

Committee: General Assembly Third Committee

Issue: Enhancing humanitarian assistance in times of conflict and complex emergencies

Student Officer: Nika Engelen

Position: Chair

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts and complex emergencies have always proven to be a very serious issue in contemporary world.. From the beginning of time, people have had conflicts in the form of war between groups; on bases such as nationalistic, religious and many others. Conflicts may cost millions of lives and may leave lots of damage. Although there needs to be done as much as possible to prevent these conflicts, this might be very hard and in this case, humanitarian assistance is one of the most vital things that needs to be focused on in order to help as many as possible people victimized by conflicts and complex emergencies.

Humanitarian assistance is defined as the aid and assistance given to victims of armed conflicts worldwide. Examples of such aid might be food, water, sanitary necessities, et cetera that are given to those in need, but also the help during a natural disaster or other complex emergency in rebuilding people's lives. This study guide will focus on the way this humanitarian assistance may be implemented in times of conflict and complex emergencies.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Complex emergency

Emergency is defined as "A serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action" according to Oxford Dictionaries. We use the term complex emergency for emergencies of a complex nature, which means lots of coordination is required for the emergency to be solved. Examples might be natural disasters, such as typhoons or tsunamis, or any type of sudden conflict, such as a (civil) war.

Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols are at the core of international humanitarian law, the body of international law that regulates the conduct of armed conflict and seeks to limit its effects. They specifically protect people who are not taking part in the hostilities (civilians, health workers and aid workers) and those who are no longer participating in the hostilities, such as wounded, sick and shipwrecked soldiers and prisoners of war. The Conventions and their Protocols call for measures to be taken to prevent or put an end to all breaches. They contain stringent rules to deal with what are known as "grave breaches". Those responsible for grave breaches must be sought, tried or extradited, whatever nationality they may hold.

- The First Geneva Convention "for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field"
- The Second Geneva Convention "for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea"

- The Third Geneva Convention "relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War"
- The Fourth Geneva Convention "relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War"
- Protocol I (1977) relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts
- Protocol II (1977) relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts
- Protocol III (2005) relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem.[35]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Humanitarian assistance in this study guide is defined as the aid and assistance that is given by professional organizations or groups to victims of armed conflicts and other complex emergencies. This section will focus on the history of humanitarian assistance in conflicts and complex emergencies and how humanitarian assistance takes place in practice, inter alia.

History of humanitarian assistance

While today humanitarian aid is often thought of as response to natural disasters and wars, it was once almost exclusively related to military conflict. The concept of appropriate treatment of wounded soldiers was put forth by Swiss activist Henry Dunant in “A Memory of Solferino” proposing a permanent relief agency to provide aid to wounded soldiers and civilians during battle, prompting the creation of the Red Cross in 1863. The Red Cross received a formal mandate at the first Geneva Convention in 1864 to provide neutral and impartial assistance to civilian and military victims of conflict under the organization of national Red Cross Committees. After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles established the League of Nations, which would become the United Nations (UN); the first permanent international organization tasked with protecting vulnerable populations and maintaining peace. Post WWII there was a sudden and unprecedented growth of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Aid began to become more global with increasing advances in transportation and communication, and began to shift from Europe to the less developed parts of the world. As NGOs proliferated, so did advertising campaigns with images of starving children, largely African; these images became the dominant Western idea of humanitarian aid which tend to persist to this day.

Humanitarian assistance in practice

There are several organizations worldwide providing humanitarian assistance in conflict zones and during complex emergencies, one example of them being the International Committee of the Red Cross. One of the things that this organization, as well as most of the other organizations, does, is providing physical aid, such as medication, food, water and other necessities.

However, this is not the only thing that humanitarian assistance consists of. Many organizations, either non-governmental or government/UN affiliated, and action groups also advocate against the cruelties people victimized by armed conflicts have to go through. Organizations do this for example by lobbying at authorities, other political organizations or even governments.

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is part of the U.N. system and is the largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide.
- The Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) is an organization dedicated to fighting global poverty. The organization leads community-based efforts to improve basic education, prevent the spread of disease, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity, and protect natural resources. CARE also provides emergency aid for war and natural disasters.
- Oxfam International is an international confederation of 17 organizations working in approximately 90 countries worldwide to find solutions to poverty and related injustice around the world. They focus on issues of active citizenship, agriculture, education, gender justice, health, peace and security and youth outreach.
- Save the Children is a well-known group that works to assist children in need in areas of the world where there is not enough money for proper nutrition, medicine and other basic needs.
- Doctors Without Borders strives to bring medical attention, surgical procedures, vaccinations for children, etc. to countries that have been ravaged by detrimental factors in the environment.

Examples of humanitarian assistance in modern times

Two great examples of conflicts and complex emergencies in which humanitarian assistance is put into practice are the Syrian Civil War (2011-ongoing) and the recent mudslide in Sierra Leone (August 2017).

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC is an organization created in 1863 by Henry Dunant. It is, as stated on their website, “an independent and neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence.” Nowadays, this organization is one of the most important in providing humanitarian assistance worldwide. (See ‘General Overview’ for examples and how the Red Cross operates.)

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

The OCHA is, as part of the UN Secretariat, the office “responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies.” It works primarily together with other UN entities, inter alia the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

Besides coordinating quick responses to humanitarian affairs with other UN bodies, NGO's and governments, the OCHA has a financial responsibility to make aid more efficient, effective and predictable. One of its core tasks is also to change international policy concerning humanitarian action and it does so by, inter alia, advocating for better humanitarian assistance worldwide and decreasing the number of casualties during conflicts and complex emergencies worldwide.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date

Description of Event

1863

The ICRC is created

1949

The Geneva Conventions are signed

December 1991

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is created

2011-ongoing

Syrian Civil War

August 2017

Sierra Leone's capital Freetown gets hit by a mudslide, causing about 600 deaths

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their additional protocols: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/vwTreaties1949.xsp> •
- UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (created the UN OCHA): <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r182.htm> •
- “Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel” (UN Secretary-General report): http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/383 •
- “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations” (UN Secretary-General report): http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/77 •
- “Central Emergency Response Fund” (UN Secretary-General report): http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/96 •

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There have been several previous attempts to solve the issue of humanitarian assistance in conflicts and complex emergencies. As mentioned before, multiple organizations, including the ICRC and OCHA, have been created to provide and coordinate humanitarian aid, and in 1949, the Geneva Conventions were signed, which was a major step forward in the development of humanitarian assistance in conflict zones.

Smaller organizations have also been created worldwide, which are working for better humanitarian assistance every day. This might be in the form of physical aid, such as medicines and food, as well as in the form of advocating for less victims of conflict or better anticipation of complex emergencies. These smaller organizations generally enjoy help from local volunteers to provide aid to those in need in smaller areas.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One very important possible solution is ensuring effective cooperation between the organizations providing humanitarian assistance in conflicts and complex emergencies worldwide. Taking this a step further might also be possible, thus creating one organization with the task of providing all the humanitarian assistance all over the world.

Second of all, it is important for the people that are not affected by conflict and emergencies to know what is happening in some parts of the world. This way, those people can help in providing humanitarian assistance as well, by for example donating money or physical goods to funds.

Last, but not least, another creative solution would be creating a conflict free and safe zone in case of an outbreak of a conflict or complex emergency. This could be created in the form of an encampment affected people can go to, to get the aid they need. Injured people can get, for example, medical aid and such an encampment would be a great way for non-injured people to stay safe.

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