁵

In both these cases, USAID neglected the principle of independence by serving the American political interests. While these are obvious examples, Ferris highlights a more subtle way to use aid for political purposes. She argues that in many cases, donor governments insist that humanitarian organizations clearly brand the assistance they deliver to make recipients associate it with them.¹⁰⁶

In some cases, it is not the donors but the aid organizations themselves that jeopardize the independent nature of humanitarian assistance. High profile crises, such as the earthquake response in Haiti, attract a lot of non-traditional aid providers: military, paramilitary or private organizations engage in areas of humanitarian interest.¹⁰⁷ The work of these actors can lead to a wide range of activities carried out under the flag of humanitarianism. However, by pursuing their own objectives, these organizations neglect the principle of independence, along with the other basic humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality.

In emergencies, such the earthquake response in Haiti, humanitarian actors rely on the help of the military to facilitate logistics in the provision of relief. This collaboration, however, results in the blurring of the line between the humanitarian and the military sphere. Fassin and Pandolfi find that there is a growing reciprocal interdependency of military actors and

¹⁰⁴ Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p. 77

¹⁰⁵ Nickolls, Jo, “Limits to neutrality in Iraq,” in *HPN Humanitarian Exchange* 25, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003, p. 7-9.

¹⁰⁶ Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p. 77

¹⁰⁷ Compare: Macrae, J., Harmer, A. (2003a) *Humanitarian Action and the ‘Global War on Terror’: A Review of Trends and Issues*, in: *Humanitarian Policy Group Report 14*, ODI London

humanitarians.¹⁰⁸ The military increasingly needs humanitarians to legitimize its actions and humanitarians the military to have their safety ensured.

For the United Nations humanitarian workers the instructions are somewhat contradictory. On the one hand they are required to uphold operational independence. On the other hand the UN explicitly instructs all its employees that they must work to support the priorities of the local government. This idea is becoming more entrenched with the shift from pure relief work, to capacity building. In addition, the UN -- a consortium of governments -- cannot entirely divorce itself from its primary constituency.

Again as with all the other humanitarian principles, the ideal is unquestionable but the reality is complex. In the next chapter, the thesis will examine in greater detail some of the dilemmas and paradoxes that make it extremely challenging for humanitarian agencies to be neutral, impartial and independent in alleviating human suffering.

¹⁰⁸ Fassin, Didier/ Pandolfi, Mariella (eds.): *Contemporary states of emergency: the politics of military and humanitarian intervention*, New York: Zone Books, 2010, p. 10-15

CHAPTER 5

THE POLITICIZATION OF AID

“Although aid agencies do important work, humanitarianism is no longer the ethos for many organizations within the aid industry.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ The Lancet, “Growth of Aid and the Decline of Humanitarianism,” Volume 375, Issue 9711, January 2010, p. 253

5.1 The Two Faces of Humanitarianism

Of the myriad of dilemmas inherent in humanitarianism, one of the most intriguing is that the motivation to assist others is seldom purely altruistic. Motivations range from organizational survival, prestige and power, feelings of guilt, a sense of superiority, religious redemption, career advancement, to the desire to demonstrate one's goodness.^{110, 111} The relationship between humanitarian agencies and recipients is therefore reciprocal. Humanitarians need people in crisis, and vice versa.

The humanitarian imperative was once the primary concern of early relief work. However, judging by the fact that, on average, only 30 percent reaches the ground, one can argue self-sustenance has become the primary business of aid organizations. International organizations, such as the UN, spend up to 70 percent of their budget on operational costs.

A case study in Cambodia revealed that the UN spent two billion dollars spent on a mission there, most of it on staff salaries (about \$118.5 million) and travel (\$62 million). Almost 9,000 new vehicles were purchased (\$81 million). Senior UN officials were receiving a daily hardship allowance of \$145 to supplement their salaries. At the time, the average annual income in Cambodia was \$130.¹¹²

5.2 Conditional donor funding

Donors providing crucial funding, continue to expand their influence on where and how their contributions are spent. Facing stiff competition for limited resources, agencies are compromised and often co-opted into political agendas. Accountability in humanitarianism appears to work better upward the aid chain, than downward.¹¹³ Humanitarians are

¹¹⁰ Tvedt, Terje, *Angels of Mercy or Development Diplomats: NGOs & foreign aid*, Oxford: First Africa World Press, Inc. Edition, 1998, p. 3

¹¹¹ Maren Michael, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid And International Charity*, New York: The Free Press, 1997, p. 3

¹¹² Branczik, Amelia, "Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance." Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: February 2004, *Beyond Intractability*.

http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/humanitarian_aid/ [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹¹³ Chambers, Robert/Pettit, Jethro/Scott-Villiers, Patta, *The new dynamics of aid: power, procedures and relationships*, Institute of Development Studies Policy Briefing, issue 15, August 2001

accountable to both donors and the people whom they assist.¹¹⁴ However, donors have the leverage to play the game in their favor.

Governments provide the majority of funds for humanitarian activities. They often treat this aid as an extension of their foreign policy. States invest in the humanitarian sector for a mixture of motives, but their main reason was to pursue their own political interests. The integration of humanitarian departments, into the defense and foreign affairs ministries of many countries, bears witness to this fact. A study on the role of the United States' overseas disaster assistance concluded that foreign policy and domestic factors outweigh all other factors influencing the country's engagement.¹¹⁵

Barnett rightly asks: "Did these shifts humanize the world of politics or did they politicize the world of humanitarianism?"¹¹⁶ It is likely that both states and humanitarians have ventured into areas of grey. What is clear is, the more influence foreign policy interests of donors have on the decision-making processes of UN agencies and NGOs, the less articulate their advocacy on behalf of victims.¹¹⁷ Recipients are therefore the biggest losers in the alliance between donors and humanitarian organizations. Rieff cautions that aid workers should worry about being used politically by the donors who direct them into certain places, while keeping them away from others.¹¹⁸

While authors like Rieff condemn politicization of aid, which he says corrupts the humanitarian principles,¹¹⁹ Slim suggests that there is another, often neglected side to politicization. Instead of being worried about western powers abusing the humanitarian idea by incorporating it into their agendas, he suggests, critics of politicization should rather worry about western governments excluding humanitarianism from their politics. For Slim "a cleansing of the humanitarian ethic from politics that wants neither humanitarian norms, nor

¹¹⁴ Gross Stein, Janice, "Humanitarian Organizations, Accountable-Why, to Whom, for What and How?" in: Barnett, Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 131

¹¹⁵ Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p. 77

¹¹⁶ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 5

¹¹⁷ DARA, *The problems of politicization, The Humanitarian Response Index*, 2010 p. 8

¹¹⁸ Rieff, David, *A bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p.23

¹¹⁹ Rieff, David, *A bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p.23

humanitarian workers in a given political arena,” would just be as much politicization.¹²⁰ He argues that politicization has always been part of the humanitarian idea, simply because it is a political concept applied in a political world.¹²¹

In order to provide relief in a world saturated with political agendas, humanitarians have no choice but to strategize and compromise. Their challenge is to play the political game to their favor, without jeopardizing the interests of their recipients and by holding donors accountable for their commitments. To counter pressure, argue Hoffman and Weiss, humanitarians should stubbornly demonstrate commitment to the core values of their work against all odds.¹²²

This is easier said than done. Competition for limited resources, in a crowded field, makes agencies more susceptible to donor influence. Donors often tie their funding to very specific projects or programs.¹²³ Earmarked funding binds aid organizations to spend money on these specific purposes. This jeopardizes the principle of operational independence. Pre-defining a purpose the money should be spent on also disqualifies the possibility to alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found.

Political objectives are likely to always remain a factor in humanitarianism. Yet donors, feeling resistance, and facing successes achieved by aid agencies committed to the values of humanitarianism, might be inclined to play by the rules.

Rivalry among aid agencies makes them susceptible to manipulation and prevents a unified resistance to donor influence. The limited funding and plethora of agencies means someone will always be ready to compromise the principles to ensure their organization's survival. This attitude is not only egotistical, it is also pragmatic. It ultimately allows them to do their work.¹²⁴ To advance their goals, aid agencies have to sell part of their soul. Others, however,

¹²⁰Slim, Hugo, “Is Humanitarianism Being Politicised? A Reply to David Rieff,” The Dutch Red Cross Symposium on Ethics in Aid, The Hague: 8th October 2003, p. 5

¹²¹ *ibid*

¹²²Hoffman, Peter J./ Weiss, Thomas, Humanitarianism and Practitioners: Social Science Matters,” in: Barnett, Michael/Weiss, Thomas J. (eds.) Humanitarianism in Question, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, p.280

¹²³Wakolbinger, Tina B./Toyasaki Fuminori, “Impacts of funding systems on humanitarian operations,” in: Christopher/Tathemeds, Humanitarian Logistics: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing for and responding to Disasters, Kogan Page Publishers, 2011, Kogan Page Publishers, 2011 p37

¹²⁴ Maren Michael, The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity, New York: The Free Press, 1997, p. 50-51

caution that donor pressure can also become an excuse for organizational self-politicization and breaking with the humanitarian principles.¹²⁵

5.3 Survival of the fittest

Turf wars have become a standard ingredient of relief efforts, especially high profile emergencies.¹²⁶ Stronger competition, due to the rapid growth of the humanitarian sector, means agencies are spending more and more time on flag-waving, to secure their own survival.¹²⁷ Green notes, for instance, that twenty-seven UN entities, to some degree, assume themselves responsible for water and sanitation.¹²⁸ Concentrated focus on the same few popular and visual topics, risks sidelining others.¹²⁹ Agencies waste time and money fighting over turf, instead of maximizing overall results.

The more visual an area of work, the greater the media's interest. Publicity usually translates directly into more funding.¹³⁰ While media collaboration is crucial for humanitarian organizations in order to generate more money, media also exercises pressure on humanitarians to hold on to their turf. Media, particularly television and the Internet have changed humanitarianism for good.

Twenty-four hour news channels send disaster pictures into our living rooms in real time. The Internet enables us to directly connect with aid workers via social media. The mental distance to the disasters of the world is much smaller.^{131, 132} The influence of television goes beyond bringing disasters into living rooms. Reporters can choose what images they want the world to

¹²⁵Smillie, Ian, Minear, Larry, *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarianism in a calculating world*, New York: Kumarian Press, 2004, p. 136

¹²⁶Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p. 92

¹²⁷Oezdem, Alpaslan/Rufini, Gianni "Humanitarianism and the Principles of Humanitarian Action in a Post Cold War Context," in: Barakat, Sultan, (ed.), *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War*, London/ New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005, p.64

¹²⁸Green, Duncan, *From poverty to Power: how active citizens and effective states can change the world*, Oxfam, Oxford, 2008, p.387

¹²⁹Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011, p 92-97

¹³⁰Robinson, Piers, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, London/New York: Routledge, 2002, p.3

¹³¹Minear, Larry/ Scott, Colin/ Weiss, Thomas George, *The news media, civil war and humanitarian action*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.,1996, p.64-91

¹³²DeChaine, Daniel Robert, *Global Humanitarianism: NGOs and the crafting of community*, Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005, p.126-127

see. Their portraying of a situation is ultimately likely to influence donor behavior. Piers Robinson notes that evidence suggests that policy makers and elite groups tend to rely on media as their primary indicator of public opinion.¹³³

Every UN agency and well-known NGO, has their own department dedicated to liaising with international media and promoting their successes, working with their recipients. The agencies' communications departments aggressively market to demonstrate that they are in the forefront to helping people. They make sure that important activities such as food distributions do not go unperceived and a camera is close by at all times. Donors need to be impressed by the actions undertaken and the results achieved.

Over the past years, social media has been discovered as a valuable tool by many agencies, to promote their work and reach out to private donors. Social media allows them to make personal and director appeals to individual donors. Facebook, for the Red Cross, for instance proved an effective awareness- raising tool, post the earthquake Haiti. The organization gained 10,000 new followers on Twitter during one week after the disaster.¹³⁴ WFP, through social games on Facebook, managed to raise impressive \$1.5 million for its food distribution program in Haiti, in only five days.¹³⁵

The addiction of humanitarian organizations to looking good however, and the competition for humanitarian market share, jeopardize the basis of humanitarianism, the principle of humanity. The relationship with the media has put aid organizations in a difficult situation. Motivated by the money the media can help them generate, they have somewhat replaced the guiding principle of humanity, with the guiding presence of the media, as determining factor for where to provide relief; a dilemma, aggravated by the impact of uneven media coverage of disasters.¹³⁶

¹³³ Robinson, Piers, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, London/New York: Routledge, 2002, p.3

¹³⁴ Leberecht, Tim, "Twitter grows up in aftermath of Haiti earthquake," Cnet News, 19 January 2010. http://news.cnet.com/8301-13641_3-10436435-44.html [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹³⁵ WFP, "Zynga Players Raise Over \$1.5 Million for Haiti in Five Days" <http://www.wfp.org/content/zynga-players-raise-over-15-million-haiti-five-days> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹³⁶ Branczik, Amelia, "Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance." Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: February 2004, *Beyond Intractability*. http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/humanitarian_aid/ [last accessed January 2, 2012]

Organizational interests and the ambition to look good in the media can become the driving force for humanitarian organizations, hijacking the original purpose of their mandate.

A leading politician brought the importance of visibility to the point, after the tsunami struck in Asia in 2004 “...this is a fantastic opportunity to show the world we care.”¹³⁷

The relief efforts in Haiti focused on Port-au-Prince neglecting hard to get to rural areas.¹³⁸ While relief was certainly needed in the capital, it was also easier and less painstaking than accessing hard-to-reach rural areas. Port-au-Prince was also the right spot to be for media coverage.

Visibility brings money, but it also comes at a prize. The higher the need to be seen as doing good aid work, the less important the needs defined by the local communities that the organization claim to assist. By marginalizing, or neglecting, the real concerns of the recipients, the principle of humanity is forgotten and replaced by market economics. Donor funding and media coverage becomes an end in itself.¹³⁹

¹³⁷As quoted in: Ramalingam, Barnett: *The Humanitarian's Dilemma: collective action or inaction in international relief?* London: Overseas Development Institute Background Note, 2010, p.4

¹³⁸ CARE – Save the Children: *Haiti Joint Evaluation Report*, October 2010 p.4

¹³⁹The Lancet, “Growth of Aid and the Decline of Humanitarianism,” Volume 375, Issue 9711, January 2010, p. 253

CHAPTER 6

HAITI SITUATION ANALYSIS

“The situation after the earthquake was a circus. Picture a thousand humanitarian organizations running around in Port au Prince, some without a clue if they were coming or going. It was a mess.”¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Participant in survey, UN humanitarian worker

6.1 Haiti Pre-Earthquake

Haiti has a long-standing reputation as the consistently poorest country in the western hemisphere. On the humanitarian development index of 2007/ 2008 Haiti ranked 146 out of 177 countries.¹⁴¹ The country's per capita income is \$250. This is less than one-tenth of the average in Latin America.¹⁴² The reasons for Haiti's poverty have their roots in a long history of exploitation by foreign forces, as well as its own leaders.

Haiti attained independence from France in 1804 on the condition that it would pay a large indemnity to its colonizer. This impoverished the country from the start. The United States, fearful of an American slave revolt, only recognized the new country under the condition that the country would agree to the deal with France and thereby discouraging its own slave population from aspiring for freedom.¹⁴³ In addition, the US occupied Haiti in 1915. When the Americans left in 1934, the country's institutions were withered.¹⁴⁴

Corruption and poor governance bedevil this country of 10 million people. The regimes of Francois and Jean Claude Duvalier that lasted from 1957 to 1986, forced a great number of intellectuals and skilled human resources out of the country.¹⁴⁵ In the past decades, Haiti struggled with a series of socio-political issues that impoverished it further. This volatile political environment makes Haiti unattractive to private investors. This has contributed to negative annual growth rates of 5 percent in the recent years.

Haiti has one of the worst records of investment in human capital. Only 20 percent of the resources in the public sector go to rural areas where two thirds of the Haitians live.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹UN, Central Emergency Response Fund CERF
<http://ochaonline.un.org/cerf/CERFaroundtheWorld/Haiti2011/Haiti2010/Haiti2009/Haiti2008/tabid/4629/language/en-US/Default.aspx> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁴² The World Bank, Haiti: The Challenges of Poverty Reduction,
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,,contentMDK:20207590~menuPK:443285~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html>

¹⁴³ Wucker, Michele, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominican, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1999, p. 33-38

¹⁴⁴ *ibid* 43-44

¹⁴⁵ Hancock, Graham, *Lords of Poverty: the power, prestige, and corruption of the international aid business*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1992 p180, 181

¹⁴⁶The World Bank, Haiti: The Challenges of Poverty Reduction,
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,contentMDK:2020590~menuPK:443285~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html>, [last accessed December 27, 2011]

The lack of basic needs, such as food and water, leads to grave food security problems in the country. In 2008, food insecurity worsened as a result of rising prices. More than half of the Haitian population was underfed. In 2004, only 54 percent of the population had access to safe water, while only 30 percent had access to improved sanitation.¹⁴⁷

In addition to all these challenges, Haiti's geographical location makes it extremely vulnerable to natural hazards. The Caribbean island nation lies in the middle of a hurricane belt, with 1,771 km of coastline, making the country subject to severe storms during the regular hurricane season. Lack of public structures, widespread poverty and deforestation amplify the impact of these natural hazards.¹⁴⁸

Mudslides provoked by torrential rains, wash away entire villages every year in the mountainous country, leaving many dead or wounded. In the years between 2001 and 2007 hurricanes and tropical storms left more than 18,000 people dead and 132,000 people homeless. In total 6,4 million people out of Haiti's population of 10 million were affected.¹⁴⁹

Despite all its challenges, Haiti had made strides towards development and stability since 2004.¹⁵⁰ The earthquake that hit Haiti on 12 January 2010 set the country back.

6.2 Haiti Post-Earthquake

Just before sunset, an earthquake of magnitude 7.0 on the Richter scale hit Haiti. It killed more than 220, 000 people and destroyed Port-au-Prince and other big southern cities.¹⁵¹ The government, many of its officials dead and its systems destroyed, was paralyzed.¹⁵² For three

¹⁴⁷ UN Central Emergency Response Fund CERF

<http://ochaonline.un.org/cerf/CERFaroundtheWorld/Haiti2011/Haiti2010/Haiti2009/Haiti2008/tabid/4629/language/en-US/Default.aspx> [last accessed December 27, 2011]

¹⁴⁸ Republique D'Haiti, Analysis of Multiple Natural Hazards in Haiti, (*NATHAT*) Port-au-Prince: 2010 gfdrr.org/docs/Haiti_Multi-Hazard_RiskAssessment_Report_EN.pdf [last accessed December 27, 2011]

¹⁴⁹ European Commission, Haiti before the earthquake

ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/Haiti_paper_01102010.pdf [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁵⁰ Fasano, Ugo, Haiti's Economic, Political Turnaround, IMF Survey Magazine: Countries & Regions, International Monetary Fund, September 17, 2007

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2007/car0917a.htm> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁵¹ Rencoret, Nicole/Stoddard, Abby/Haver, Katherine/ Taylor, Glyn /Harvey, Paul, Haiti Earthquake Response Context Analysis, ALNAP/UN Evaluation Group, July 2010

¹⁵² UN, Report of the United United Nations in Haiti 2010, Situation, Challenges and Outlook p 12, 16

days, the head of the devastated nation was nowhere to be found. In less than 48 hours assumed leadership. Without control, aid organizations of all kinds swarmed into the country and turned it into, what is sometimes referred to as a, “Republic of NGOs”.^{153,154} While many were helpful, they also contributed to the chaos.

Internally displaced people started to occupy free plots of land anywhere they could. At the peak of displacement, 2.3 million people were without shelter¹⁵⁵ and 1.5 million people lived in 1,354 spontaneous settlements. One year after the earthquake 810,000 people still lived in 1,150 IDP camps.¹⁵⁶ The conditions in the camps are squalid, often consisting of tarpaulins tied to wooden sticks or makeshift huts made out of scrap metal. People in camps are highly vulnerable to heavy rains, threatening to wash away the meager possessions.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, food was in short supply. Malnutrition in children worsened, with about 15,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Estimates suggest, that one in three children in Haiti, is chronically malnourished.¹⁵⁷ People, especially children and the elderly, were at high risk of contracting infectious diseases. Water and waste management worsened. Hazardous ditches clogged with human feces and trash, were now winding through the numerous tent cities.¹⁵⁸ The cholera outbreak in October, made the sanitation issue an even more pressing one. Hospitals were unable to cope; thirty had been damaged by the earthquake.¹⁵⁹

The chaotic situation after the earthquake and especially in the many IDP camps was a particularly great hazard for women and girls. Lack of security facilitated sexual violence. Many of the people living in camps lost their families in the disaster. Women and adolescents often lived in tents by themselves. They are unprotected and highly vulnerable to abuse. More

¹⁵³ *ibid* p. 8

¹⁵⁴ Herlinger, C., Jeffrey, P., *Rubble Nation: Haiti's Plan, Haiti's Promise*, Seabury Books, New York 2011 p 30

¹⁵⁵ Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti, Facts and figures about the earthquake, cholera, and development challenges in Haiti.p.1 <http://www.haitispecialenvoy.org/relief-and-recovery/key-statistics/> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁵⁶ OCHA, Haiti: One Year Later <http://www.unocha.org/issues-in-depth/haiti-one-year-later> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*

¹⁵⁸ Romero, Poor Sanitation in Haiti's Camps Adds Disease Risk, *The New York Times*, February 19 2010

¹⁵⁹ OCHA, Haiti Humanitarian Response Info <http://haiti.humanitarianresponse.info/Default.aspx?tabid=208> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

than 250 cases of rape were reported in the first 150 days after the earthquake.¹⁶⁰ The authorities provided limited assistance to victims.¹⁶¹

One year after the earthquake, parts of Haiti's capital look exactly as they did a day after the earthquake. Some roads are still filled with rubble of concrete buildings with human remains still trapped in them. Only 10 to 15 percent of rubble had been removed one year after the earthquake.¹⁶² Part of the rubble removal is being done through cash for work programs. Run by aid organizations, these programs enable jobless people to contribute to the rehabilitation of their environment and earn money at the same time.

Unemployment is a bigger problem in post-earthquake Haiti than it was before. Two thirds of the population does not have a formal job after the earthquake. Many businesses were destroyed in the event.¹⁶³ The financial damages during the earthquake equal about 120 per cent of the country's gross domestic product of 2009.¹⁶⁴

Members of Haiti's middle class, who had labored for years to build a modest home, were among the biggest losers, now joining Haiti's poorest with nothing left to lose. The poorest lack the means to help themselves. Mostly, they fear for their children's future, citing education as a priority need. The earthquake was an enormous setback for education, 3978 schools were damaged or destroyed.¹⁶⁵

The death toll claimed and destruction done by the quake, highlight the fact that poor countries are by far more susceptible to natural hazards than wealthier ones. The earthquake that hit Chile a few weeks later was far stronger, yet caused minimal damage and loss of life compared to Haiti.¹⁶⁶ Chile is wealthier. Strict building codes and a sound emergency

¹⁶⁰ Amnesty International, *Aftershocks: Women speak out against sexual violence in Haiti's camps* London 2011, p.8

¹⁶¹ *ibid*

¹⁶² OCHA, Haiti: One Year Later, <http://www.unocha.org/issues-in-depth/haiti-one-year-later> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁶³ The New York Times, Haiti's New Prime Minister Emphasizes the Need for Jobs, October 5, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/world/americas/haitis-new-prime-minister-emphasizes-the-need-for-jobs.html> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁶⁴ Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti, Facts and figures about the earthquake, cholera, and development challenges in Haiti.p.1 <http://www.haitispecialenvoy.org/relief-and-recovery/key-statistics/> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁶⁵ OCHA, Haiti: One Year Later, <http://www.unocha.org/issues-in-depth/haiti-one-year-later> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁶⁶ The Christian Science Monitor, Chile earthquake facts: Chile vs. Haiti, in numbers

response saved many lives. While Haiti was numbed by the earthquake and dependent on foreign aid, Chile helped itself, even outright rejecting foreign aid.¹⁶⁷ The year that began with a deadly earthquake, ended with a cholera epidemic that killed 7000 people. The people of Haiti were left ever more dependent on aid.

6.3 The UN Response in Haiti

Previous to the earthquake, there were nine specialized UN agencies and a peacekeeping mission. The mission, MINUSTAH, was mandated in 2004¹⁶⁸ to support the government in maintaining peace and security in the country. The earthquake weakened the UN, killing 102 staff members and destroyed the mission's Headquarters. This was the single biggest loss in the UN's history. Its capacity to respond was curtailed.

To cope, the UN redirected staff from other peacekeeping operations around the world to Haiti. The specialized agencies drastically bolstered their manpower and were joined by seven other agencies. The UN country team worked together under the lead of the mission to tackle the many different needs in the country post the disaster. The Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was overseeing relief efforts and liaising with the myriad of NGOs doing in the country. The UN's initial relief efforts were focused on immediate needs, such as providing shelter, food, water and basic health care to the affected population.

After the immediate response phase, the UN focused on rebuilding the demolished infrastructure including rubble removal, to rehabilitate destroyed neighborhoods and the reconstruction of damaged or collapsed schools.¹⁶⁹ The specialized agencies supported the government in strengthening its capacities to deliver basic services to its citizens. They also worked with communities on their recovery from the disaster.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2010/0302/Chile-earthquake-facts-Chile-vs.-Haiti-in-numbers> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁶⁷ Padgett, Tim, Chile and Haiti: A Tale of Two Earthquakes, Time Magazine March 01, 2010, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1968576,00.html#ixzz1gJ2dDek0> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁶⁸ Security Council resolution 1542,

¹⁶⁹ UN, Report of the United United Nations in Haiti 2010, Situation, Challenges and Outlook p.12, 13

Table 3:

The UN Actors in Haiti¹⁷⁰

| NAME OF ENTITY | MAIN AREAS OF WORK |
|--|--|
| UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti MINUSTAH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule of Law • Logistical Support to humanitarian activities |
| Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of all UN entities • Liaising between NGOs and military actors |
| UN Children's Fund UNICEF | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection • Nutrition • Water and sanitation • Building schools |
| World Food Programme WFP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security • School Meals • Nutrition |
| Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights OHCHR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of human rights • Rule of law |
| UN Joint Programme on HIV AIDS UNAIDS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fights against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis • Reactivating HIV centers |
| UN Development Programme UNDP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihoods and poverty reduction • Cash for work • Strengthening governance & the rule of law |
| UN Environment Programme UNEP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment and climate change • Sustainable natural resource management |
| UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Vocational training • Advocacy for culture • Youth mobilization through culture |
| UN Population Fund UNFPA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and reproductive health • Family planning • Demographic data collection and analysis |

¹⁷⁰ UNITED Nations in Haiti <http://www.onu-haiti.org/agencies-partners/> [last accessed December 2, 2011]

| | |
|---|---|
| UN Human Settlements Programme UN-Habitat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Urban planning and management • Municipal development |
| UN Refugee Agency UNHCR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection internally displaced people • Prevention of forced evictions, • Family reunification |
| International Labor Organization ILO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor rights, • Livelihoods, vocational training • Small and medium businesses |
| UN Office for Project Services UNOPS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management • Transitional and permanent shelters • Infrastructure • Debris removal |
| UN Women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality • Women's rights • Gender-based violence |
| Food and Agriculture Organization FAO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security • Support to farmers • Seeds, tools and fertilizers. |
| World Health Organization WHO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad range of health issues |

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS OF SURVEY

“In real life, you want to help people. But as an organization, you need to show that you are better than everybody else and keep the money coming in. That’s reality.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Participant in survey, UN humanitarian worker

Q 2: For the UN what are the major challenges of operating in a high profile disaster where there are many international actors involved, such as in Haiti?

Table 4:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|--|-----------|
| Lack of coordination | 90% |
| Neglect of local needs | 40% |
| Internal and external Pressure | 37.5% |
| Competition among aid agencies | 27.5% |
| Staff incompetence | 15% |
| Poor capacity of Haitian government | 15% |
| Blurring humanitarian and military lines | 5% |

Lack of coordination among the humanitarian actors was the number one challenge faced in responding to the earthquake. The 16 UN agencies' mandates overlapped at times, which resulted in duplication of efforts. The office responsible for coordination, OCHA, is seen as having failed in fulfilling its mandate. It is illustrative that during the initial response phase, OCHA was commonly nicknamed "Organized Chaos in Haiti".

The agenda of humanitarians were not attuned to local needs. Participants reported that the Haitian government was widely excluded from planning the relief activities; joint situation analysis and information management for needs assessments proved difficult. The civil society was ignored and needs assessments conducted without its help. The results were relief activities that did not necessarily meet the real needs of the people.

The participants also felt under pressure, from both internal and external forces. Under the close watch of the donors and the media's scrutiny, they felt pressured to deliver visible results quickly. The stressful emergency context with a multitude of needs that had to be attended to simultaneously exerted its own pressure.

Participants also reported that agencies competed for turf and visibility, to the detriment of the work. Other factors, such as inexperienced and incompetent humanitarian staff, the poor capacity of the Haitian government to engage in the relief efforts and the blurring of lines between humanitarian and military actors were also challenged relief efforts.

[Refer to sections 8.4, 8.3 and 8.2 for a discussion of these results.

Q3: What in your view are the three primary concerns motivating the international humanitarian agencies that are operating in Haiti post the earthquake?

Table 5:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Alleviating human suffering | 82.5% |
| Survival of organization | 40% |
| Building the capacity of Haitian Gov. | 17.5% |

Saving lives and improving the overall situation for the people afflicted was the factor cited most by the participants, when asked what motivated humanitarian agencies to engage in relief activities in Haiti. This appears somewhat inconsistent with responses throughout the survey, when donor pressure and organizational interest are consistently cited as overriding the humanitarian imperative. It would then appear participants might be rationalizing the motivations for why they do their work, as this question goes to the core of their own integrity. Or perhaps this is the ideal that they chase and is often sullied by reality.

The second major concern mentioned was their organizational survival. The fact that Haiti was a high profile disaster, in the spotlight of international media, attracted many aid organizations. Being seen doing good work in the disaster promised to enhance the image of an organization in the eyes of donors who would respond with higher funding.

The third main factor was the ambition to support the Haitian government in the aftermath of the earthquake and strengthen its capacities to coordinate the relief efforts. The government had lost many of its civil servants in the earthquake and with 60%¹⁷² of its economic and administrative infrastructure destroyed it had emerged crippled from the event and was unable to coordinate the relief efforts.

[Refer to sections 8.2, 8.8 and 8.9, for a discussion of these results.]

¹⁷² Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti, Facts and figures about the earthquake, cholera, and development challenges in Haiti.p.1 <http://www.haitispecialenvoy.org/relief-and-recovery/key-statistics/> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

Q 4: In theory four fundamental principles guide humanitarian work (humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence). In practice, do you find that humanitarian agencies abide by these core principles?

Table 6:

| RESPONSE | PERCENTAGE |
|-----------|------------|
| Sometimes | 67.5% |
| Yes | 27.5% |
| No | 5% |

Participants overwhelmingly felt that humanitarian workers abide by the core humanitarian principles only sometimes. Reasons for this included that donor interests dominated the humanitarian agenda.

Those who reported that humanitarian principles were not followed at all attributed this to humanitarian workers prioritizing urban communities over rural areas, which received only marginal attention.

[Refer to section 8.2 for a discussion of these results].

Q5: What makes it difficult to practice the principle of humanity/ putting people first?

Table 7:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|--|-----------|
| Drive for organizational survival | 53% |
| Difficult socio-political context in Haiti | 35% |
| UN staff Incompetence | 20% |
| Lack of access to the afflicted | 15% |
| Overwhelmed by day-to-day demands | 15% |

Participants cited the drive for survival of the organization as the number one impediment to the principle of humanity. Dependency on donor's good will jeopardizes this principle if humanitarian organizations place funding needs above those of the people they serve. The difficult socio-political context in Haiti is also seen as a challenge. Corrupt government entities complicated relief efforts by keeping aid goods blocked in the customs and sometimes asking for up to 100% in tax for the goods to be cleared.

Participants report that government officials diverted aid towards areas directly beneficial to them. UNICEF, in its school construction program, for instance, depended on the government's guidance on where to build schools. In some cases, additional classrooms were built in schools run by friends of government officials, hardly damaged by the earthquake. Yet some schools that desperately needed reconstruction were ignored.

Some Haitian partner NGOs crucial to assess the needs on the ground, were unreliable since they often lacked the necessary training to deal with the complex relief efforts. Incompetence of humanitarian workers who do not have sufficient experience in disaster response was also a major problem. In addition, lack of commitment to the needs of the people and valuing their own career and financial interest hindered relief works. Many were not familiar with the principles at all. Lack of access to afflicted people and the overwhelming day-to-day needs were also mentioned as obstacles to alleviating human suffering wherever it may be found.

[Refer to sections 8.7 and 8.9 for a discussion of these results.]

Q 6: What makes it difficult to practice the principles of neutrality and impartiality?

Table 8:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|--|-----------|
| Internal and external pressure | 55% |
| Difficult socio-political context in Haiti | 47.5% |
| UN staff incompetence | 15% |
| Blurring humanitarian and military lines | 12.50% |

The majority of the participants mentioned external and internal pressure as a challenge to practicing the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The fact that donors hold the purse strings can put agencies under pressure to align activities according to their expectations and requirements. The strong presence of the media in Haiti amplifies the pressure on the agencies to prioritize projects that generate the highest visibility at the expense of projects that meet the real needs of the people.

UN agencies, operating in highly politicized environments depend on political acceptance and support of host governments. Their mandates require them to maintain good relationships with government officials, which can undermine the agencies' neutrality and impartiality. It also undermines their ability to resist governmental pressure.

The complex socio-political context was mentioned second often as jeopardizing the principle of neutrality and impartiality– see Question 5.

The participants also mentioned other factors such as staff incompetence and the blurring of lines between humanitarian actors and military actors as being an obstacle to practicing the principles of neutrality and impartiality.

[Refer to sections 8.2, 8.5 and 8.7 in Chapter eight, for discussion of these results.]

Q7: What makes it difficult to practice the principle of operational independence?

Table 9:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Internal and external Pressure | 77.5% |
| Need to cooperate with Haitian Gov. | 30% |
| UN staff incompetence | 17.5% |

When the participants were asked about the challenges to practicing the principle of operational independence, most of them mentioned internal and external pressure. The dependence on donor funding, the need to get positive media attention and the specific organizations' mandates, were found to highly impair the ability of humanitarian agencies to act purely abiding by the principle of independence.

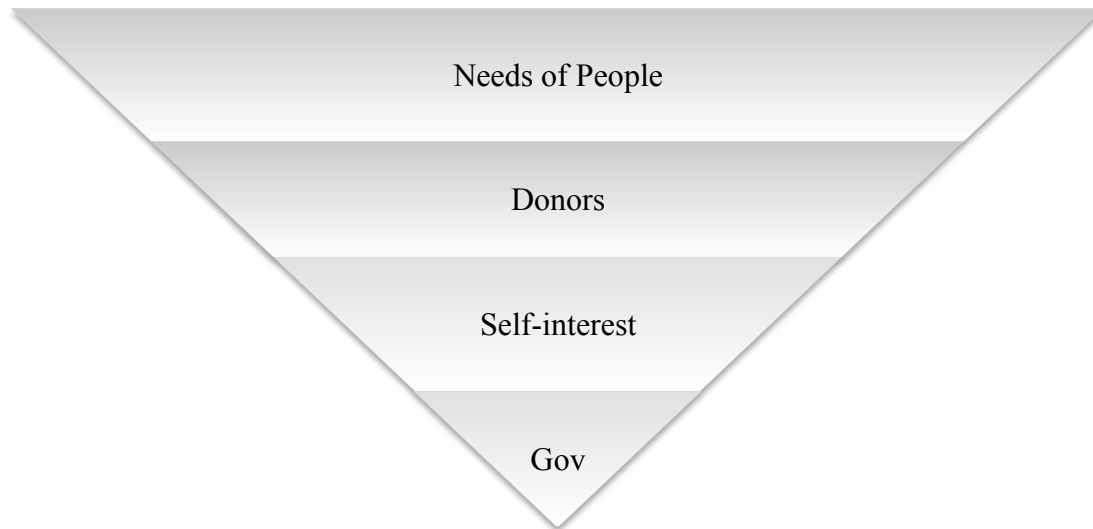
The need to cooperate with the Haitian Government was another problem. They felt dependent on the government for: authorization to be in the country; provision of security; and for admittance of foreign relief goods into Haiti. This dependence on the government is seen as an obstacle to operational independence, especially when the Haitian government attached clear political agendas to its authority.

The fact that many humanitarians were not familiar with the emergency context in Haiti made dependent. Biased and poor decisions by managers of agencies were also cited as major obstacles to practicing operational independence

[Refer to sections 8.2, 8.7 and 8.8 for a discussion of these results.]

Q8: In practice what is strongest in driving the humanitarian agenda?

Figure 1:



Participants reported that the need to alleviate human suffering is the strongest driving force behind humanitarian organizations, followed by donor agenda, organizational interests and the local government, in order of influence. This appears somewhat inconsistent with responses throughout the survey, when donor pressure and organizational interest are consistently cited as overriding the humanitarian imperative.

For example, in question 13, participants named the neglect of local needs as the biggest shortcoming of the UN response in Haiti. Again, as question 3, it would then appear that participants might be rationalizing the motivations for why they do their work, as this is a question that goes to the core of their own integrity. It is also rather glaring, that while stating that the needs of the people come first, they say, in the same question, that the Haitian government is the most negligible force in driving the humanitarian response; the government is the official representative of the Haitian people.

[Refer to sections 8.2 and 8.8 for a further discussion of these results.]

Q9: The One-Year-Report by MINUSTAH says the most pressing need in post earthquake Haiti is securing the rule of law (police, courts, judiciary) Do you agree?

Table 10:

| RESPONSE | PERCENTAGE |
|----------|------------|
| Somewhat | 40% |
| Yes | 32.5% |
| No | 27.5% |

Forty percent of the participants did not fully agree or disagree. They recognized the importance of the rule of law, but equally emphasized the grave need for food and jobs.

Thirty-two and a half percent agreed that the rule of law was indeed the most pressing need in post-earthquake Haiti. From their perspective securing the rule of law provides a solid framework for other government institutions, enabling them to cover their citizens' basic needs in the long run.

[Refer to section 8.3 a for a discussion of these results.]

Q10: Would the people of Haiti agree that the rule of law is their most pressing need?

Table 11:

| RESPONSE | PERCENTAGE |
|----------|------------|
| No | 70% |
| Somewhat | 25% |
| Yes | 5% |

Interestingly, when asked if the people of Haiti would agree that the rule of law was their most pressing need, the same people who had cited this as the number one priority now disagreed. An overwhelming 70% said that for most Haitians jobs would be their most pressing need. Some rationalized this discrepancy as Haitians not really understanding the meaning of the rule of law. Only a marginal amount of participants fully agreed that Haitians would name the rule of law as their most pressing need.

[Refer to section 8.3 for a discussion of these results.]

Q11: What in your view are the top three pressing needs in Haiti?

Table 12:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|-------------|-----------|
| Basic needs | 70% |
| Rule of Law | 67.5% |
| Education | 47.5% |
| Jobs | 35% |

When the participants were asked about the top three pressing needs in Haiti, the majority mentioned basic needs such as housing, food and water. Thousands of people in Haiti are still living in IDP camps and have no jobs to sustain their families with. Without having the population's basic needs covered, sustainable long-term development is not probable.

The need mentioned second to basic needs was the rule of law. Some participants explained that the rule of law is needed as a prerequisite for all other development in the country. Apart from the population benefitting from overall security in Haiti, the rule of law would also create economic opportunities, as investors would become more interested in the country.

The third most pressing need mentioned was education. Some participants explained that vocational training in particular would enable youth to get basic jobs enabling them to rebuild the country's desolate infrastructure. Capacity building is also crucial in breaking the cycle of independence from foreign help.

The participants mentioned jobs as another pressing need for the people of Haiti to help them work towards a more prosperous future.

[Refer to sections 8.3 and 8.8 for a discussion of these results.]

Q12: What were the top three successes of the UN response to the disaster in Haiti?

Table 13:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|---|-----------|
| Capacity building of Haitian Government | 72.5% |
| Response to basic needs | 57.5% |
| Maintenance of peace and security | 47.5% |
| Rapid fund mobilization/response | 37.5% |
| Prevention of disease outbreak in camps | 27.5% |

When the participants were asked about the top three successes of the UN response to the disaster in Haiti, they most frequently mentioned strengthening and building capacity of the Haitian government. The UN mission and agencies provided several government institutions with support in taking charge of the relief coordination after the disaster.

The UN's rapid overall response and mobilization of funds after the earthquake was also considered a success. The participants found that the UN quickly provided the people affected with temporary housing, food and water.

Participants said peace and security was the third great success of the UN intervention in Haiti. The UN achieved to uphold peace and security in the country by supporting the Haitian police and working in tight collaboration with the government to strengthen the rule of law in its institutions

[Refer to sections 8.3, 8.8 and 8.9 for a discussion of these results.]

Q13: What are the three primary shortcomings of the UN response to the disaster in Haiti?

Table 14:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|---|-----------|
| Neglect of local needs/ perspective | 55% |
| Lack of coordination | 52.5% |
| Failure to relocate displaced people | 40% |
| Lack of long term vision | 32.5% |
| Cholera Outbreak attributed to UN | 20% |
| Military mixed with humanitarian response | 10% |

Participants said the neglect of local needs was the UN's primary shortcoming.

The UN is criticized for its failure to include the local civil society in assessing needs. The UN did not always actively engage the Government of Haiti in the relief efforts.

Lack of coordination among the relief actors was also a serious shortcoming. The bureaucratic mechanisms of each agency were difficult to overcome and were an obstacle to efficiently coordinating the efforts, resulting in duplication and waste.

Following the earthquake, the biggest need is relocating those whose homes are destroyed. Participants say the UN put too little effort into relocating the thousands of people living in camps across Port-au-Prince and other southern Haitian cities such as Leogane. Clearing rubble and rebuilding houses and roads, took too long to implement.

Other major problems were: the lack of a long-term vision and instead a narrow focus on immediate relief, the outbreak of cholera from a source traced to UN peacekeepers; the UN never acknowledged responsibility, and the dominating role of UN peacekeepers and other military entities in the response compromised Humanitarian Space.

[Refer to sections 8.3, 8.4, 8.5 and 8.6 in chapter eight, for discussion of these results.]

Q14: How can the UN better serve the needs of the people in Haiti?

Table15:

| RESPONSE | FREQUENCY |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Focus on local ownership | 72.5% |
| Focus on long term development | 47.5% |
| Better intra UN coordination | 22.5% |
| Strengthening the rule of law | 10% |
| Improve quality of UN staff | 10% |

To better serve the needs of the people in Haiti, participants say the UN needs to put a stronger focus on local ownership; listening to the needs of Haitians and including them in the planning of humanitarian efforts. They also state that the UN needs to strengthen the government's capacity to better serve its people. The UN should empower civil society to disseminate information about citizen rights, to help the population actively engage with their elected politicians. This came up as a suggestion despite its obvious conflict with the humanitarian principle of neutrality and non-political involvement.

The participants mentioned the need to focus on long-term development. The UN they recommend, should implement its lessons learned during forty years of presence in Haiti. Some participants raise the issue that the UN's impact has been marginal. They say that lack of good governance and economic stability are the longstanding challenges in Haiti. This is where the UN needs to invest its efforts.

Other key areas that were cited as needing improvement were: intra UN coordination; the rule of law; and, the quality of staff. These have been adequately discussed elsewhere in the results section (Q2, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13).

[Refer to sections 8.3, 8.4, 8.7 and 8.9 for a discussion of these results.]

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

“Were some mistakes made in Haiti? Of course. Did we do some good work? Absolutely. Compromise is the nature of the beast in humanitarianism.”¹⁷³

¹⁷³Participant in survey, UN humanitarian worker

8.1 Overview

This thesis sought to investigate the practicability of the humanitarian principles in the context of crises and disasters. The hypothesis for the thesis assumed, while the humanitarian principles provide a valuable framework for the people responding to crises, aid workers face many challenges staying true to their spirit on the ground.

Another question was to understand what motivates UN agencies when responding to disasters—where does self-interest end charity begin? What challenges do humanitarian workers face in remaining neutral, impartial and independent? The thesis will now discuss the main conclusions reached.

8.2 External and Internal Pressure

Humanitarianism is under constant tension. It is caught in the center of donor interest, organizational ambitions, the genuine needs of the people it serves. It is not surprising that the research demonstrated that pressure is the number one impediment to upholding the principles. This unstable balance is due to pressure felt, from the host government, the difficult operational environment, the competition among humanitarian actors and the constant glare of the media. The hypothesis has been supported by the results of the research in Haiti. The results showed that humanitarianism is unable to exist independently from the political context it is embedded in.

Humanitarian aid has become a billion dollar empire; donors who are polishing their charitable image by investing in humanitarian activities are making political profits off it at the same time. With a higher share of funding coming from bilateral donors versus funds channeled through the UN, the pressure on humanitarian agencies has grown to incorporate donor interests in decisions about humanitarian interventions; hence to politicize themselves to a greater extent.

Most donors give money on a very limiting year-by-year funding scheme. Each year's budget has to be used before the allocation of the installment; the new budget is calculated on the basis of previous spending. This system forces agencies to empty their coffers, regardless of

whether the money could be spent more purposefully at a later point.¹⁷⁴ Failure to spend the money results in less funding for the next year. To secure their own financial security, many agencies resort to spending the remaining funds on irrelevant projects, such as expensive cars for donations to government partners. Participants report that these cars often end up in the private possession of government officials.

The crisis in Haiti gives a perfect example of how the business of humanitarianism works. While aid agencies are motivated by the desire to help people, the research clearly shows, institutional survival is an equal consideration. A never before seen number of humanitarian agencies took part in the relief efforts in Haiti. Close to a thousand¹⁷⁵ relief actors registered with the UN and many more were unregistered.

The crisis in the country was not only a humanitarian mega happening but also an international media spectacle. This offered a possibility to humanitarian agencies to present themselves to the public, and ultimately to their donors, as doing necessary work. The possibility of being spotlighted attracts humanitarians to engage in relief activities for the wrong reasons. This phenomenon is nicknamed the ‘CNN effect’. There is no denying the media’s powerful role to crises that might otherwise go unnoticed. Its power to show the world in real time what is being done to attend to the needs of the suffering, can contribute to a higher quality of relief work.

The CNN effect is especially known and appreciated by donors who are happier to give more money to agencies that are visible doing work. Their calculation is that they will ultimately be able to use the positive image of an agency they support to their own advantage. This holds true for private and government donors. This entices agencies to prioritize projects to bring them visibility to those that will truly serve the needs of the people. This is the reason why humanitarian actors were crammed in Port-au-Prince, the media capital, while some badly hit rural areas were neglected.

¹⁷⁴ Branczik, Amelia, "Humanitarian Aid and Development Assistance." Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: February 2004, *Beyond Intractability*.

http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/humanitarian_aid/ [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁷⁵ Cross, Tim, "Disaster agencies and military forces- not such strange bedfellows after all," in: Christopher, Martin/Tatham Peter (eds.), *Humanitarian Logistics: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing for and responding to Disasters*, London: Kogan Page Publishers, 2011 p. 245

This fight for the spotlight also stirs competition among humanitarian workers who should be working together. In addition, agencies spend valuable time courting the media and trying to balance this with the demands of their donors and the need of recipients. Flag waiving and turf wars were as much part of the Haitian relief activities as they were part of previous ones such as the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004.

Humanitarians are forced to make difficult decisions between these diverging interests. They have to maneuver between various fronts trying to find a compromise satisfying everybody. This quest however is often doomed to end with settling for the lowest common denominator. These diverging interests are difficult to marry. Against the backdrop of a more competitive humanitarian scene, agencies feel in stronger competition with each other. Their need to generate funds in a world of ever-scarcer resources, pressures them to listen to their donors who want to see their funds turned into visible results as quick as possible. Practitioners in Haiti argue that in the initial response phase, focus on quantitative results jeopardized the quality of the intervention.¹⁷⁶

The pressure felt by humanitarian workers is not only external but comes also from within organizations. The narrow focus of mandates can jeopardize the humanitarian principle of impartiality, which stipulates that every person has a right to equal consideration for aid. Mandates can lend themselves as a convenient excuse for humanitarian agencies to justify their focus on certain areas and to neglect others.

The UN's mandate to collaborate with the government also pressures its agencies, to agree to work under conditions that might be in disaccord with the principles. In Haiti, UN agencies were dispatched with clear orders to support the government's work. This meant while they were trying to exercise operational independence they were also dependent on its decision and direction. This situation was reportedly taken advantage of by certain government officials who directed aid into areas of political advantage.

¹⁷⁶ CARE – Save the Children: Haiti Joint Evaluation Report, October 2010 p.3

8.3 Neglect of Local Perspectives

The alleviation of human suffering should be the primary concern of all humanitarian action. To know the sufferings of the population humanitarians seek to serve, they must listen. Disaster after disaster has demonstrated that the inability to listen has become a trademark of humanitarians.¹⁷⁷ The Haiti experience confirms this shortcoming.

Immediately after the disaster in Haiti, humanitarian actors found a devastated government unable to take charge of the relief efforts¹⁷⁸. With no captain in sight, it was a wide-open field, anyone who wanted to erect a tent somewhere did just that, or whatever they thought necessary. Participants say the assessment of needs was weak, if at all conducted. One could hardly blame the humanitarians alone. The situation was dire -- with hundreds of thousands buried in the rubble -- humanitarians were racing against time. The situation demanded immediate action.

Despite an active Haitian civil society, UN agencies and other international actors parachuted into Haiti with their own ideas about what needed to be done. They marginalized these key local voices that knew the local terrain better and could have been vital allies. Researchers argue that aid workers have an unconstructive and limited way to interact with local populations. This limited interaction according to them, can lead to distorted views of their needs.¹⁷⁹ While different actors conducted their individual needs assessments from scratch, the majority of them neglected the analysis of local context, local capacities and constraints to response.¹⁸⁰ Failure to assess the needs on the ground results in distributing aid inappropriately.¹⁸¹

A paternalistic streak in the institute of humanitarianism could help explain why humanitarians do not listen. The whole doctrine of institutionalized care is based on the

¹⁷⁷ Development Assistance Research Associates (DARA), Humanitarian Response Index 2008: Donor Accountability in Humanitarian Action, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.98

¹⁷⁸ Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti, Facts and figures about the earthquake, cholera, and development challenges in Haiti.p.1 <http://www.haitispecialenvoy.org/relief-and-recovery/key-statistics/> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁷⁹ Harvey,Paul/Lind, Jeremy, Dependency and Humanitarian Relief, a critical analysis HPG Report 19, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2005, p.24

¹⁸⁰ Gruenewald, Francois/Binder, Andrea, Inter agency real time evaluation in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, Final Report, Global Public Policy Institute, 2010, p.46

¹⁸¹ Development Assistance Research Associates (DARA), The Humanitarian Response Index, 2010, p.14

explicit presumption that “victims” are too helpless to dig themselves out of their troubles and need to be rescued by outside Samaritans. The paternalistic attitude creates a gap between what recipients feel they need and what humanitarians feel their recipients need. Grunewald and Binder argue that the local population was mostly excluded from organizing relief efforts, because humanitarians often saw the Haitians as victims.¹⁸²

A clear example of this is MINUSTAH’s ascertainment that the rule of law is Haiti’s number one need. This is despite a number of researches including this one, concluding that Haitians consider jobs their gravest need.¹⁸³ Participants rationalize this as Haitians not understanding how relevant the rule of law is to their plight. It is beyond question that the rule of law is an important concept. It is necessary to upholding peace and creating the framework for societal living in a democratic state. But without the buy-in of the local people, such lofty ideas will always fail, as they will be perceived as imposed by exterior forces. Recipients must be accorded the dignity to be heard.

Why don’t humanitarians want to do better? Literature review and results from Haiti go conform in observing that accountability in humanitarianism works better upward the humanitarian chain than downward i.e. humanitarian actors feel more accountable to their donors than to their recipients. This fact clearly distills from the research in Haiti. While aid agencies like to assert that their work is based on empowering their recipients, scholars argue that they rather tend to impose strategies on their own terms.¹⁸⁴ Power is an exceptionally complicated part of humanitarianism. It underlies the humanitarian idea and finds expression in terms like alleviating suffering and providing aid and relief. While humanitarians are quick to feel victimized by donors they are not attuned to their own victimization of the local population.

Why don’t local populations, such as those in Haiti, challenge this? Local populations are often deeply entrenched in the dynamics of dependence of foreign help. The paternalistic

¹⁸² Gruenewald, Francois/Binder, Andrea, Inter agency real time evaluation in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake, Final Report, Global Public Policy Institute, 2010, p.42

¹⁸³ OXFAM America, Haitians say Jobs Key To Recovery
<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/press/pressreleases/haitians-say-jobs-key-to-recovery> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁸⁴ Chambers, Robert/Pettit, Jethro/Scott-Villiers, Patta, The New Dynamics of Aid: Power, , Procedures and Relationships, University of Sussex: Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Policy Briefing Issue 15, Aug 2001 p.1

attitude of humanitarians, who think recipients need to be assisted the way they find appropriate, is mirrored with an inferiority complex in the recipients. Too little focus on empowerment of-and collaboration with the local population and instead focus can result in their muting and stronger dependency.

Every emergency context has its own dynamics. Only through understanding of the local context and empathy with the population can ultimately lead to successful humanitarian actions. Humanitarianism should be built on a foundation of mutual respect. The humanitarian idea is born out of the wish inherent to humanity, to help others in need and therefore incorporates a certain paternalistic element. Yet given the rise in attacks against humanitarians in the past decades, it is necessary to rethink this attitude and start considering recipients as politically mature and able to decide for themselves in what way they want to be assisted. Empathy and inclusion of the local population is likely to lower the risk for humanitarian actors to become targets themselves.¹⁸⁵

8.4 Lack of coordination

A recurrent theme throughout the research is the lack of coordination among the plethora of humanitarian actors in Haiti, resulting in duplication and waste. Picture close to a thousand organizations running around Port-au-Prince trying to stake a claim in the chaos that was Haiti soon after the earthquake. The UN, which is supposed to serve as the premier multilateral mechanism to facilitate the response of all those stakeholders, had its own 16 specialized agencies and an entire peacekeeping operation with which to content.

The UN office in charge of coordinating humanitarian affairs, OCHA, was criticized, by those surveyed, as a failure; it was dubbed “Organized Chaos in Haiti”. Coordination in Haiti is conducted via a cluster system. These clusters, headed by OCHA, bring together specialists in the same field from all the various humanitarian actors, including NGOs, the Haitian Government, UN agencies and other stakeholders. The creation of clusters contributed to the swift response, in the initial phase of the crisis. Their continued existence, however, was soon resented as an extra layer of bureaucracy by some program staff. Participants lamented that

¹⁸⁵ Hammond, Laura, “The Power of Holding Humanitarianism Hostage and the Myth of Protective Principles?” in: Barnett, Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, p.195

the clusters, coupled by weak management led to confusion, and ultimately bogged down the response due to constant conflict.

Creating channels for collaboration is futile, if people are not willing, or trusting enough, to work together. The UN is well aware that it needs to be more coherent in its delivery of services. The world body launched, in 2006, the “Delivering as One” initiative. Despite strong incentives, including funds that can only be accessed as part of the Initiative, takers are few. Organizational reforms that involve giving up turf, or authority, will meet resistance. Organizations are likely to support changes that enhance their autonomy, resources and size, not those that scale them down.¹⁸⁶

In this climate of economic hardships, asking people to collaborate is basically asking them to give up individual credit for the better good. This in turn implies ceding the unique platform upon which they attract funding, as discussed under “Pressure” # 8.2. In a fiercely competitive world where being first can mean the difference between the next funding installment going to UNESCO versus UNICEF, collaboration is a hard sell.

Whoever the winner may be, the losers will always be the poor men, women and children who have their complete trust in humanitarian bodies, such as the UN. Money, time and energy are wasted in turf wars. Though on paper the mandates of the UN agencies seemed different, in practice they often overlapped. Many undertook efforts in the same areas of work. For example, the long-suffering Haitian communities were bombarded with the same questions, over and again, because agencies did not share information already gathered. These repetitive assessments added no value, wasted money and time. Humanitarian agencies on the ground could do their part to help better address the real needs of the recipients by cooperating better to minimize the overlap in activities.¹⁸⁷

Competition, in the worst case can drive humanitarian agencies to turn into purely business oriented propaganda machines, primarily concerned with raising more money by waiving their flag into the lens of every camera. The findings of the research suggest that, when brought to a head, organizational self-interest and survival will prevail over the humanitarian

¹⁸⁶ Minear Larry, *The humanitarian Enterprise: Dilemmas and Discoveries*, Bloomfield CT: Kumarian Press, Inc., 2002, p.170-180

¹⁸⁷ Ferris, Elizabeth, *The politics of protection: the limits of humanitarian action*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2011 p 92-97

imperative. The alleviation of human suffering, wherever it may be found, must yield until the business concerns of agencies are satisfied.

8.5 Blurring of lines between the military and aid agencies

A well-intentioned initiative to better coordinate the UN's work on the ground, the "integrated mission" concept, solved some old problems, but created new ones. The integration of the peacekeeping missions with the specialized agencies blurred the lines between politics and humanitarianism. The agencies struggled to manage the balance between establishing a strategic partnership and staying true to their principles.¹⁸⁸

This blurring of lines unfortunately comes at a bigger cost to the humanitarian ideal than to the political. This mix humanizes the political branch, which is a positive. Yet it politicizes the humanitarian agencies, which can have negative results on their image.

This unholy union has some tangible benefits to aid workers. In short-term, security forces allow humanitarians much needed access to high-risk areas.

In Haiti, the UN stabilization mission provided substantial logistical support and security to humanitarians. Agency staff, and other NGOs, lived and worked out of the secure MINUSTAH base. The security forces of MINUSTAH also escorted aid workers to reach unsafe parts of the country. It is worth noting that MINUSTAH, had been present in Haiti six years before the earthquake and advert of many humanitarian workers. The UN humanitarian workers, for better or worse, inherited the perceptions Haitians had of the military. Participants lamented that this association with the military made it difficult for the Haitian population to view them as neutral and independent.

Though Haiti is not a conflict state, the blurring of lines had serious consequences. The cholera outbreak, attributed to the UN (see # 8.6), hampered the humanitarian's ability to provide relief due to the anger and soured relations with the local population. Participants stated that their activities were crippled at the height of the tension because Haitians could not

¹⁸⁸ OCHA, Thematic Areas, Humanitarian Engagement, United Nations Integrated Presence, Operating in Complex Security Environments, <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/policy/thematic-areas/humanitarian-engagement> [last accessed 2 January 2012]

differentiate between the various branches of the UN. Rightly so, to ordinary people around the world, the UN is one entity. The intricate details of the Security Council versus the General Assembly, specialized agencies versus peacekeeping missions, are not even understood by some staff within the UN itself, let alone those outside. The population's anger was directed at the UN as a whole.

This blurring of the lines, as also discussed in the literature review, diminishes the Humanitarian Space. It fuels hostility towards aid workers. While they gain short-term protection, it makes them longer-term soft targets for terrorism. It can also compromise the access to certain conflict areas, because they are no longer seen as neutral.

8.6 A crisis within a crisis

The UN's good work has of late been tarnished by a number of controversies, particularly due to abuse of power and lack of accountability. Haiti was no exception. In what has come to be known as a "crisis with a crisis". Ten months after the earthquake, there was a cholera outbreak that killed 7000 people. The outbreak source was traced to a UN military camp. Within a few months, cholera had spread all across the country, leaving a trail of dead bodies and much suffering in its wake. The UN, to this date, has not acknowledged responsibility.

Perhaps, there is no greater tragedy in the industry of care, than when those entrusted with the duty to save and protect lives become violators. While the cholera case was a case of negligence rather than intentional harm, the lack of accountability displayed by the United Nations added insult to injury. Obvious errors tend to be concealed or explained away, rather than offering an outright admittance.

Needless to say, angry Haitian crowds rioted on the streets throwing dead bodies over the UN's compound and demanding its ouster from their country. At the time of writing, affected Haitians, represented by the Institute for Justice and Democracy, filed a lawsuit against the UN seeking compensation for cholera victims. Failure to admit responsibility and respond in good time, did not only sour relations with the Haitian population, it also soured UN relations with other international humanitarian organizations who were caught in the crossfire.

Unfortunately, cholera was not the only controversy the UN suffered in Haiti.

Videos widely circulated on the internet, and were picked up by leading news sources, of UN peacekeepers allegedly sodomizing a young Haitian man. In the video, the alleged peacekeepers are seen laughing and taunting their defenseless victim. MINUSTAH's response, was a bland one "We take the case very seriously and are currently investigating".¹⁸⁹

Humanitarians have the obligation to assure protection and assistance.¹⁹⁰ Not unique to Haiti, a recent study by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, the first international self-regulatory body of the humanitarian sector, found proof for sexual abuse of recipients by aid workers in several countries. The report notes five separate incidents for Haiti. All of them happened in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. In one example an aid worker asked a girl, whose tent had been washed away by heavy rains, for sex in exchange for a replacement tent.¹⁹¹

The Organization also faced accusations of not being effective in relocating people made homeless by the earthquake who lived in squalid conditions in camps.

The cholera outbreak was a disaster for the UN. It chipped away much of its credibility among the Haitian population. When problem solvers become problem creators, the local population will lose confidence in them. Humanitarians must treat with care the trust accorded them. Humanitarianism without accountability towards their recipients, becomes open to abuse. It becomes a farce, useful, at most, for joining the ranks of unaccountable local politics, in place in countries that need support to escape their cruel lot.

If the UN hopes to maintain its place as a trusted and credible force of good, it should own up to its mistakes and immediately take steps to address them. It must take action to reign in its excesses. Humanitarianism is as much about the implementation of programs, as it is about being a role model. Workers in countries afflicted by disasters and crises have the unique

¹⁸⁹Reuters: UN Haiti peacekeepers face outcry over alleged rape, September 5, 2011 <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE7844HQ20110905> [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁹⁰ Herson, Maurice, "Putting the 'H' into humanitarian accountability" Humanitarian Policy Network, Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Issue 24 July 2003, London: Overseas Development Institute,

¹⁹¹Davey, Nolan, Ray, Change starts with us, talk to us! Beneficiary perceptions regarding the effectiveness of measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian aid workers: a HAP commissioned study, 2010, p.67

possibility to be a force of change for the better. They have a moral obligation to protect vulnerable people, not to abuse their power.

8.7 Incompetence of humanitarian workers

Humanitarian intervention is as good as its implementers. Disasters hit unannounced. Over night, the UN must deploy thousands of workers to save lives and at times within 24 hours. Quick deployment, however, does not necessarily translate into quality staff.¹⁹²

Emergencies certainly attract veterans of the humanitarian response who are ready and willing to do good work. But, they are also prone to attracting opportunistic risk takers and inexperienced staff due to the time-pressured recruitment.¹⁹³

For UN staff, deployment to countries undergoing an emergency (classified as hardship duty stations), mean significantly higher compensation. Benefits, including hazard payments, can be an incentive for some staff members to engage in disaster relief work for a limited amount of time.¹⁹⁴ Time in a hardship duty station is also a short cut to a promotion and sometimes a requirement for moving up the career ladder.

As might be expected with such a mix of motives and talents, staff incompetence was a recurrent theme in the reported impediments to the humanitarian principles. Unmotivated and incompetent staff can seriously compromise the success of humanitarian missions. The results from Haiti, mirror findings from other disasters, such as the 2006 Tsunami in Asia¹⁹⁵, which found that incompetent and inexperienced workers were more vulnerable to making blunders and further complicating the coordination of relief efforts.

Poor hiring practices also account for staff incompetence. For example: “excessive turnover, partly due to short-term contracting but also attrition (health-induced, for example, leading to gaps due to inadequate back-up staff); insufficient competent staff; and a predominance of

¹⁹² Telford, John/Cosgrave John, Joint Evaluation of the international Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report July 2006, London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006, p.17-19

¹⁹³ Polman, Linda, The Crisis Caravan, New York: Picador, 2010, p.142

¹⁹⁴ United Nations Salaries, Allowances, benefits and Job Classification http://www.un.org/depts/OHRM/salaries_allowances/index.html [last accessed January 2, 2012]

¹⁹⁵ Telford, John/Cosgrave John, Joint Evaluation of the international Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report July 2006, London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006

inappropriate ‘Western’ profiles, with poor language skills and an inadequate understanding of context and culture.”¹⁹⁶

French is the international language spoken in Haiti; it is prerequisite for collaborating with the government and for communicating with the local population. Yet the UN deployed people who did not speak a word of French; participants claim that soon after the earthquake, about half the UN staff was non-French speaking. Key meetings in the initial response phase were held in English, sidelining local participants. Language problems impeded relief work, with aid workers living in their own bubble. The local population better accepts humanitarian workers who speak the local language.¹⁹⁷

The factor of inexperienced international and national staff as an impediment to relief efforts¹⁹⁸ was aggravated by Haiti’s geographical location. Only a convenient four-hour flight from New York City, it is easily accessible for staff already working with the UN at headquarters, eager to spice up their resumes with an emergency experience.

The biggest frustration for the participants was what they called the ineffectiveness of some senior managers; managerial decisions did not always reflect an understanding of emergency relief activities, jeopardizing their success. Participants accused some senior managers of impartiality in allocating resources to certain activities.

The condescending attitude of some UN staff towards the local population also created problems. This is prevalent among workers who are not driven by a desire to alleviate human suffering, but by self-interest. They were reported to be uncommitted to the humanitarian imperative. While career advancement or monetary compensation is not evil in itself, people engaging in humanitarian work should also be committed to service. The humanitarian ideal has, however, been taken advantage of by some of the people who are supposed to guard and preserve it. Engaging in humanitarianism, for some, has purely become a bid for prestige and material gain.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid* p.54

¹⁹⁷ Harvey, Paul/ Lind, Jeremy, *Dependency and Humanitarian Relief, a critical analysis*, HPG Report 19 London: Overseas Development Institute, 2005, p.24

¹⁹⁸ CARE – Save the Children: Haiti Joint Evaluation Report, October 2010 p.29

This recipe for disaster goes unmitigated because, despite the UN mandating the humanitarian principles by General Assembly resolution, the fact is few humanitarian staff are aware of the principles that they are expected to uphold. Even the veteran humanitarian staff interviewed were, for the most part, not formally trained or informed about the principles; they eventually learned of them through various avenues.

The same holds true for the author who was deployed to two humanitarian missions. On the ground, no one talks about the principles. There are no formal mechanisms for educating staff on the need to be neutral, impartial and independent. There are no checks and balances to ensure the principles are applied; it is left up to the individual's intuition to know that they exist and the individual's conscience to apply them.

8.8 Poor capacity of Haitian Government

Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, already had a weak government before the earthquake. The earthquake further weakened vital mechanisms of the government. In most humanitarian operations, the government's guidance is key to coordinating relief efforts. A government articulating clear and measurable goals, coupled with mechanisms ensuring accountability, could have contributed to an efficient and quality recovery process. The Haitian government, due to its weakened state, could not fulfill this critical role.

Participants state that the lack of government leadership hindered the channeling of the relief into the right directions, which resulted in chaos. With the right guidance, the combined force, especially of many small NGOs, could have been utilized to engage civil society in day-to-day relief and recovery activities. This would have been a valuable social asset, contributing to the reconstruction of the country. The government, which had to be consulted for approval of humanitarian actions, was not able to constructively assist in the planning of relief efforts. The research demonstrates that relief actors would have wished for a stronger role of the government.

At the same time, the research shows that UN agencies are also guilty of sidelining the government. Many aid actors took advantage of the weak governmental oversight. They were rampant, initiating activities that were not always necessary. The aid agencies justified their

free reign by arguing that the capacities of the ministries, important for the planning of relief activities, were severely understaffed and they had to take charge.

The chaos in the country and the lack of accountability within the government gave room to widespread corruption. Exploitative forces in the humanitarian community and the government found a marriage of convenience, in direct violation of the basic code of conduct for aid workers and the humanitarian principles.

Corruption obstructed the response to urgent needs. It jeopardized the lives of people by often slowing down important decision-making processes, as someone's hands had to be greased before they could green light projects. The author recalls a plane ride into Port-au-Prince from Miami, where a Haitian government official sitting next to him and discussing the personal profit he gained in the aftermath, said, "The earthquake is the best thing that could have happened to Haiti."

Badly needed relief goods were delayed in the ports of entry. Import tax demands on donated goods could, arbitrarily, be set as high as 100 percent of the good's value. In addition, substantial amounts of relief money were diverted into projects directly benefiting government officials. Navigating these challenges is daunting for many humanitarians and puts them in unexpected circumstances that can test the humanitarian imperative and make it difficult to remain independent.

Abiding by the humanitarian principles in emergency situations can put aid workers in situations of moral conflict, when neglecting them might save lives. Cutting deals with the devil sometimes might seem to be the only way to provide assistance. Yet when humanitarians yield to corrupted demands by officials it will be counter-productive in the long run. Giving in does not appease corruption; it only results in more and more demands. Corrupt patterns that further enrich the elite of poor countries offer no solution for the problems of the poor. Long-term solutions, such as focusing on education and economic opportunities, are urgently needed.

8.9 The Emergency Context

The success of the humanitarian mission is uncertain from the start. Emergencies are characterized by chaos, refugees seeking shelter, famine, disease outbreak, widespread death and suffering. Essentially, some of the toughest challenges anyone could face. Rieff eloquently states that, "...humanitarianism is by definition an emblem of failure, not success."¹⁹⁹

When the disaster strikes in a desperately poor country such as Haiti, the challenge is magnified by the lack of an emergency response system, lack of infrastructure and resources. With thousands of people buried in the rubble and racing against time, the finer details of the humanitarian principles are the last consideration. If a shovel to dig out a child bears the American flag, or indeed that of a belligerent party, no one weighs this lifesaver against the principle of neutrality. In an emergency you do what needs to be done by any means necessary. For the same reason, humanitarians blurred the lines by accepting military escorts to access high-risk zones.

Humanitarian workers can never be absolutely prepared for all eventualities of exceptional circumstances of emergencies. The bigger the emergency, the bigger the challenges involved and the greater the number of competing needs. The earthquake in Haiti is arguably the gravest disaster of the past decade. The immediate needs never run dry. Humanitarians are simply overwhelmed and they will never succeed at addressing all human suffering wherever it may be found.

Participants cited, as a major failure of the UN response, the fact that, a year after the earthquake, thousands of people were still living in camps. Only a few have a prospect of moving anywhere else in the near future. Resettlement programs in many cases only move families from tents to new camps at the outskirts of town, where they live in small plywood shelters. These sites, far off from economic opportunities in the city and schools, promise to be the future slums of Port-au-Prince if humanitarian actors and the government do not work together on viable solutions for the future.

¹⁹⁹ Rieff, David *A bed for the Night, Humanitarianism in Crisis*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p.21

For the UN, the situation in post earthquake Haiti was one of the most challenging. The earthquake killed 102 staff members; the highest staff casualty in the history of the UN. It decimated its Headquarters in Haiti and damaged other vital facilities. Yet as wounded as the UN was, it was still expected to rise from the rubble and play its role. Against all these odds, the UN agencies, with re-enforcements coming in from around the world, succeeded in responding to the immediate needs of the people.

Participants believed, one of the UN's greatest successes in Haiti was that it raised money quickly to immediately respond to the most pressing needs of the people. Participants further commended the UN's maintenance of peace and security and especially the capacity building of the Haitian government

Despite its many challenges, despite the compromising of the humanitarian principles the UN did alleviate human suffering in Haiti. Could it have done better? Yes. Were the humanitarian principles observed throughout the response? Sometimes.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

“The question facing agencies is not whether to be political, but how.”²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Leader, Nicholas, The Politics of Principle: “The principles of humanitarian action in practice,” Humanitarian Policy Group Report, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, p.15

The argument in favor of the humanitarian principles is undeniable; the principles are powerful ideals worth chasing. The reality on the ground is far more complex. Humanitarians walk a constant tight rope of multiple -- and often conflicting -- accountabilities to donors, organizational mandates, recipients and public opinion. From the battlefields of Solferino, what began as a simple act of compassion has grown into a gigantic international government and multi-billion dollar empire. It is increasingly hierarchical and institutionalized with all the dynamics of power²⁰¹.

At the outset, the thesis sought to investigate the hypothesis stating that: *“If the humanitarian principles are idealistic, then UN agencies will face considerable limitations practicing them.”* Based on the results of the research, the author concludes that indeed the core humanitarian principles cannot be practiced as preached. On the ground, humanitarian workers face considerable limitations and tough choices. Confronted by the myriad of dilemmas inevitable in the emergency context, there are too few incentives to sustain the humanitarian principles, yet too many disincentives. There is no accountability mechanism to enforce the principles; they are voluntary. While the principles are noble, their custodians are human beings complete with their own limitations. Without a firm system to reward those who uphold the principles, or penalize those who violate them, these ideals are at the mercy of more powerful forces. They are open to abuse and manipulation.

The second hypothesis sought to prove that: *“If UN agencies seek to alleviate human suffering, then they are more likely to do so when this also advances their self-interest”*. Indeed, while UN agencies want to alleviate human suffering, they also want to be seen to be doing good work and doing it better than other agencies, and thereby attract donor confidence. The global economic meltdown has intensified this organizational survival instinct. The crisis is forcing further restructuring with its call to “Do more with less”. Despite the incentives to do away with duplication and waste, cooperation for the greater good is often hindered by competition, protection of territory and conflicting policies.

²⁰¹ Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011, p.29

The third hypothesis, sought to prove that: *“If UN agencies remain neutral, impartial and independent, then they do so only when feasible and strategic.”* The data was leaning towards the confirmation of the hypothesis. The conundrum is that the principles were designed to secure a Humanitarian Space that is apolitical, yet they must be applied in a very much political context. Whenever politics and principle clash, politics will prevail. Holding on to the notion that humanitarianism is independent of these external forces is futile. The sooner aid workers face up to this fact, the better prepared they will be to at least engage in good politics. This is not to suggest that the principles no longer have a place.

The humanitarian principles are needed more than ever before. It is precisely in these times of tremendous pressure that humanitarianism needs standards to ensure it does not shift too far from its roots. Rather, the author argues that principles should not be clung onto as an end in themselves. Neutrality, for instance, has proved to be the most controversial of the principles.

Will humanitarians choose, in the name of neutrality, to remain silent in the face of grave human rights abuses? Is it their duty to bear witness and condemn those that perpetrate atrocities against the defenseless communities they serve? As the thesis demonstrated, the answers are not straightforward. Yet humanitarian actors cannot afford to brush aside these valid questions. They must actively influence the discourse.

To conclude, the principles should serve humanitarians, rather than the reverse. Principles should facilitate the ability to alleviate the suffering of the millions of women children and men, around the world who have placed their trust in organizations such as the United Nations. Humanitarianism is about people first. When the principles jeopardize this non-negotiable hallmark of humanitarianism, aid workers must have the integrity, moral backbone and wisdom to choose people. If this means renegotiating the principles, in the political context of each individual emergency, this is a reality humanitarians must embrace. Aid workers must therefore cultivate the acumen to humanize politics, or risk that external forces will forever politicize humanitarianism.

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APPENDIX

I. Research Survey on the UN Humanitarian Response in Haiti

According to UN Guidelines, there are four principles that provide the foundation for humanitarian action. Compliance with these principles is essential:

Humanity: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it may be found; this is the fundamental principle that humanitarian efforts must put the needs of people first.

Neutrality: humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities, or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Impartiality: Humanitarian assistance must be delivered on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress without discriminating on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

Operational independence: Humanitarian action must be autonomous; and implementation must be independent from the political, economic or military objectives.

In answering the questionnaire, please refer to the period between January to December 2010 (the first year since the earthquake). Thank you for participating:

- 1) What are the main goals of your agency in post-earthquake Haiti?
- 2) For the UN, what are the major challenges of operating in a high profile disaster where there are many international humanitarian actors involved, such as in Haiti?
- 3) What in your view are the three primary concerns motivating the international humanitarian agencies that are operating in Haiti post the earthquake?
- 4) In theory, four fundamental principles guide humanitarian work (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence). In practice, do you find that humanitarian agencies abide by these core principles?

| | | |
|-----|----|-----------|
| Yes | No | Sometimes |
|-----|----|-----------|
- 5) What makes it difficult to practice the principle of humanity/putting people first?

- 6) What makes it difficult to practice the principles of neutrality and impartiality?
- 7) What makes it difficult to practice the principle of operational independence?
- 8) In practice, what is strongest in driving the humanitarian agenda: The needs of the people affected, Donors, Government of Haiti, or Organizational Interests of humanitarian agencies? Please rank from most influential to least influential:
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
- 9) The one-year report by MINUSTAH says the most pressing need in Haiti, post the earthquake, is securing the rule of law (police/ courts/judiciary). Do you agree?
- 10) Would the people of Haiti agree that the rule of law is their most pressing need?
- 11) What in your view are the top three pressing needs in Haiti?
- 12) What were the top three successes of the UN response to the disaster in Haiti?
- 13) What are the three primary shortcomings of the UN response to the disaster in Haiti?
- 14) How can the UN better serve the needs of people in Haiti?
- 15) Do you have any additional comments?

II. ABSTRACT DEUTSCH

Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit war es zu untersuchen, wie schwierig es ist, die humanitären Prinzipien von Humanität, Neutralität und operationeller Unabhängigkeit zu befolgen. Die Prinzipien dienen als Verhaltensgrundregeln für humanitäre Akteure und sind somit eine essentielle Komponente humanitärer Einsätze. Die Prinzipien haben auch die pragmatische Funktion, humanitäre Akteure von politischen Akteuren zu unterscheiden. Die humanitären Prinzipien wurden etabliert, um einen apolitischen “Humanitarian Space”, eine humanitäre Sphäre, frei von politischen Einflüssen, zu garantieren. Ihre Widersprüchlichkeit liegt darin, dass sie dennoch in einem politischen Kontext angewendet werden

Die vorliegende Arbeit fokussiert sich auf den Zeitraum im ersten Jahr nach dem Erbeben in Haiti 2010. Sie erforscht die Grenzen der Prinzipien und versucht die Motivationen der humanitären Agenda im Land zu ergründen. Zu Forschungszwecken, wurden Interviews mit 40 Mitarbeitern der Vereinten Nationen, die direkt an der Krisenhilfe nach dem Erbeben beteiligt waren, durchgeführt.

Der Autor resümiert, dass die humanitären Prinzipien nicht so befolgt werden können, wie sie gepredigt werden. Die Forschungsergebnisse zeigen, dass die Agenturen der Vereinten Nationen menschlichem Leid Abhilfe schaffen wollen. Wie dem auch sei, zumindest im gleichen Ausmaß sind ihnen ihre institutionellen Interessen ein Anliegen. Humanitäre Organisationen folgen den Prinzipien, wenn es in ihrem besten Interesse ist. Sie befinden sich in einem ständigen Balanceakt, zwischen den Verantwortlichkeiten gegenüber ihren Geldgebern, ihren institutionellen Interessen, und den Interessen der lokalen Bevölkerung. In Konfrontation mit der komplexen Realität in Katastrophengebieten, gibt es zu wenige Anreize die humanitären Prinzipien zu befolgen, und zu viele Argumente für deren Ignorierung.

III. RESUME

BENJAMIN STEINLECHNER

EDUCATION

University of Bologna, Italy (2009)

Master's of Science in Development Economics and International Relations

Specialized in local development in Africa, fragile states, Islamic law, intellectual property rights

Political Sciences Institute of Bordeaux, (Sciences Po) France (2007)

Erasmus Study-Program

Specialized in Africa studies, international relations, disarmament and regionalization of conflicts

University of California Los Angeles, United States (2005)

Legal Communication, Narrative in Mass Communications, Propaganda and the Media

WORK EXPERIENCE

UNICEF, Haiti: Communications Officer (Sept 2010 - current)

Contribute to promoting UNICEF's work in Haiti in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake; confidence-building with affected families and local NGOs to ensure buy into UNICEF programmes; assist in the monitoring and evaluation of measures implemented, identifying gaps for improvement; participate in inter-agency working groups to coordinate relief efforts in Haiti and ensure coherence in the UN; effective and constant follow up with focal points as needed.

UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), Department of Public Information, Information Officer (Jan 2010 - Sep 2010)

Advocated for the Peacekeeping Mission's work towards the political stabilization of the DRC; Promoted community leadership in rural areas to develop infrastructure; Contributed to improve online community engagement strategies for MONUC's website; Developed innovative outreach strategies to reach the most remote places to promote MONUSCO's peacebuilding efforts

UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo MONUC, Electoral Division, Civic Education Officer (Aug 2009-Jan 2010)

Assisted the DRC's Independent 2009-2010 Electoral Commission in organizing media partnerships, broadcast opportunities; Civic education strategies to promote local elections.

UN Secretariat, Department of Public Information, New York

Intern, assistant TV Producer/Planning & Management Oct 2008-Jul 2009

Wrote scripts for UN- related human-interest TV reports; oversaw production of and researched news reports related to work of the United Nations.

Internship: Antenne Steiermark, Austria Mai 2004-July 2004

Involved in all aspects of radio production featuring news, weather and current affairs reports.

University of California Los Angeles, USA / John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, USA. Research assistant worked on a study later published as *Coverage of Elite Foreign Policy Evaluations (2005)*.
