

Redefining the Role of Humanitarian Organizations in Civil Emergencies

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Introduction

The end of the twentieth century brought about the collapse of the bipolar world order and the “balance of fear,” and saw it replaced by the increase of global instability, which prompted worldwide integration processes. The position of the authors is that a global war is hardly likely to occur in the twenty-first century. Instead, we find that the main challenges to global security will be insurgencies, international terrorism, civil emergencies such as natural disasters and man-made disasters, and conflicts over natural resources. Consequently, the role of humanitarian international organizations and other institutions is being redefined, along with the nature of their participation in conflict prevention and emergency management. A new overall approach to this issue is being developed that touches on all aspects of crisis management: political, military, economic, humanitarian, social, and environmental. All participants in those processes must adapt themselves to new conditions, and humanitarian organizations are no exception, since they are important players in the prevention and mitigation of emergencies and in post-crisis recovery efforts.

The circumstances that can cause emergencies have changed significantly; yet security challenges still exist, as well as the need for efficient civil emergency planning and relief. Within the framework of the new circumstances, crisis relief in cases of emergency and war is the most important humanitarian activity carried out by society.¹ Good organization and efficient functioning of humanitarian organizations in an emergency situation—and particularly in the case of war—can be of paramount importance for the survival of civilian populations as well as for the management of the consequences of peacetime emergencies. In the organization and implementation of civil emergency relief, humanitarian organizations—both national and international—participate alongside the maximum engagement of governmental services and institutions. The core roles, tasks, and principles of the work on which civil emergency relief is based and implemented reside within different areas of assistance provided by humanitarian organizations. The conse-

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¹ This article discusses war, although the authors’ opinion is that in the near future the possibility of large-scale direct military aggression is almost nonexistent.

quences of emergencies include human losses, environmental destruction, the inability to provide basic human needs (water, food, and shelter), and the destruction of infrastructure, all of which endanger the survival of civilians, and especially that of the most vulnerable: children, women, and the disabled, sick, and elderly. Since assistance needs to be provided promptly, humanitarian agencies need to become immediately engaged at the request of the relevant authorities.

New Challenges for Humanitarian Organizations

The last decade of the twentieth century was marked by positive and encouraging security tendencies, on one hand, but on the other hand it was marked by the escalation of global terrorism and other security challenges that have significantly changed the security climate around the world. Although the number of armed conflicts between states is decreasing, the world is, nevertheless, facing numerous challenges, above all the violation of basic human rights to live in peace, freedom, and in a healthy environment, and to enjoy economic development or state territorial integrity. Huge economic differences between the developed West and the non-developed East (or, perhaps more accurately, between the wealthy North and the poor global South), fueled by support from a wide variety of interest groups, instigate terrorism, corruption, and organized crime. Terrorism—which is promoted by different groups, from political radicals to religious fundamentalists, and has the potential to deploy highly dangerous weapons, including weapons of mass destruction—has been the greatest threat in recent years, and it cannot be prevented without eliminating its deep roots.

Although the nature of global security challenges has changed, their consequences have not; the results of a terrorist attack can be the same as those of an attack carried out by a conventional military force. We still need to engage all of our resources in civil protection. In order to develop an overall security approach, all its aspects ought to be analyzed: political, military, economic, humanitarian, social, etc. For this reason it is necessary to redefine the role of humanitarian organizations, since the mobilization of all humanitarian organizations in the field of emergency management is still an important factor for overcoming the challenges of crisis response.

In cases of emergency, the state authorities, the respective government institutions and bodies in charge of civil emergency relief, and non-governmental humanitarian organizations are responsible for the protection of endangered populations. They plan, organize, and conduct civil emergency relief operations. Regardless of the altered conditions of the security environment, civil emergency relief efforts are to be divided into two different categories, the consequences of which are still the same—civilian losses and suffering. Those categories are peacetime civil emergency relief and wartime civil emergency relief.

Emergency Relief in Wartime

In both scenarios mentioned above, humanitarian organizations play a critical role in providing urgent civil emergency relief and aiding in the mitigation of consequences following a crisis. If we look at the wartime civil emergency scenario, there are certain situations that demand a response from humanitarian organizations. Those situations include mass civilian losses in the war zone and its vicinity, or the use of weapons of mass destruction or other forms of attack that cause the loss of lives, destruction of property, and the environment.

The lessons learned from major refugee crises worldwide show that the usual emergency measures, such the provision of food and water, shelter, and medical assistance are ineffective if rescue plans are not implemented in an organized manner.² These situations are followed by states of humanitarian emergency; the most important step in such cases is to properly react to and meet the needs of the affected civilian population. In such extreme situations, cooperation between different humanitarian organizations is too often slow and inadequate (although there are international efforts underway to improve reaction time and cooperation in emergency situations). Consequently, it is no surprise that there is confusion on the part of humanitarian organizations when facing extreme situations.

In order to adequately respond to such emergencies, it is necessary to conduct certain preparations. In cases of war-related catastrophes, it is necessary to implement urgent measures in order to alleviate negative consequences. The plans for deployment and rules of engagement of all the available resources must be in place in order to minimize human losses and material damages. It is of the utmost importance for a state to have at its disposal the resources necessary to carry out any type of emergency relief and, if the situation requires, to mobilize additional human and material support. Civil Protection, Civil Defense, or an institution responsible for emergency management should be the organization through which the state assists its population in cases where humanitarian relief is required. The Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations that can be part of emergency relief operations should be involved as well.

If a country is in a state of war or involved in other armed conflict, and there is no emergency management system in place, or the existing system is inadequate, the state then must mobilize all its available national resources and request assistance from the international community. As a rule, humanitarian organizations shall provide assistance to endangered populations regardless of their race, gender, age, religion, political affiliation, or any other differences. Assistance from humanitarian organizations is based on consolidated appeals launched by state institutions or from the endangered territory. Their direct assistance includes providing

² As has been illustrated by the crises in Serbia, Sudan, Rwanda, etc.

emergency supplies of food, drinkable water, drugs, and other medical assistance, as well as emergency housing for displaced persons and/or refugees.

The 1990s frequently witnessed intense conflicts within state borders that caused mass displacements of people, increased violence, and loss of life, as well as severe damage to the states' society and economy. Those complex, urgent cases caused enormous humanitarian crises in what were often extremely confusing and complicated political and military environments. The aspirations of modern society to maintain the peace and avoid war, as well as to enhance international cooperation and mutual respect and tolerance, are the starting points in improving solidarity and cooperation in humanitarian activities. Therefore, the fact that current research projects focus on the role of humanitarian organizations in protecting endangered civilians in civil emergencies is of great relevance. Presently, that role is arguably more relevant than ever. Due to contemporary challenges, risks, and threats, it is not possible to foresee all potential emergencies, and that greatly complicates the operations of institutions and individuals devoted to protecting and rescuing civilians and material and cultural property.

Despite the development of international institutions and world aspirations that have produced cooperative efforts in the field of security, international relationships still cannot be completely controlled nor considered a guarantee of peace and security. This is particularly true of civil emergencies that cannot be predicted and prevented on the basis of previous experience, and under which civilians suffer. In any case, regardless of whether these civil emergencies are caused by human or natural factors, the consequences are the suffering and agony of innocent people, and significant destruction of property. War has always been and still is the main cause and the worst form of emergency situations, with catastrophic consequences for civilians, mostly because of the advanced weapons systems that are deployed, and the frequently indiscriminate application of extremely dangerous and destructive capabilities. Therefore it is necessary to increase the efficiency of humanitarian activities and to evaluate the capabilities of humanitarian organizations and institutions according to their preparedness to carry out their functions in civil emergencies resulting from armed conflicts.

Challenges in Providing Relief

The most complex problems in civilian relief operations are supplying adequate shelter, food, and health care, and creating the optimal conditions for the return of displaced people to their normal lives (leading to the final resolution of their status). The lessons learned from major civil relief operations show that there is a significant discrepancy between the needs that exist and the efficiency of the relevant institutions and organizations in providing for those needs. That phenomenon should be analyzed, taking into consideration economic, social-educational, legal, and political parameters. A thorough analysis of this problem may lead to a more

clearly defined role for humanitarian organizations in civil relief operations in emergency situations.

Based on the experience of the recent wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia—the largest emergency in this region since World War II—a few basic problem areas can be emphasized. For the purposes of this study, we will examine the influence and contribution of humanitarian organizations, as well as internal and international actors that provide assistance for refugees, persons affected by war, and internally displaced persons (who came to Serbia after the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia).

The problems identified and examined during our research are as follows:

- The lack of defined steps in the process of providing shelter, food, health care, legal status, and humanitarian aid in civil emergencies on the basis of prior experience
- An inadequate level of efficiency on the part of humanitarian organizations in carrying out fundamental tasks of assisting civilians in civil emergencies
- Incomplete regulations and inertia of relevant institutions in assisting endangered civilians and the elimination of the consequences of emergency situations
- The volume and dynamics of delivery and the abuse of humanitarian aid.

A study of the problem of assisting civilians in crisis situations is accompanied by various difficulties, mostly of a methodological nature. Those difficulties indicate the lack of adequately developed instruments for measuring the efficiency of humanitarian organizations in providing emergency relief to civilian populations. Beyond that, research on humanitarian organizations is limited for various political reasons, as well as by the reasonable doubts that exist regarding the accuracy of statements given by refugees and internally displaced persons. In social science research, the requirement to state one's social status and nationality affects minority groups to the degree that they perceive the questionnaire as an inappropriate form of a test of loyalty or gratitude to the donor or humanitarian organization, regardless of whether the question is based on a factual situation or on attitudes and beliefs. Beneficiaries may have doubts about the motivations behind a questionnaire they are asked to complete and, consequently, they may exaggerate in agreeing with generally accepted norms, and may even modify their actual behavior to comply with these norms. In such polls, recipients of aid often give socially acceptable answers for fear of losing their legal status, which jeopardizes the reliability of the study. This phenomenon is known as the "interview effect." It can certainly be concluded that respondents in this study were subject to this effect. To confirm that, the same questions were asked by the UNHCR, the Red Cross, and the authors of this study. In our opinion, the responses we received are more hon-

est, because we come from the same region and social background as the respondents, so they felt free to tell the truth. It is also important to emphasize that we are not part of the institutional system of humanitarian aid, and respondents knew that. This indicates the need for new and better solutions that will solicit adequate answers to research questions about the role of humanitarian organizations in assisting civilians in emergencies.

The results of those questionnaires create a solid basis for analyzing and assessing the methodology of this project. Well-established interview effects should be taken into consideration by international organizations within their own projects. Research that takes into consideration elements of its own supervision and project evaluation should enable these organizations to present objective indicators of success to donors. This is important because the authors of current research projects for such organizations are often experts in humanitarian aid, but not in methodology. As a result, serious errors in research are not unusual. This can lead to collecting unreliable data, which leads to inaccurate conclusions.

Generally speaking, social acceptance is used to emphasize the tendency of respondents to give answers in order to satisfy researchers. While that could be a fundamental motivation, especially in a survey conducting research on attitudes and opinions, those who conduct research on social acceptance do not see it as an adequate explanation of influence on factual questions. Stereotyped behavior disables the pressure of unpleasantness and thus helps to avoid appraisal and potential degradation in the processing of information. The research effort coincides considerably with the environment that is being tested, where stereotyped behavior can affect answers to factual questions.

In spite of these problems, the results obtained should be interpreted from an analytical and scientific point of view. The parts of the study that investigate both the scope of the activities and the role of humanitarian organizations, as well as the factors that affect them most in civil emergencies, are shown at the level of scientific description. That is to say, the impact of the described factors on humanitarian organizations in civil emergencies as well as the cause/effect dependence and legality are identified and described by applying relevant scientific methodology. During the research, the authors' level of cooperation with international humanitarian organizations was higher than with national organizations. Different UN agencies were much more cooperative than the International Red Cross. Essential data for the research were provided by the Belgrade Red Cross, which demonstrated a high level of cooperation and a positive attitude toward this research.

The events of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia (SFRY) required a more intensive response on the part of humanitarian organizations in assisting endangered civilians. But the disintegration of the SFRY and its former political regime made humanitarian organizations' activities almost impossible, and destroyed their na-

tional organizational structures. Thus, the SFRY Red Cross organization, formerly composed of many small Red Cross organizations (on the level of the Republics), became the Red Cross organization for the rump Yugoslavia (SRY, eventually Serbia and Montenegro). Thus the overall responsibility for assisting refugees, war-affected persons, and internally displaced persons lay with that weakened organization.

A unique situation developed due to the civil war (which had both sectarian and ethnic characteristics) and the resulting NATO intervention. In a relatively short period of time (1995–99), military operations provoked two great social disturbances, and the consequence was a great influx of internally displaced persons and refugees. At the dawn of the new millennium, Serbia, a European country, was facing a major social, economic, and humanitarian crisis brought about by the presence of 560,000 refugees and other war-affected or internally displaced people. Under these circumstances, providing relief for that number of people was a mission close to impossible. The state, along with humanitarian NGOs and society in general, was incapable of offering either sufficient or efficient assistance to the refugees and displaced civilians. The following factors negatively influenced the intensity and effects of the process of assisting these categories of beneficiaries:

- The transition and transformation of the state and society, which are long-lasting, complex, and difficult processes
- The closure or obsolescence of industrial facilities as a result of events that occurred in the 1990s
- Severed economic and commercial relations with foreign countries and within the country itself
- A certain degree of distrust and a negative attitude toward Serbia within the international community, caused by the civil war
- Economic sanctions, which lasted for a long period of time and resulted in an economic crisis
- A halt to the work of humanitarian and other NGOs, and limitations on humanitarian activities.

Although the most important mission for humanitarian organizations is taking care of endangered civilians in peacetime—that is, offering help with humanitarian aid and shelter; supplying adequate amounts of quality food, water, and health care; and especially resolving people’s refugee status—humanitarian organizations have to be supported by relevant institutions both within individual states and the international community. Therefore, the final and overall solution of these problems requires the cooperation and coordinated activities of all participants involved in humanitarian efforts. Humanitarian organizations should play an important principle-driven and creative role in these processes.

Improving Standards for the Provision of Aid

Various analyses show that the current level of overall humanitarian activities with respect to solving the problems of refugees and assisting displaced persons is not satisfactory. Even though there are objective problems at the general, social level, which often provide the environmental context for action, humanitarian organizations are unable to fully accomplish their essential role in assisting endangered civilians. A clear example of this problem is the situation in Serbia in 2005. Fifteen years after the influx of refugees from the former Yugoslav Republics, and six years after the displacement of part of the population from Kosovo and Metohija, the 2005 census in Serbia showed that 346,749 persons still held the status of refugees or internally displaced persons.³

The lessons learned from the experience of humanitarian organizations in assisting endangered civilians in civil emergencies have not been comprehensively analyzed and sufficiently taken into consideration in defining either the standards that must be met by any successful civil emergency relief operation or the criteria for evaluation of the defined solution to the civil emergency situation. The study carried out by Dr. Strbac confirms the existence of significant discrepancies in the level of success for different stages of a civil emergency operation.⁴ In addition to that, the beneficiaries have very different perceptions of their treatment and the performance of the services involved in the relief effort. The research also shows that the process of assisting refugees and displaced persons is done in a disorganized and fragmentary manner. Consequently, the majority of potential beneficiaries are left out, and forced to take care of their needs on their own. This leads to the conclusion that, although there are situations that are difficult to envisage, civil emergency planning is currently very poorly done, and significant efforts need to be invested in enhancing both the process and the final product of the process—the creation of a civil emergency plan of action.

Shelter

Dr. Strbac's research shows that refugees and internally displaced persons are of the opinion that very little is done in providing housing, although it is a vital element of any civil emergency operation. The reasons for expressed discontent are as follows:

- Lack of estimates for the duration and consequences of war operations from the humanitarian perspective, and an unexpected influx of refugees and displaced persons, resulting in a “surprise effect”

³ The census was performed by the Belgrade office of the UNHCR.

⁴ See the doctoral thesis on which this article was based, Dr. Katarina Strbac, “The Role of Humanitarian Organizations in Civil Emergencies,” Belgrade University, 2004.

- Insufficient preparation by humanitarian organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the government itself in organizing and planning the admission of these categories of people
- An insufficient number of the various types of emergency shelters, and the meager supply of such shelters to existing refugee camps
- Lack of direct communication and concrete cooperation and coordination between the government and humanitarian organizations and NGOs in admitting and sheltering refugees and internally displaced persons
- The absence of monitoring and the lack of agreed steps to be taken toward improving conditions in the refugee settlements.

One of the most difficult problems in providing for endangered civilians in emergency situations is shelter. Regardless of the causes of the emergency, in either wartime or peacetime circumstances, the first activity in taking care of endangered people is evacuation from the endangered territory and the provision of shelter. Therefore, resolving the problem of shelter—the most critical and important step that is *the* basic condition in taking care of any endangered population—should not be left to chance and resolved in an arbitrary way.

Therefore it is more than necessary to standardize methods of providing shelter for endangered populations and getting housing solutions to a level of mobile readiness, so that they can be deployed on short notice. On the basis of our research, several things would contribute to greater success on the part of humanitarian organizations in providing shelter:

- Defining the concept, content, and various methods of sheltering endangered civilian populations in emergency situations
- Precisely defining the types of shelter that might be used (centralized, group, or joint kinds of shelter in refugee camps should be the basic types; all the other, complementary forms would be used depending on individual choice)
- Defining standards for the infrastructure, equipment, autonomy, and general conditions for normal living in refugee camps
- Specifying criteria for the objective evaluation of the quality of shelters, which should depend neither on respondents' judgments nor exclusively on the observations and unsystematic estimates of examiners.

Addressing these questions could be the foundation for humanitarian organizations to take concrete preparatory steps in providing for endangered populations in eventual civil emergencies, such as:

- Selection and refurbishing of existing facilities suitable for the collective lodging of endangered civilians, including schools, military barracks, rest homes, camps, and similar sites, and eventually organizing new camps if needed (of

course, these are mostly objects that are used for different purposes in regular situations, but they could be adopted and used in emergency situations)

- Anticipation of needs and, depending on the possibilities, equipping of special housing for the elderly
- Creation of processing centers for the admission and recording of details on refugees in order to obtain general insight into the number, structure, and conditions of the endangered populations, as well to as classify and assign people to suitable buildings and shelter types.

To conclude, well-organized, well-prepared, and highly mobile admission centers and refugee shelters are the first and most important links in the chain of providing shelter and more generally successfully aiding endangered populations.

Food

Humanitarian organizations, as suggested earlier, should have a well-prepared global action plan that would be useful in any civil emergency. On the issue of food, our research confirms that assistance is mostly provided on individual bases by means of financial support to refugees. A number of refugees are supported by their relatives, who often provide food and temporary shelter. The observation that only a very small number of refugees are able to rely completely on refugee camps points to the fact that the camps did not have enough food of good quality, and were not able to prepare it.

Respondents' level of satisfaction with food quality must be perceived as circumstantial, because their statements stemmed from the fact that they had very limited financial means, and that they were not exactly starving. That pointed to the need to define standards and criteria for the provision of quality nutrition to the endangered civilian population. The following elements were taken into consideration:

- Timely supply of prescribed quantities of food for immediate consumption, as well as of food reserves
- Reopening and complete fitting of public kitchens in refugee camps or outside them, and plans to establish new ones depending on future needs
- Ensuring a centralized method for the preparation and distribution of quality food within the refugee camps.

Health Care

The issue of medical care for refugees and internally displaced persons generally received a positive evaluation, mostly thanks to the well-developed structures and widely dispersed medical institutions in Serbia, as well as the social protection policies that were in place in the country at that time. Taking into account the possible appearance of sudden emergency situations provoked by natural phenom-

ena—or, for example, terrorist actions, which could lead to massive numbers of injuries in a very short time—humanitarian organizations should define the rules of action and operation in such cases.

In order to provide needed care for endangered people on a large scale, it is critical to accomplish the following steps in a timely fashion:

- Establish and prepare mobile medical teams for work in refugee camps and interventions in caring for civilians
- In coordination with appropriate state authorities, the possibility of free or very inexpensive medications should be arranged for sick refugees and displaced persons
- Similarly, free medical treatment should be provided for people who get sick while under refugee or displaced person status.

Efficient Operations

Under emergency circumstances, humanitarian organizations make essential contributions to the reduction and alleviation of threats to endangered populations. These organizations play a critical role in taking care of refugees or internally displaced persons that are suffering as a consequence of warfare or peacetime catastrophes; both people and the reduction of material damage depend on their efficiency. The efficient functioning of humanitarian organizations is conditioned on various factors, of which the most significant are:

- The level of organization and mobile readiness for quick action in emergency situations
- The financial and material capabilities of the society in which the organization operates
- The intensity and scope of the actual international humanitarian support
- The level of built-up trust in and reputation of humanitarian organizations in general within the society
- Respect for the main principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and enforcement of international human rights.

Dr. Strbac's research results indicate that humanitarian organizations did not fully carry out their role in the relief of refugees and internally displaced persons from the territory of the former Yugoslavia.⁵ According to this analysis in the field of humanitarian aid, the current state of affairs in assisting endangered people is unsatisfactory. Great numbers of refugees and displaced persons are dissatisfied

⁵ Ibid.

with the scope of humanitarian aid, and even more are dissatisfied because of abuses in the distribution of that aid.⁶

The Red Cross, in its role as the largest humanitarian organization in Serbia, was not efficient enough in taking care of the refugees and displaced persons. That inefficiency was demonstrated through:

- Insufficient preparation for the reception and sheltering of refugees and internally displaced persons
- Lack of involvement in enhancing standards of living in the refugee camps
- Poor organization of the distribution of humanitarian aid, as well as insufficient monitoring of its use
- Insufficient provision of hygienic items and other goods necessary for daily life
- Limited influence on national and international politics to alleviate or eliminate the consequences of the civil emergency.

Improving Cooperation

It should be noted that the internal organizational shortcomings of humanitarian organizations cannot be exclusively blamed for their overall performance, which should be viewed within the broader social, economic, political, and even military context. One of the reasons for the inefficiency of these organizations is the lack of strictly defined standards and criteria for needs assessment, provision and distribution of aid, as well as the clear definition of what constitute “minimum living standards” in a given environment.

Another reason for humanitarian organizations’ unsatisfactory performance is the cooperation and coordination of activities—or rather the lack of it—between humanitarian organizations and relevant state institutions, in particular in monitoring the situation and events in the war-affected territories of the former Yugoslavia. Due to the government’s poor assessment of the situation in the war-affected territories, there was no sustainable action plan for receiving and providing assistance to the refugees and displaced persons. More precisely, in addition to their internal organizational issues, the unsatisfactory performance of humanitarian organizations was also the consequence of the poor assessment of the course and outcomes of the war by the relevant government institutions.

Lessons from the Balkan Case

In order to overcome the above-mentioned problems in humanitarian work, and to achieve higher operational standards in humanitarian NGOs, it is necessary to analyze the lessons learned from operations similar to those in the former Yugo-

⁶ See *ibid.*, table 42.

slavia. The findings and conclusions drawn from these analyses should be applied in future operations of the same character.

A significant reason for the unsatisfactory efficiency of humanitarian organizations in providing for refugees and displaced civilians in the former Yugoslavia was the imposition of sanctions and the introduction of a trade embargo as punitive measures that greatly limited the work of humanitarian organizations in peacetime, and made that work almost impossible in wartime. Thus, a desperate domestic economic situation and the diminished economic potential of the population, along with the reduced volume and intensity of international humanitarian support, were the most important reasons for the inefficiency of humanitarian organizations in providing for refugees and displaced civilians. Besides that, the operational capabilities of many humanitarian organizations completely depend on the material reserves of the state and on state financial support. Humanitarian organizations do not possess their own resources for the provision of humanitarian aid, but rely on donations, contributions, and help from international organizations. Consequently, their ability to act independently is significantly limited.

Dr. Strbac's research results point to the need to improve the protection of, and level of care for, endangered civilians from the consequences of emergency situations, from the viewpoints of both the practical role of humanitarian organizations and of international law on human rights. It is also necessary to improve the primary work of the national and international Red Cross organizations for health and social services in civil emergencies, and to raise that work to a defined level on the basis of experience from past wars and intervention in the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is critical to carry out timely preparations during peacetime, so that humanitarian organizations will be able to act at maximum capacity to help endangered civilians in wartime situations. In connection with that, it is very important to monitor and constantly evaluate events related to contemporary social changes in nearby countries and around the world so as to extract lessons and conclusions in order to adjust the concrete measures, actions, and assumptions governing humanitarian work in future civil emergencies. Namely, organizations' emergency response measures and emergency planning—along with crisis management capabilities—should be significantly improved in order to reduce the suffering of vulnerable civilian populations.

One of the first steps toward the improved implementation of humanitarian operations is to enhance the awareness and enforcement of international law on human rights and humanitarian assistance. All parties to armed conflicts (members of humanitarian organizations, military personnel, government and civil defense representatives, medical staff, etc.), and potential victims of such conflicts should be the target of awareness programs. Effective dissemination and enforcement of international law on human rights and humanitarian assistance could directly con-

tribute not only to better protection of civilian victims, but also to the security of humanitarian workers participating in relief missions in war zones.

Besides the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, the main role in the observation and enforcement of international humanitarian law belongs to national humanitarian organizations and NGOs, which have to establish relations with government institutions and other interested parties in order to resolve questions about national and international legislation and provide for their observation and enforcement. By launching initiatives for the adoption of legal measures in connection with the enforcement of international human rights law, as well as with the protection of the emblem of the Red Cross, national societies contribute to the dissemination of ideas, culture, and knowledge, as well as to the enforcement of international law. Dissemination should not be limited to the Red Cross members and government institutions; the general public ought to be informed of the limitations and rights laid out by international humanitarian law. Programs to raise awareness work best if they target all social and age groups, and are done through the regular education system, by organizing seminars and courses for specific target groups, as well as by launching media campaigns. The responsibility for raising awareness of international humanitarian law and the principles of the Red Cross/ Crescent movement does not rest solely with national and international humanitarian organizations and NGOs. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols oblige the signatories to respect and implement international humanitarian laws and the principles of the Red Cross/Crescent movement. That also means providing training for legal professionals in humanitarian law, including sanctioning war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Still, it must be understood that there is no mechanism that can guarantee a minimum level of respect for individual rights in an armed conflict. That could be achieved by educating the general public that, even in an armed conflict, an enemy is also a fellow human being who deserves respect.

Nongovernmental humanitarian and other organizations must work very hard in peacetime in cooperation with relevant government institutions and with society in general to acquire resources and accumulate reserves of humanitarian aid. In this regard, rules of behavior and standards of operation for humanitarian organization personnel should be arranged in order to exclude abuses in the provision of humanitarian aid, thereby avoiding behavior that could compromise the entire relief effort. Humanitarian aid should be seen exclusively in the context of guarding lives and health, and in no way should its provision be permitted to be conditional on political concessions. Humanitarian aid ought to be based on socioeconomic factors (the number of endangered persons, demographic data, economic and financial power, and similar factors) that could help establish appropriate forms of aid, sites and methods of distribution, and measures for improving that aid. Related to this, it is necessary to document relief efforts regularly, so that data on

needs can be gathered and delivered on very short notice to potential sources of aid in order to help those most in need.

A detailed plan for the distribution of aid in crisis situations should be put together. This would prevent abuse of aid and possible political manipulation. A well worked out plan would also protect the recipients of aid and the personnel involved in its distribution. Donors should have insight into the distribution and use of donated aid. It should be taken into account that aid in emergencies can contribute to the reduction of social tensions and political instability. Thus, the political leadership of a country might be reluctant to encourage and support the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons in order to politically benefit from the received aid. Therefore, it is important to establish strict plans and rules for the provision of aid.

Aside from developing more efficient systems for providing humanitarian aid, or broadening its range, preventive action is also very important, so that groups will not be seeking aid when matters have already reached a crisis level. The sustainable solution of the status of refugees and displaced persons should include granting permanent residence and/or citizenship, providing adequate housing, and promoting conditions for economic independence (such as employment programs). However, a recipient country experiencing internal economic and social problems is usually not capable of effectively and efficiently providing sustainable solutions for refugees and displaced persons; this failure could lead to their discontent and a complete lack of hope that their situation will ever be resolved. The absence of a solution to these problems in the former Yugoslavia, and the failure to respect the laws on civil protection (the implementation of which was not overseen by a separate agency), contributed significantly to humanitarian organizations' uncoordinated work, which led to poor care for refugees and displaced persons.

The resolution of the final status of refugees and displaced persons is of vital importance. Still, in the former Yugoslavia it seems to have been neglected, and even forgotten. The reasons for such inefficiency and negligence in addressing issues of prime interest to the refugees and displaced persons are various: political, economic, legal, etc. In our opinion, the most significant are as follows:

- The weak material and financial capability of the state, and the insufficient and irregular nature of international aid, as a result of which the national strategy for resolving such problems did not fully succeed
- Imprecise and incomplete standards, legal procedures, and limitations, as well as slowness in redefining existing positive regulations (and enacting new ones) for carrying out integration
- Disorganized relations among Serbia and Montenegro and other new and neighboring states, and distrust of refugees and displaced persons, which made the repatriation process difficult

- Indecisive and slow reactions of the state, the international community, and national and international humanitarian organizations in resolving the status of refugees and displaced persons
- Lack of clarity and legal obsolescence of some international rules and methods, and their selective application in practice

Conclusion and Recommendations

Contemporary emergency situations show a tendency toward increased suffering and victimization on the part of civilians.⁷ The accomplishment of the programmatic goals and tasks of humanitarian organizations in emergency situations in which global threats to people, material goods, and the means of survival are increasingly present must be adjusted and matched to the conditions and methods that result from contemporary challenges, risks, and threats. Related to that, from a humanitarian point of view, it is necessary to update standards and legal procedures in order to create legal bases for resolving problems in the areas of providing aid to endangered civilians and achieving greater operational efficiency in emergency situations. Therefore, where domestic standards and legal procedures are concerned, the following should be undertaken:

- Establishment of legal and regulatory duties, rights, obligations, and procedures of supervising institutions in the areas of contemporary challenges, risks, and threats
- Creation of a national security strategy in individual nations, which should define all the relevant issues in connection with humanitarian activities, as well as the position of the state with regard to humanitarian activities
- Special legal regulations in the area of civil defense clearly laying out civil defense agencies' relations and obligations toward humanitarian organizations and missions
- Creation of laws and regulations defining the modalities of cooperation and coordination between humanitarian and other NGOs and the government in carrying out humanitarian missions
- Creation of national strategies for the resolution of the final status of refugees and displaced persons, with clearly defined responsibilities, roles, and assignments (for example, housing loans and other similar assistance)
- The potential creation of a national fund that would strictly be dedicated to humanitarian work

⁷ Such situations range from terrorist attacks (including those which may involve biological or radiological weapons) to natural disasters such as the tsunami in South and Southeast Asia in late 2004.

In the context of modernizing and upgrading standards and legal procedures, in addition to the previously mentioned recommendations, and with the support of the government and of humanitarian and other NGOs, it is necessary to take the following steps:

- To standardize the definition of civil emergency, which would contain a humanitarian component as a common foundation and framework for all sectors in the humanitarian field
- To construct a national database of resources that can be drawn on in cases of natural disaster, and that can help inform efforts to systematize the actions of all participants in the process of resolving civil emergencies
- To standardize a methodology for collecting data at the national level on the basis of total economic and ecological loss calculations
- To provide support and cooperation among the authorities that establish the database in order to decrease redundancy, support data exchange, and improve public access to that database.

With respect to standards and legal procedures, particularly those related to actions carried out in protection of civilians, our research showed that some international humanitarian law regulations and parts of the Charter of the United Nations are unclear, and sometimes either outmoded or directly contradictory. Given that international humanitarian law is applied only in efforts directed at protecting and providing for endangered civilians in civil emergencies caused by armed conflicts, it is desirable to bring it up to date in order to cover all emergency situations, including those caused by natural disasters. Therefore, the application of the Geneva Convention and all additional protocols should be mandatory in protecting and providing for endangered civilians in civil emergencies originating for reasons other than armed conflicts.

Likewise, it would be very helpful to oblige all states to protect and provide for endangered civilians in all types of emergencies, in peacetime and in wartime, regardless of whether they are signatories to international humanitarian treaties or not. That would also be useful from the humanitarian point of view for civilian protection in emergencies caused by natural disasters, which have been numerous in the past few years. Existing procedures for establishing a “humanitarian bridge” between the international humanitarian community and the victims (and between the humanitarian community and the affected territory) are not sufficiently standardized, and need improvement. The vast experience and lessons learned by national Red Cross societies and humanitarian organizations should be taken into consideration in any future attempt to enhance these procedures.

Bibliography

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