Preparing for the World Humanitarian Summit: challenges and opportunities for humanitarian assistance

2015/2051(INI) - 16/12/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 395 votes to 63, with 244 abstentions, a resolution on preparing for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS): challenges and opportunities for humanitarian assistance.

Parliament recalled that the number of people in need **has more than doubled since 2004 to over 100 million in 2015.** It also noted that:

- 250 million people are affected by humanitarian crises;
- the number of forcibly displaced persons has reached its highest point since World War II at nearly 60 million;
- over half of the world's refugees are children;
- a billion people could be displaced because of climate change by 2050, with more than 40 % of the global population living in areas of severe water stress;
- economic losses from natural disasters are likely to increase dramatically from the USD 300 billion currently lost annually.

In view of this, Parliament felt it was time to **pass from global consultations to global action**. It called on Member States to support the WHS and to reach **firm Council conclusions, with specific commitments and priority areas for action,** while pursuing better coordination with emerging donors, based on **politically non-biased aid** as well as on humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Parliament called for a coherent and solid new action plan for the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid that guarantees an **impartial and effective European humanitarian response**, tailored to the local context while being age and gender specific and acting without discrimination and in proportion to needs.

Parliament stressed that today's enormous humanitarian challenges require a more inclusive and truly global humanitarian system while ensuring **people-centred and human rights-based protection responses.**

It emphasised that, in order to be meaningful, the WHS outcome document should include a **five-year roadmap for concrete political commitments undertaken**, linking the post-2015 development agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21).

It called for a global, comprehensive and **long-term solution for the masses of people fleeing conflict regions**, noting that Europe's role and credibility on the global humanitarian scene is also at stake in the response in the EU to the current crisis.

Objectives of the summit: Parliament considered that the WHS should mainly:

- commit to a systematic, and participatory approach, for affected people to take part in the whole cycle of humanitarian action;

- work towards the institutionalisation, better monitoring and evaluation of the UN Accountability to Affected Populations framework;
- **reflect on the vital need for UN reform** towards an inclusive, transparent and effective coordination system, with a more inclusive and operative Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Transformative Agenda;
- increase complementarity between humanitarian and development aid in order to address effectiveness and the humanitarian financing gaps.

For its part, the EU should, as the world's largest humanitarian aid donor, show leadership in the WHS by calling for more flexible methods for delivering humanitarian aid, as well as for effective tools for **preventing crises.**

Serving the needs of people in conflict: Parliament called on the EU to place **protection** at the heart of humanitarian action. It stressed the need for the institutionalisation of the role of protection officers, and for the development of strategic and integrated approaches with **sufficient funds for protection activities** also in the first phase of emergencies. It urged the EU to commit more strongly to a human rights-based approach in humanitarian action to ensure that the dignity, and the needs and rights, of specific vulnerable groups – especially women, youth, migrants, people living with HIV, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities – are respected.

It also called for the WHS to put in place **a comprehensive agreement on practical ways to reinforce the respect and compliance of international human rights law** (IHRL) and refugee law.

Refugee crisis: Parliament underlined that migrants must be offered the same level of protection of their rights as guaranteed to all other groups in times of crises. It stressed the need to expand the Refugee Convention and the Kampala Convention to protect and assist displaced people around the world, as well as those affected by climate change, and also to protect them from various forms of violence.

Stressing the need for a fundamental shift in the support offered to refugees and to host countries and communities, Parliament called on the WHS to examine a **comprehensive "refugee hosting deal" that recognises host countries' contributions**, arranges longer-term, predictable and sustainable financial packages to assist them, makes refugees self-reliant by giving them access to livelihood opportunities, and **creates more equitable arrangements for their resettlement in third countries**.

Calling for a wide, participatory code of conduct among current and new donors, such as those reflected in the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) principles, Parliament asked the Union and all international actors to improve, in refugee camps, techniques for providing humanitarian assistance, particularly by improving hygiene and distribution of drinking water.

It urged that the **provision of humanitarian aid follow international humanitarian law** and that EU humanitarian aid not be subject to restrictions imposed by other partner donors.

Parliament condemned the continued use of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls as a war weapon in humanitarian emergencies. All staff involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including police and military forces, should receive adequate gender-sensitive training. In this regard, Parliament called for a global commitment to ensure that women and girls are safe from the start of every emergency or crisis by addressing the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

Depoliticisation of humanitarian assistance: Parliament stressed that it is imperative to differentiate the humanitarian response from foreign, political, security and **counter-terrorism considerations.** It insisted that counter-terrorism measures should neither undermine nor obstruct humanitarian efforts, and invites the WHS to address this issue in an appropriate way.

Humanitarian effectiveness: Parliament condemned the consistent thwarting of attempts to deliver humanitarian aid and any action that violates the principles guarding against "non-assistance to persons in danger." It was deeply concerned about the recurrent attacks on both humanitarian workers and infrastructures, including hospitals. More work is needed to improve their safety. Members felt that there must be a **clear distinction between civilian humanitarian and military actors,** and that the civil humanitarian response must be prioritised.

Given the alarming number of children who are denied education and the huge potential of education to increase people's resilience, Parliament called on the Council to **endorse the Commission's proposal to dedicate 4 % of the EU humanitarian aid budget to this purpose**. At the same time, it called for the establishment of a **global fund for humanitarian assistance** (GFHA) that supports the participation of non-DAC donors and brings together all existing international financial mechanisms, domestic resources and pooled funds (UN emergency response funds, CERF funds, trust funds, etc.) and that is complemented by voluntary financial payments by governments, the private sector and regional organisations.

Parliament urged governments, donors and their enabling environments to simplify administrative requirements for implementing partners. They also called on the WHS to establish a new deal for engagement with fragile states and protracted crisis with sustainable programmes.

Reducing vulnerability: Parliament underlined that an international response should build on existing **local** or national initiatives and partnerships rather than create parallel efforts. It stressed the need for a **new global model for complementarity** on which to base cooperation between humanitarian and development actors, starting with joint analyses and programming. Such a model should include:

- entry strategies for development actors allowing them to build bridges in the field,
- crisis modifiers in development programmes, and,
- exit strategies for humanitarian responses;
- accountable and flexible multiannual funding mechanism for responding to protracted crises.

It called on the Commission to present an initiative to link humanitarian aid, development cooperation and resilience in a more systematic way, so as to enable the EU to be more flexible and effective in responding to growing needs.

Managing risk: Parliament stressed the importance of disaster risk reduction for resilience in four priority areas:

1) understanding disaster risks;

2) strengthening risk governance to manage disaster risk;

3) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience, contingency plans and early warning systems; and

4) enhance disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "build back better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Parliament also underlined that disaster preparedness, risk reduction and resilience should **systematically be incorporated** into the response plans to be provided by local, regional and national administrations, industry and civil society. It called on the WHS to give strong emphasis to the issue of **climate change** and humanitarian action.

Transformation through innovation: Parliament stressed the importance of minimum humanitarian standards to boost essential public services, such as education, nutrition, health, shelter, water and

sanitation throughout humanitarian responses. It believed that public-private and cross-sectorial partnerships could be a means to complement the public response to growing humanitarian needs. It acknowledged that while only a small proportion of humanitarian assistance is currently **cash-based**, the use of cash-based assistance has significant potential as an innovative, dignifying, safe, gender sensitive, flexible and cost-efficient modality to cover the emergency basic needs of the most vulnerable. It called on the EU and its Member States to promote the common principles and the **use of unconditional cash assistance.**

Parliament emphasised the role of new technologies and innovative digital tools in the organisation and delivery of the humanitarian aid, particularly in remote areas and disaster zones. It highlighted that Africa, and especially sub-Saharan Africa, is currently undergoing a mobile digital revolution with a surge in mobile subscriptions (and mobile internet use), makings such tools crucial for putting in place early warning systems and for providing **speedy information on health matters, danger areas and aid contacts.**

The EU was also asked to explore and encourage partnerships with start-ups, and with insurance and technology companies, with a view to developing tools for **preparedness and deployment in emergencies.** Parliament also called for the involvement of businesses, especially SMEs, while respecting humanitarian principles and ethical standards.

Lastly, Parliament emphasised the need to ensure predictable and **timely funding for humanitarian aid through the EU budget.**