Key messages from the French National Humanitarian Conference
23 February 2016, Paris

CNH 2016

The French National Humanitarian Conference gathered more than 400 participants from France and abroad, on the theme, "What will be the role of international humanitarian actors in the aid system of the future?"
The following key messages summarising the day's debates will be taken by French stakeholders to the World Humanitarian Summit.

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Called by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, the first World Humanitarian Summit will take place in exactly 3 months, on 23-24 May 2016, with the view to rebuild an international partnership for humanitarian action. Current events have shown how important this initiative is.

The participants at the 3rd French National Humanitarian Conference (CNH) discussed the ideas laid out in the Secretary General's report. The results of the conference were as follows:

- **Acknowledgment that the current situation is much preoccupying**, with millions of victims around the world and equally worrying prospects for the future;
- **A mixed assessment of the humanitarian sector**, with some major steps forward in recent decades but also the recognition that the system is reaching its limits in terms of capacity;
- **Proposals** for ways of consolidating a "**diversified humanitarian ecosystem, centred on populations and structured by humanitarian principles**", which would be able to meet current needs more effectively and prepare to meet the challenges of the future.

1. Consensus on the seriousness of the current situation

A real increase in the number, duration and complexity of crises:

- The number of conflicts and attacks on civilian populations is constantly increasing;
- Certain protracted conflicts have created untenable situations for the populations involved;
- Climate change is increasing the stress on systems that are already fragile (e.g. the Sahel, the Oceanic Islands, Madagascar, and the Andean cone) and produces extreme climatic events;
- Natural disasters have a direct impact on the most vulnerable and exposed populations.

The reasons for this situation are primarily political, notably for security crises, **and can only be solved by political solutions**. However, difficulties in preventing or ending political crises have become obvious notably in Syria, which was mentioned several times. **This raises several issues**:

- National sovereignty is too often used to legitimate serious violations of human dignity or the holding up of the aid delivery ;
- Non-compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), despite being unacceptable, is increasingly common, affecting populations and humanitarian actors, and sometimes leading to impunity;
- Global governance of international security has had mixed results, questioning the capacity of the United Nations to prevent or end conflicts;
- Regarding the so-called natural disasters, the realization of the gravity of the coming impacts of climate change has been too slow, impacting the effectiveness of the reaction.

Consequently, **humanitarian needs have grown in quantity and complexity, and are characterized by**:

- Mass population displacement, some of which are currently towards Europe;
- Long-term crises that have an impact on entire generations, notably on the youngest who are undergoing , significant psychosocial impacts;
- high standard of living and education in societies affected by the current crisis, which make the usual humanitarian aid irrelevant to address their needs;
- Problems of insecurity and access to populations;
- Deterioration of the living conditions of millions of people caught up in conflicts.

2. A mixed analysis of the humanitarian system

2.1. Positive steps forward

The humanitarian system has become more structured in the last 20 years, and has grown in capacity to address the humanitarian needs. Nowadays, the sector is well-organized and the role of humanitarian organisations is recognized. International NGOs have become more professional, United Nations agencies have increasingly become involved in these crisis contexts and donors have taken part in the structuration of the sector by bringing transparency and accountability.

Local stakeholders (central and local public entities, civil society, etc.) **have developed their capacities**, have gained in experience and have learned from the crises that have affected them. **They are now willing to play a more important role** in the response to the crises and in terms of leadership, notably because they have real competencies in this area.

New sources of funding have emerged through the private sector, foundations and emerging countries, and also through forms of solidarity from individual to individual, such as through diasporas.

Finally, various **promising technical and technological innovations have improved certain areas of aid** and have contributed to increasingly draw the attention of the private sector.

2.2. A system which is reaching its limits due to the massive growth of the needs and the evolutions of the operational contexts

The first limit concerns funding and funding instruments. There is insufficient funding. The volume of aid has been multiplied by 12 since 2000, but there continues to be a shortfall of about 15 billion US Dollars to cover all funding requests. In addition, there is insufficient funding for disaster preparedness and prevention, though it is generally accepted that this kind of investment is less expensive than dealing with the consequences of natural disasters afterwards. The funding allocation process is complex and sometimes unsuitable. Reporting mechanisms are not harmonized between donors; there are a large number of sources of funding and little coordination between them, notably in relation to LRRD ("linking relief, rehabilitation and development"). Funding is allocated per country whereas crises are often regional. Finally, in order to reduce administrative costs, donors tend to concentrate on fewer and larger operators. There is a risk that this trend will lead to a reduction in the effectiveness of the system.

The second limit is at the level of operators themselves. Development organisations need to address vulnerabilities ahead of a crisis. For their part, humanitarian actors need to revise their operational methods and think on the long term. Both development and humanitarian organisations need to fine-tune and contextualise their approaches, and avoid the standardization of practices and tools.

The third limit concerns coordination and the humanitarian system. Partnerships with local actors and the localisation of aid are at the heart of humanitarian system reforms. The system is too often disconnected from the reality of local contexts. Too often the authorities and organisations from the countries affected by crises are not sufficiently involved, if at all. Concrete, operational methods need to be brought up today to foster major changes.

3. Proposals for a "diversified humanitarian ecosystem, centred on populations and structured by humanitarian principles"

Given these observations and the issues raised, French humanitarian organisations are supporting the emergence of "a diversified humanitarian ecosystem, centred on populations and structured by humanitarian principles".

In this ecosystem, everything should be done to prevent crises and end conflicts, notably with greater **political commitments from governments to face situations of fragility and crisis.** Humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for a lack of political action. It is important to bear in mind that it is the responsibility of States to apply IHL and that standards need to be respected (as, for example, by: supporting the proposal to abandon Security Council vetoes if there is a resolution that aims to end mass crimes; reinforcing IHL monitoring systems; or respecting humanitarian principles in decisions about providing populations with aid). Measures to promote the protection of humanitarian actors and to end impunity should be reinforced.

With the increase in the number of so-called "natural" disaster situations, **the commitments of the COP 21 and the Sendai conferences must lead to concrete measures**. This will require actions in

several areas: combatting climate change; reinforcing preparedness and prevention measures; climate change adaptation; and a concrete action plan for environmental migration.

This ecosystem needs to **end the dichotomy between development and emergency humanitarian actions**. All actors are concerned by crisis situations and they have to contribute to their resolution, taking into account the specificities and the capacities of each kind of actors. Know-how has to be better used in order to prevent and manage the crisis. This implies that humanitarian actions have to better integrate medium and long terms agenda in order to guarantee the sustainability of the development actions which will be carried out.

The ecosystem needs to **adapt to local contexts**. This is not possible with a "one size fits all" approach. Cash transfer programmes, which have been a positive development in recent years, require a contextual analysis of the absorption capacity of local markets. It is important to be able to be **flexible, to support innovation and to adapt, and also to accept that risks sometimes need to be taken**. The system needs to be based on networks of different kinds, with different types of partnerships. It should guarantee the involvement of local actors in all contexts, including urban contexts.

The growing role of local stakeholders needs to be more supported, without being naive or dogmatic, and taking local contexts into account as well as the political issues at stake in crisis situations. The localization of aid is more efficient economically, but it is much more than that. It brings continuity, knowledge of what is needed on the ground and risk prevention. The system should therefore allow access to structural funding for local NGOs that meet the criteria and conditions to enter into a partnership, possibly using pre-qualification mechanisms. Beyond speeches on partnerships and capacity building, it is time to consider the concrete changes it implies. The extent to which capacities have been transferred should be evaluated, using indicators, as a central factor of project's success. This is not simply a question of access to funding for local NGOs, it also addresses specific jobs and methods of action for genuinely structural partnerships.

It is also crucial to mobilise new resources and to ensure the effectiveness of the use of available resources to respond to the growing number of crises. This could involve: new sources of funding (the involvement of private stakeholders for example); using innovative funding (as taxes on financial transactions); adapting funding to the complexity of crises and situations (by developing multi-country, multi-sector, multi-phase and multi-stakeholder approaches); lightening and harmonizing donors' administrative procedures (resolving the issue of multiple, redundant and expensive controls; making multi-year funding or commitments easier, etc.); or facilitate access to funding for local NGOs by helping them to develop their organisational capacities.

This ecosystem should ensure that the diversity and complementarity of stakeholders is fostered. A large variety of stakeholders should be taken into account, each with their own added value (local and international NGOs, States, regional authorities, diasporas, the private sector, new private donors such as foundations, etc.). It is crucially important to reinforce the role of new actors in crisis situations, such as businesses and regional authorities, and to **encourage partnerships**. The humanitarian system needs to take advantage of this diversity and to be more inclusive.

Facing these issues, it is important to **review the effectiveness of the coordination mechanisms**, and notably make the cluster system more flexible, more accessible and, particularly, less cumbersome. This implies **rethinking aid architecture**, notably at the United Nations level where there is still too much administrative burdens, duplication and competition between agencies. Networks and local consultation based processes have shown that they allow the development of a good quality dialogue and help to identify complementary between actors (e.g. multi-actor regional networks). Lastly, the system should aim at being more balanced. Funding mechanisms should not lead to a concentration of humanitarian actors and the creation of "super organisations" that are not suitable to offer flexible responses. Giving priority to partnerships between stakeholders, while avoiding the creation of oppositions and specifying the conditions for partnerships (principles, accountability, combatting impunity, legal security, risks sharing, etc.), remains the cornerstone of a responsive and effective system in crisis contexts.

To conclude, we support the Secretary General's call for a renewed political commitment towards the prevention and resolution of crises. Assisting and protecting crisis-affected populations is everyone's responsibility: politicians, humanitarians, development workers, business people, and committed citizens.

We therefore call for the implementation of a series of measures to strengthen and facilitate the functioning of the aid ecosystem, so that it is centred on populations, structured by principles, and encourages diversity and complementarity between stakeholders.

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