



Rethinking the global aid strategy

Lisa Hastert explains why the European Union has put forward over 80 individual commitments to the World Humanitarian Summit, which took place at the end of May

As you read this article, more than 125 million men, women and children worldwide are in need of humanitarian aid. During the past decade, the number of people affected by the ever-increasing scope and intensity of violent conflicts and natural disasters has almost doubled.

Under the current levels of strain, the humanitarian system, based for the past two decades on *Resolution 46/182 (1991)* of the UN General Assembly, is overstretched. Despite record contributions by donors, funding to cover humanitarian needs cannot keep up with the scale of today's crises and disasters. It is at this critical juncture that the international community came together to rethink global aid strategy at the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul in May (see p33).

The summit gathered some 5,000 humanitarian stakeholders across the board for a wide-ranging discussion on how to adapt the humanitarian system to new challenges and more effectively serve people in need.

To enable the summit in Istanbul to set a viable working agenda for 2016 and beyond, commitments at the highest political level must be made and maintained. The declared objective of the summit, managed by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), is for the international community to reconfirm the commitment to humanitarian principles, share best practices and most importantly, commit to concrete actions.

The European Union and its Member States have committed to play their part fully and welcome the vision set out by the UN Secretary-General. In Council Conclusions adopted on May 12, 2016, the EU spelled out its position and priorities for the summit to reshape aid by establishing global partnership for principled and effective humanitarian action. At the summit itself, the European Union not only endorsed all core commitments put forward by the United Nations, but also led by example by putting forward over 80 individual commitments destined to enable communities to prepare for and respond to crises more effectively, make

humanitarian financing more efficient and effective, promote the respect of International Humanitarian Law and bridge the gap between the humanitarian and development worlds.

If the summit is an important milestone towards redefining the landscape of humanitarian action, this event is only the tip of the iceberg of the demanding work accomplished over the past two years. The initial call to action by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in September 2013 was followed by a two-year dialogue during which over 23,000 stakeholders were consulted.

Outcomes and actions

Global leaders from governments, business, aid organisations, civil society, affected communities and youth groups came together to tackle the needs of a rapidly-changing world, develop stronger partnerships and find innovative solutions to current and future challenges.

This process has led towards and built upon the commitments of the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and the *Paris Agreement on Climate Change*.

The European Commission, first and foremost through its Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), has been actively involved in the preparations and consultations from the outset. As a major humanitarian donor and key policy-setter with vast operational experience, the European Union has a role to play in strengthening and reshaping humanitarian action for future generations.

The Summit will result in a 'Commitments to Action document' and a report of the UN Secretary-General on the outcomes and actions to follow up.

While the eyes of the world are turned to the event in Istanbul, the international community cannot rest on its commitment-shaped laurels: the end of the WHS is the starting shot to translate all announced undertakings into concrete and tangible action. 

Author

Lisa Hastert is
Communication Officer at the
EU Humanitarian Aid and
Civil Protection department