



International Council of Voluntary Agencies  
Conseil International des Agences Bénévoles  
Consejo Internacional de Organizaciones Voluntarias

# talk back

The Newsletter of ICVA

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## SPECIAL ISSUE: “GENEVE HUMANITAIRE” DEVASTATED

### *Departure of GHD pillar risks leaving an irreplaceable gap*

The imminent departure of one of the pillars of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) process will create a huge gap in the city proud to call itself the world’s humanitarian capital. The return of Ms Leslie Norton to Ottawa, to take up her next position in the government administration, comes four weeks after the retirement of another key-figure, Mr. Joel McClellan (former Executive Secretary of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response), who has also been instrumental in ensuring Geneva’s humanitarian identity.

These departures take place at a time when the concept of “Genève humanitaire” is increasingly under threat. With the political and military sides of the UN and many governments dominating debates these days (particularly from the New York side of the pond) champions of humanitarian action seem to be becoming a rare breed. The city – not to mention the humanitarian community, as a whole – are in great need of leading humanitarian voices, such as Ms Norton’s. Too much time is spent in UN and other meetings with poor presentations, meaningless debates, and with political agendas dominating discussions instead of humanitarian principles.

During her tenure, however, Ms Norton has become famous for taking important initiatives that move the humanitarian sector forward and, thus,

helping put Geneva on the map. Her organising of debates with humanitarian officials and military militants, in particular from her own country, who see themselves as indispensable in carrying out humanitarian tasks, has made a significant impact in helping to put these militaries on the right track. An unbridled champion of NGOs, as well, Ms Norton has often gone beyond the call of duty to ensure that the important voice of NGOs is not left aside in debates and discussions.

The response to IDPs is another area where she did not shy away from bringing together UN and other agencies, which, in the sectoralised UN bureaucracy, often work more against, than with, each other. But she did not stop at the mainstream issues when it came to getting organisations to work better. Instead, she constantly tried to bring issues that should be mainstreamed (but which are not) to the forefront. Ms Norton will long be recalled for her questions focused on, among others, the High Commissioner’s 5 Commitments to Refugee Women; children; and accountability. Such issues will have to now hope for other strong supporters to step in and ask similar hard-hitting questions.

Most important of all, perhaps, has been her contribution to the Montreux and GHD processes aimed at enhancing donor behaviour in financing

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## “GENEVE HUMANITAIRE” DEVASTATED

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humanitarian operations. One suspicion of why Canada is really sending Ms Norton back is that she may be the only one who can do what is needed to get the Canadian government to implement its GHD commitments. Or, maybe, she is just going back so that she can prove to all the GHD doubters that GHD *is* possible to achieve. In any case, Canada will have to think of some creative means by which to compensate for the vacuum that will be left upon her departure.

There is, however, a silver lining even to this dark cloud that is descending over Geneva: Canada will fare well in the deal. Lucky Canadians! They get the best of everything – great country and great people ;-). The neighbours, however, leave a bit to be desired....

AND, YES, *TALK BACK* IS EXPECTING FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM CIDA IN 2006.



All the best, Leslie! You will be sorely missed.  
Ed and Manisha

### **Talk Back Editorial Team**

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