



Keynote speech by Janez Lenarčič for Humanitarian Congress Vienna

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Federal minister Gewessler, Director Wank,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start with the following. I very much like the term 'global responsibility' because that's what humanitarian aid is. It's not a charity – it's a global responsibility that has to be shared equitably. We'll talk about this a bit later.

We meet at a time of unprecedented humanitarian needs globally. Nearly 340 million people are in need of humanitarian aid. To put this in perspective, there are only two countries in the world that have more people: India and China. Meaning this figure would be the third biggest country if it were a country.

And the population of this non-country is growing. In the last year, the number of people in need around the world has risen by 17%. The equivalent of five times the population of Austria.

Of course, when you face such an unprecedented situation you need to think about unprecedented action. We must do something about this situation. And that's why I like the motto of this congress. What are these must-haves?

Of course, fundamentally this is about the imperative to deliver effective and efficient humanitarian response everywhere it is needed. And some of those 'must haves' that I would like to offer for your consideration today are the following:

First of all, there has to be respect for International Humanitarian Law and access for humanitarian aid. Second, there has to be something that would reduce humanitarian need – at least in the mid-term.

Because humanitarian aid is not a solution to humanitarian crisis. You need to look into the root causes and offer solutions that address. And you cannot do that with humanitarian aid that is emergency aid aimed at saving lives and alleviating suffering.

And third, we have to close the gap between the growing needs and not-so-growing resources.

I'll talk about humanitarian law first.

The protection of civilians and of civilian infrastructure, even in a war, is an international legal obligation of all involved. Even wars have rules. But increasingly, these rules have been violated. As you can see on a daily basis in Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Most recently, you could see the unprecedented dimension of violations of humanitarian law through the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam in Ukraine. This has resulted in thousands of homes being destroyed, thousands of hectares of agricultural land destroyed, sources of portable water destroyed and so on.

And why is this a problem? Well, International Humanitarian Law violations directly increase humanitarian needs. As I just illustrated with the example of south Ukraine. Europe, of course, is one of the staunchest advocates and supporters of International Humanitarian Law. And we need to ensure that others respect it too.

Around the world, we see tactics such as sexual violence and starvation as a weapon of war. You can see this in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Haiti. Armed groups there have targeted food systems and supply routes.

This trend is simply unacceptable. We must do everything possible to ensure IHL is respected and followed. It would be great to hear what ideas you might have in order to make this a reality.

Second: I already mentioned that with humanitarian aid we are not going to solve the crisis. When aid is necessary, it is absolutely essential for the survival of people affected. But in order to solve the

problem, you need more than just aid. Who else needs to be on the ground and work on the root causes?

If the cause of humanitarian crisis is conflict, then you need diplomats, politicians and all those who can sit down, negotiate and stop a conflict. If the root causes of humanitarian crisis are weather-related events like drought or floods, or social reasons like abject poverty, you need development partners to come into that area and work on those root causes and offer solutions. This is called the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, as you know.

We need to improve our cooperation on the nexus because otherwise we will see an increased number of what we already have all over the world. The so-called protracted crises, forgotten crises, have been with us for years and years. And nobody is looking at them except some humanitarian workers. And fewer and fewer donors who still provide humanitarian assistance.

But this situation, as I said – providing humanitarian assistance year after year – is not ideal. We need to strengthen this nexus.

However, as long as these crises are with us, providing humanitarian assistance to affected people is an absolute imperative. And for that we need funding. This brings me to the final point of my introduction: how to address the funding gap.

There are several ways we do this. One of them is to reduce the needs through the nexus, which we have already discussed.

Another way is to use your funding in a more effective and efficient manner. For instance, instead of bringing food from one part of the world to another, you give people in the affected area cash cards so they can buy food themselves.

It's cheaper, more efficient, more effective and gives the affected people more dignity. Because, as I'm sure you'll agree, if you go to a shop or a market with your cash and decide yourself what to buy for you and your family it's more dignified than standing in line with a dish.

But the simplest way of decreasing the funding gap is to increase the funding. And here there are some good examples. We have been urging EU Member States to do better: because in the European Union, the Commission and five Member States account for over 90% of European humanitarian aid.

We have been discussing this with the Member States and I'm glad to report we now have some improvement. Most recently, last year France entered the group of top 10 humanitarian donors in the world. Which is remarkable, as France was traditionally doing less than it could.

And last December, Spain adopted a law committing itself by 2030 to the well-known target of allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income to official development assistance and at least 10% of this to humanitarian aid.

This has inspired the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union to work on Council conclusions that were just adopted a few weeks ago, committing all 27 EU Member States to that same goal. It's a voluntary target – but it is a target. And now we can work with all EU Member States to achieve this target.

And this brings me to Austria. Austria has made remarkable progress in the span of just a few years. Back in 2018, the Austrian humanitarian budget was 25 million US dollars. Last year, it was well above 100 million US dollars. More than four times larger. This is remarkable. However, if we recall the target we just discussed, 0.7% of GNI for ODA, of which 10% is for humanitarian aid – well, there is still room for further improvement. I will leave it to you to calculate the difference.

Let me conclude with the following: we need more commitment from more donors to work on fixing the problem of the funding gap. There are countries out there who could and should do more. I would particularly single out a special category of countries – and although this isn't diplomatic, I feel obliged to do it. I am speaking about Permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Why am I singling these countries out? Because over 80% of humanitarian crises around the world are a direct consequence of conflict. War. Inter-ethnic conflict. Violence. Who is responsible for this? Of course, those involved in the first place. But also, the UN Security Council. Which, according to the UN Security Charter, bears 'primary responsibility for international peace and stability'.

And there are five countries that occupy seats in that eminent body permanently. Only three of them appear among the ten top humanitarian donors. That leaves two countries who are doing either very little or nothing. One of these countries is actually increasing humanitarian needs globally through its aggressive behaviour.

This is what I wanted to share with you. I am very much looking forward to the outcome of this

congress. I thank you again for inviting me. I wish you a very interesting discussion.
Thank you.

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