A Call for Humanity
from global civil society to the
World Humanitarian Summit

We, civil society organisations working in the world’s humanitarian crises, are witnessing extraordinary global events. With intense, violent conflicts, more people have been forcibly displaced from their homes than at any time since the end of the Second World War. Meanwhile, the rising tide of climate-related disasters – including the current El Niño – means that millions more women, men and children will be exposed to disasters in the future.

The World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul this May will propose ways to improve, and to increase the resources for, humanitarian action. That is vital. We are dedicated to contributing to the changes needed to make humanitarian action, in every single instance, effective, transparent and accountable to the affected people we work with every day.

But the World Humanitarian Summit must do much more than that. It must recognise that humanitarian action cannot replace political solutions to crises. Most crises are avoidable and the suffering and loss of life that they cause is a scandal. The World Humanitarian Summit is a chance for change – for world leaders to demonstrate that they will tackle the causes as well as consequences of humanitarian crises.

The UN Secretary-General has tabled an Agenda for Humanity to place people’s safety, dignity and thriving back at the heart of global relations. He has called on world leaders to come to Istanbul and promise tangible changes to turn those words into reality.

We call on world leaders to rise to the challenge that the Summit represents. They must address the root causes of crises that affect millions of people, acting far earlier to avert conflict, and strengthening the resilience of States and communities to crises. They must reverse the growing lack of respect for international humanitarian law and other international norms meant to safeguard humanity. Too many governments, including third party governments, and armed groups fall woefully short of their fundamental responsibilities to protect civilians and allow unimpeded access to humanitarian relief.

We call on world leaders not only to take up the responsibilities put forward by the UN Secretary-General, but to make explicit and concrete commitments so that millions of women, men and children do not continue to suffer and die in crises, and so to:

1. Lead collective action to prevent and end conflict
   - **Demand that the UN Security Council** - the body responsible for international peace and security – works together to anticipate, prevent and resolve conflicts far better than it has.
   - **Tackle the causes of conflicts** - including the denial of human rights, poverty, inequality, and climate-related environmental pressures.
   - **Seek solutions to conflicts with and for the people affected** – including the meaningful inclusion of women and women’s groups in peace processes.

2. Safeguard humanity by upholding international laws and norms
   - **Reaffirm the core humanitarian principles** of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality and respect for humanitarian space. The facilitation of timely and safe access to those most in need, free from influence from political agendas; and the rights of those at risk
to be made and kept safe, regardless of gender, age, ability, ethnicity or socio-economic status must all be safe-guarded.

- **End violence against civilians** – including stopping bombing and shelling of populated areas; ending all military or diplomatic support to any party that does not comply with international humanitarian law designed to protect civilians; and setting up a new global watchdog to systematically track, collect data and make transparent trends of violations and compliance to combat impunity.

3. Take responsibility for helping refugees and those seeking asylum

- **Share responsibility fairly for addressing large-scale movements of refugees and displaced people** – so that wealthy countries contribute proportionately and far more than most do currently and all states uphold international humanitarian and refugee law by offering sanctuary to those fleeing conflict and persecution. This new sharing of responsibility must ensure safe and legal avenues for asylum-seekers to reach safety; refugees to work in countries of asylum and children to be protected and educated; greater support to lower- and middle-income host countries with long-term, predictable financing; and scaling up worldwide refugee resettlement.

4. Put crisis-affected people at the centre of response

- **Ensure people affected by crises, especially vulnerable groups and those facing discrimination, can shape the decisions that affect them.**
- Recognising that governments have the duty to respond and protect their people, set out a robust plan to preserve the space for national actors and support national and local humanitarian ownership and leadership. This must include contextualised responses to crises, in which frontline and national responders are at the centre of making decisions about humanitarian action and have adequate and timely resources allocated directly to them. The international community should scale up investment to ensure that local actors have capacity for community resilience and managing and mitigating risk.

5. Invest in humanity in order to build resilience and reduce people’s need for aid

- **Take long-term and flexible approaches to assisting fragile and vulnerable states, above and beyond meeting immediate humanitarian needs, far more than at present.** This must include demonstrating that every aid programme is informed by the risks facing countries vulnerable to recurrent disasters or conflicts; and that every aid dollar in fragile states is driven by the needs of affected people in those countries, irrespective of donor governments’ political priorities.

Other things must be done of course to guarantee that every woman, man and child can reach the assistance and protection to which they have a right. These commitments are the absolute minimum that world leaders must promise to uphold when they gather in Istanbul this May.

This is our call to world leaders – to make concrete commitments to deliver the United Nations Secretary-General’s Agenda for Humanity, a call for real change for the millions of women, men and children struggling in crises: a Call for Humanity.

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