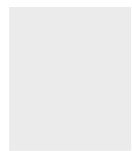


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ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE Disarmament and International Security Committee
ISSUE Discussing the Responsibility of Non-Governmental Organisations in Conflict Zones
SUBMITTED BY Botond Cservenák and Levente Cséri, Chairs of the Disarmament and International Security Committee
APPROVED BY Vilmos Eiben, President of the General Assembly

Introduction

The changing environment of war and the multiplication of conflicts has made conflict resolution more urgent than ever before and exacerbated the need for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address conflicts and restore civil society. Traditional diplomacy often falls short without the involvement of alternative actors to engage beyond formal processes. This highlights the growing need for complementary approaches to conflict resolution, particularly through NGOs, which play a crucial role in dispute resolution.

Historically, organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) set principles of neutrality and impartiality, providing critical assistance where governments and international bodies failed. The United Nations plays a significant role in shaping the behaviour of NGOs by establishing frameworks for cooperation, ensuring accountability, and setting guidelines for humanitarian work. At present, NGOs operate in regions like Syria, Yemen, and Sudan, addressing crises such as displacement, food shortages, and health emergencies. Questions surrounding the neutrality and accountability of NGOs have become increasingly complex and pressing. Efforts to address these issues have included the development of international frameworks like the Sphere Standards, which provide guidelines for humanitarian response.

Definition of Key Terms

NGOs - Non-governmental organizations that operate independently of any government and are responsible for addressing social and political issues.

Track-II Diplomacy - This form of diplomacy entails confidential, off-the-record discussions among current and former officials, as well as policy experts, aimed at addressing issues that states are either unable or unwilling to resolve through official dialogue.

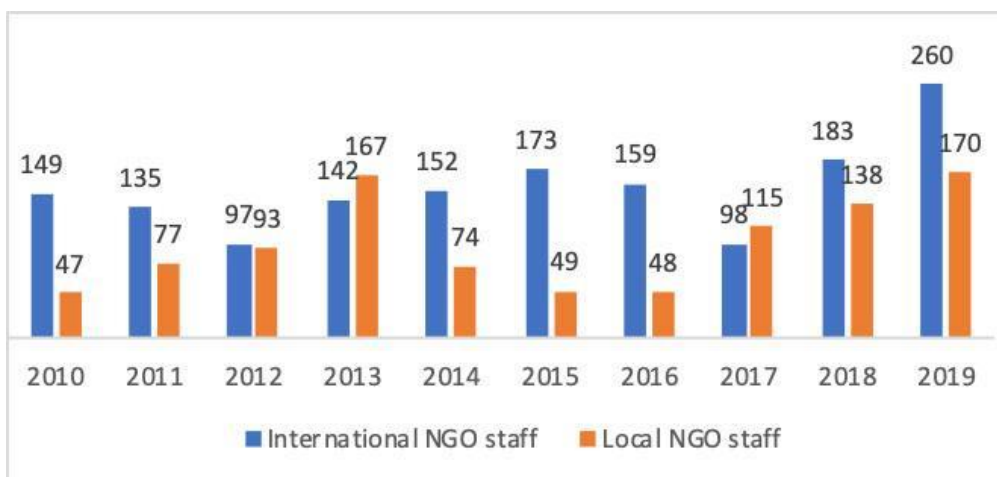
Peacekeeping Missions - These provide security, and political and peacebuilding support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace

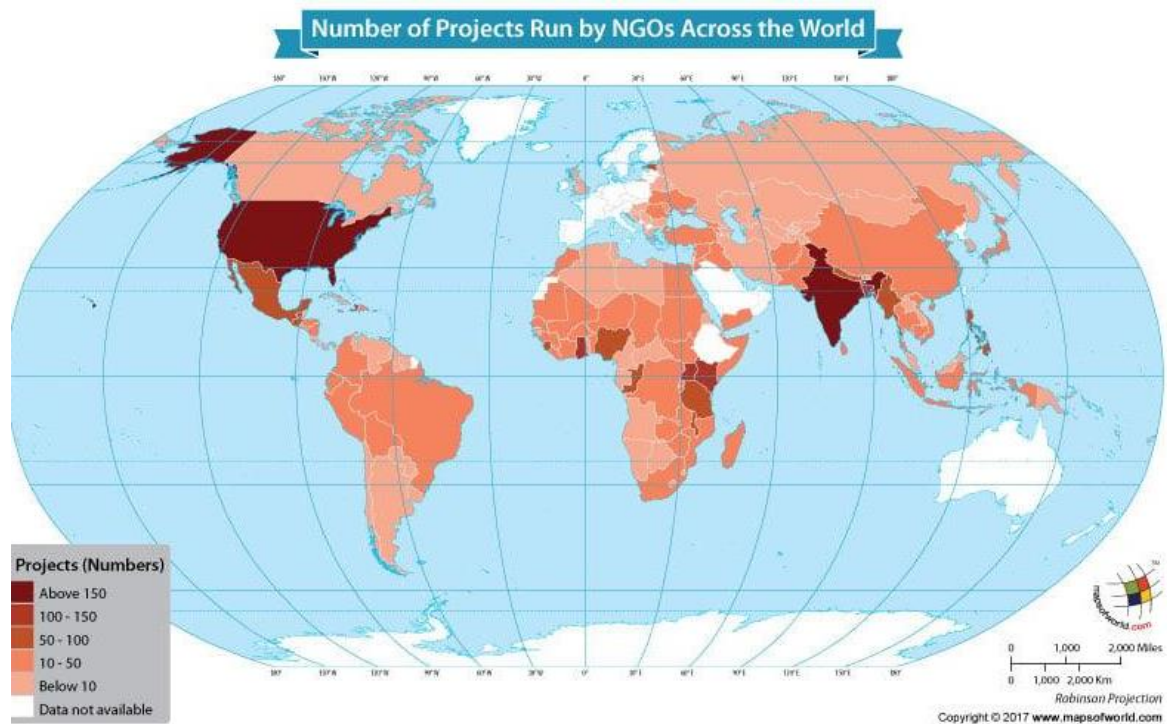
Humanitarian Aid - Assistance provided to meet basic needs such as food, water, and shelter.

Principled Humanitarianism - Adherence to core humanitarian principles like neutrality, impartiality, and independence in conflict zones.

General Overview

The nature of conflict has changed substantially in the post-Cold War era and it may be summed up for many by one sentence: there is less immediate threat, but much more insecurity than ever before. Instead of wars among nations, the conflict most often appears to be internal and rooted in ethnic division, religious extremism, struggles for power and dominance and related challenges. These types of inevitable conflicts frequently result in mass migrations, with the refugees subjected to numerous adversities and vulnerabilities, including starvation, epidemics and the lack of governmental aid. Non-governmental organisations play a vital part in resolving the ongoing crises, providing diverse skills such as humanitarian relief, preventive action and conflict resolution, development assistance, and institution-building. The primary strength of NGOs lies in their local expertise, strong connections to local actors, and the ability to be among the first responders during complex emergencies. As a result, they can face imminent danger while carrying out relief operations. For instance, aid workers are often targeted by armed groups, with over 400 attacks reported annually on average.

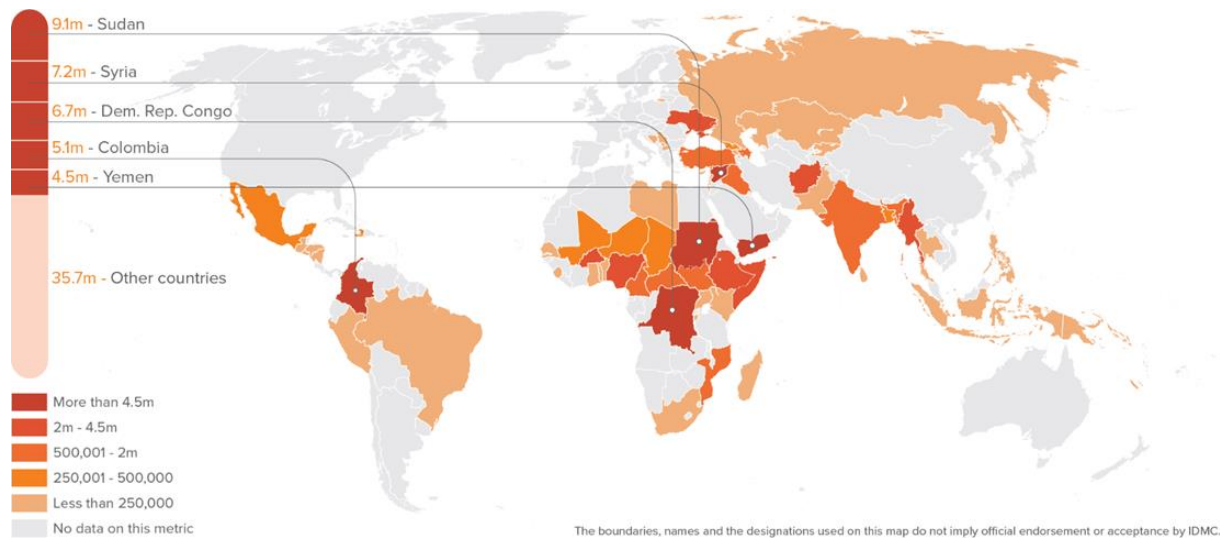




One of the fundamental responsibilities of NGOs operating in conflict zones is the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need. Such aid can consist of essential services, including, but not limited to, water, food, shelter, medical care, and sanitation. During humanitarian assistance in conflict zones, numerous institutions operate simultaneously, including national civil defence organizations, military units, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, international governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, coordinating humanitarian conflict can be extremely complex and delicate.

NGOs operate according to the framework of Principled Humanitarianism, which is based on 7 chief principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. These principles are crucial for maintaining access to populations in need while avoiding accusations of political bias. However humanitarian aid delivery faces many challenges ranging from access and security concerns, logistics and transportation to cultural and language barriers. However, delivering humanitarian aid faces many challenges, ranging from access and security concerns to logistics, transportation, and cultural and language barriers.

To mention an example, when the Syrian War broke out, organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières provided life-saving assistance to millions of displaced individuals.



NGOs play a primary role in Track-II diplomacy, a nonofficial interaction between adversary groups or nations to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize resources to help resolve a conflict. It can also be defined as ‘non-official diplomacy’ or ‘interactive problem solving’. Track-II diplomacy offers a range of activities that broaden official negotiations, such as problem-solving workshops, conferences, seminars, training, and dialogue groups, aiming at building relationships and producing new ideas for conflict resolution. The positive aspects of Track-II lie in the fact that the contacts are not influenced by any political or regional power, while the organizations and individuals involved in the contacts provide social, economic, and political benefits to disadvantaged groups, who are given a voice in the resolution of the conflict through means appropriate to their nation or regional community. This approach is particularly effective in protracted conflicts where official negotiations have stalled.

For instance, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue has been essential in advocating for peace talks in countries such as Myanmar and South Sudan.

Major Parties Involved

United States of America: The United States is a leading contributor to global humanitarian efforts, providing substantial funding through USAID to support NGOs operating in conflict zones such as Yemen and Ukraine. Its involvement ensures rapid resource mobilisation and logistical support, addressing urgent needs in war-affected areas. The U.S. plays a critical role in stabilising regions by delivering food, medical supplies, and emergency relief, often in coordination with international organisations. However, challenges such as maintaining transparency and operational efficiency persist,

requiring ongoing efforts to streamline processes and ensure accountability. Nevertheless, recent news states that President Trump has shut down the organisation or is at least planning to do so.

Türkiye: Türkiye has emerged as a central player in humanitarian response, hosting over 3.6 million Syrian refugees – the largest refugee population in the world – and serving as a logistics hub for aid delivery to conflict zones like Northern Syria. The country's strategic geographic location bridges Europe and the Middle East, enabling efficient cross-border humanitarian operations. Türkiye collaborates with international organisations such as the UNHCR and the World Food Programme, as well as NGOs like the Turkish Red Crescent and IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, to deliver aid to regions affected by the Syrian Civil War and other crises. The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, has created a dire humanitarian situation, with millions displaced and in need of food, shelter, and medical care. Türkiye's efforts have been instrumental in providing relief, though the strain on its resources remains significant.

Sudan: Sudan is a critical focus of humanitarian efforts due to ongoing conflicts, including the Darfur crisis and the recent escalation of violence between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. These conflicts have resulted in widespread displacement, food insecurity, and a lack of access to basic services. NGOs such as SAPA (Sudan Aid and Peace Initiative) have been pivotal in delivering medical care, nutritional support, and emergency relief to affected populations. However, humanitarian workers face significant risks, including violence, bureaucratic hurdles, and restricted access to conflict zones. Efforts to address these challenges are ongoing, with a focus on improving coordination with international partners and strengthening local capacity for sustainable interventions.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), established in 1863, is a globally recognized humanitarian organization providing neutral and impartial aid during armed conflicts. Operating in war-torn regions like Yemen, Syria, and Ukraine, the ICRC delivers emergency medical care, supports healthcare systems, and provides food, water, and shelter to displaced populations. It also works to restore family links disrupted by war and advocates for compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL), ensuring the protection of civilians, prisoners, and detainees. Through dialogue with all conflict parties, the ICRC maintains access to high-risk areas, enabling life-saving interventions in some of the world's most challenging environments. Its commitment to neutrality and independence remains central to its mission.

Doctors Without Borders: Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF) is a globally recognised organisation providing impartial medical aid in over 60 countries, with a particular focus on conflict zones like Yemen and Ukraine. Known for its commitment to neutrality and independence, MSF operates in high-risk environments to deliver life-saving care to the most vulnerable populations. The organisation's work includes emergency surgeries, disease prevention, and mental health support, often in areas where healthcare systems have collapsed due to war or instability. MSF also advocates for the protection of civilians and the respect of international humanitarian law.

Save the Children: Save the Children is dedicated to addressing the needs of children in conflict zones, with programs focused on education, health, and psychosocial support in regions like Syria and Yemen. The organisation works closely with local communities to protect children's rights and provide critical resources, such as safe spaces, school supplies, and trauma counselling. Save the Children also advocates for stronger global child protection policies, emphasising the importance of safeguarding children in war-torn areas. Its community-based initiatives have been instrumental in helping children cope with the devastating effects of conflict.

Action Against Hunger: Action Against Hunger operates in some of the world's most challenging environments, including South Sudan, where it addresses malnutrition through nutrition programs, sanitation initiatives, and hygiene education. The organisation collaborates with UN agencies and local partners to deliver life-saving interventions, such as therapeutic feeding programs and clean water access. By empowering communities to address food insecurity, Action Against Hunger has made significant strides in reducing malnutrition and improving public health outcomes in conflict-affected regions.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): OCHA plays a central role in coordinating global humanitarian efforts, ensuring that responses to crises are aligned with international humanitarian law. By bringing together NGOs, states, and other UN bodies, OCHA facilitates efficient and effective aid delivery in some of the world's most challenging environments. The organisation oversees resource allocation, monitors humanitarian needs, and advocates for protecting civilians in conflict zones. OCHA's coordination efforts are critical to ensuring that aid reaches those who need it most, particularly in complex emergencies.

SAPA - Sudan Aid and Peace Initiative: SAPA is a Sudanese NGO dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance and promoting peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions of Sudan. Established to address the urgent needs of communities impacted by ongoing violence, SAPA focuses on delivering medical care, nutritional support, and emergency relief. The organisation operates in high-risk areas, often facing challenges such as violence against humanitarian workers, bureaucratic obstacles, and limited access to vulnerable populations. SAPA's work is critical in regions like Darfur, where decades of conflict have left millions in need of assistance. By collaborating with international partners and local communities, SAPA aims to create sustainable solutions to the humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

Timeline of Events

1863 – The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is founded, marking the creation of the first NGO dedicated to humanitarian assistance. Its principles of neutrality and impartiality during conflicts set a precedent for future humanitarian work.

1945 – The United Nations is established, becoming a cornerstone of global cooperation. Over time, it evolves into a critical partner for NGOs, playing a key role in coordinating international humanitarian efforts.

2001 – The Sphere Standards are adopted, a milestone in humanitarian work. Developed through collaboration between international NGOs and UN bodies, these guidelines aim to improve accountability and quality in disaster response.

2011 – The Syrian Civil War begins, sparking one of the largest humanitarian crises of the modern era. NGOs quickly mobilize to address massive displacement, casualties, and the growing needs of affected populations.

2015 – The conflict in Yemen escalates, leading to widespread famine and a collapsing healthcare system. NGOs intensify their operations to deliver life-saving aid amid the worsening crisis.

2022 – Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggers a global humanitarian response. NGOs and international organizations rally to assist refugees and provide critical support to those affected by the active conflict.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

ADOPTION OF THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS (1949)

The adoption of the Geneva Conventions in 1949 marked a pivotal moment in the development of international humanitarian law (IHL). These treaties established clear legal standards for the protection of civilians, prisoners of war, and medical personnel during armed conflicts. NGOs like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) played a central role in advocating for the conventions and continue to monitor compliance worldwide. The conventions have been widely ratified, making them a cornerstone of global humanitarian efforts. However, challenges remain in enforcing these laws, particularly in non-international conflicts where violations are frequent. Despite this, the Geneva Conventions have significantly shaped the way wars are conducted and have provided a legal framework for protecting the most vulnerable in times of crisis.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SPHERE STANDARDS (2001)

The Sphere Standards, introduced in 2001, revolutionized humanitarian response by creating a universal framework for accountability and quality in aid delivery. Developed through collaboration between NGOs, UN agencies, and other stakeholders, these standards outline best practices in areas like water supply, sanitation, healthcare, and food security. They emphasize the rights of affected populations and the importance of dignity in humanitarian work. Widely adopted by organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières and Save the Children, the Sphere Standards have improved the consistency and effectiveness of disaster responses. While some critics argue that the standards can be overly rigid, they are generally praised for raising the bar in humanitarian operations and ensuring greater transparency.

NGO EFFORTS IN THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR (2011-PRESENT)

The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, has been one of the most devastating humanitarian crises of the 21st century. NGOs like Save the Children and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) have been at the forefront of the response, addressing mass displacement, health crises, and food insecurity. MSF has operated hospitals and clinics in conflict zones, often under extremely dangerous conditions, while Save the Children has focused on providing education, psychosocial support, and protection for vulnerable children. Despite their efforts, challenges such as access restrictions, funding shortages, and attacks on aid workers have hindered operations. Nevertheless, the work of these organizations has saved countless lives and highlighted the critical role of NGOs in protracted conflicts.

INCREASED ADVOCACY FOR AID WORKER PROTECTION (2020-PRESENT)

In recent years, the protection of humanitarian workers has become a major focus for organizations like the Red Cross and the United Nations. Attacks on aid workers have risen sharply, particularly in conflict zones like Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Syria. In response, initiatives such as the Red Cross's #NotATarget campaign have sought to raise awareness and advocate for stronger legal protections. These efforts have led to increased dialogue with governments and armed groups, as well as the adoption of new UN resolutions condemning violence against humanitarian personnel. While progress has been made, the safety of aid workers remains a pressing concern, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and international cooperation.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

ENHANCE SECURITY FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS

To protect aid workers in volatile regions, governments and international bodies should collaborate to establish no-fire zones, secure humanitarian corridors, and provide military escorts for NGO operations. For example, in Syria, the UN has occasionally negotiated temporary ceasefires to allow aid delivery. Such measures could significantly reduce risks for humanitarian personnel, enabling them to reach vulnerable populations more safely. However, these efforts may face resistance from conflict parties who view aid workers as biased or who seek to control access to resources. Additionally, relying on military escorts could compromise the perceived neutrality of NGOs, potentially putting them at greater risk. Despite these challenges, enhanced security measures would save lives, improve aid delivery, and uphold the principles of international humanitarian law.

PROMOTE LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LEADERSHIP

NGOs should prioritise partnerships with local organisations and communities to empower them in leading relief efforts. For instance, in South Sudan, local groups have been instrumental in distributing aid during floods, leveraging their knowledge of the terrain and cultural context. This approach not only builds local capacity but also ensures that solutions are culturally appropriate and sustainable. However, some critics argue that local partnerships can be hindered by corruption, lack of infrastructure, or political interference. Despite these risks, investing in local leadership reduces dependency on international aid, fosters community resilience, and creates long-term solutions that are more effective and cost-efficient.

STREAMLINE FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Establishing flexible and predictable funding mechanisms is crucial for enabling NGOs to respond swiftly and effectively during crises. For example, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) provides rapid funding for emergencies, but its resources are often insufficient. Donor nations and the private sector should create contingency funds to ensure uninterrupted aid operations, particularly in protracted crises like Yemen. While some donors may hesitate due to budget constraints or concerns about accountability, streamlined funding would improve coordination, reduce bureaucratic delays, and ensure that aid reaches those in need faster. This approach would also enhance the efficiency of humanitarian responses, ultimately saving more lives and reducing long-term costs.

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