

## THE HUMANITARIAN SPACE INCREASINGLY UNDER THREAT

Humanitarian workers have a noble mission but one which is more and more difficult and dangerous to carry out. Over the past decade, humanitarian operations have increasingly faced obstacles of all sorts and relief personnel have been the subject of deliberate targeting: relief operations have been blocked physically or hindered by legal and administrative impediments, aid workers have been harassed, expelled, and even attacked and killed.

Humanitarian emblems and flags which traditionally provided a shield for humanitarian workers have now often become targets. The figures speak for themselves: in 2008 alone, **every three days a humanitarian aid worker was killed somewhere in the world**. In total more than 260 humanitarian aid workers were kidnapped, killed or severely injured. In comparison, 12 years earlier this grim figure stood at 32. Last year more humanitarian workers than UN peace keepers died in action. These figures present the highest total on record, and still the number of attacks on aid workers continues to rise. Worryingly, many of these attacks are politically motivated whereas **humanitarian aid is by its very nature independent and neutral**.

The shrinking of the "humanitarian space", that is, the ability to deliver aid in an unhindered and secure environment, puts humanitarian work under serious threat. It makes **crisis victims "double victims"**: first hit by a disaster or conflict and then denied their basic right to receive vital assistance. Furthermore, the shrinking humanitarian space affects the efficiency of aid operations as humanitarian organisations need to take preventive and protective measures, which diverts efforts and funds from direct assistance to the victims.

Humanitarian organisations and relief workers need and deserve more than just an expression of sympathy and admiration for their commitment and courage. Concrete and resolute action is required by all actors involved to reverse this worrying trend.

Responsibility first lies with the government authorities of the crisis-hit countries to facilitate humanitarian action and access to victims, and to respect and protect humanitarian organisations. Protection for humanitarian organisations and actors in the field can be ensured by full respect for their specific mandates and roles, dialogue with all local stakeholders and respect for local traditions, customs and sensitivities. In turn, donors and political actors also have an important role to play.

As a leading humanitarian donor and global political actor, Europe is committed to contributing to the preservation of the humanitarian space and changing the outlook -- and the statistics -- for the humanitarian organisations - NGOs, the United Nations specialised aid agencies and the Red Cross family - which provide a lifeline every day to millions of victims in the most dangerous places of the world.



*"It is paramount that we understand and respect the core principles of humanitarian aid: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. We must stop the shooting of humanitarian workers -- when they are hurt, so is the hope in the future of our children".*

**Kristalina Georgieva,**  
European Commissioner for  
International Cooperation,  
Humanitarian Aid and Crisis  
Response

### HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

#### HUMANITY

Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable in the population. The dignity of all victims must be respected and protected.

#### IMPARTIALITY

Humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations.

#### INDEPENDENCE

Humanitarian objectives are autonomous of political, economic, military or other objectives: the sole purpose is to relieve and prevent the suffering of crisis victims.

#### NEUTRALITY

Humanitarian aid must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute.

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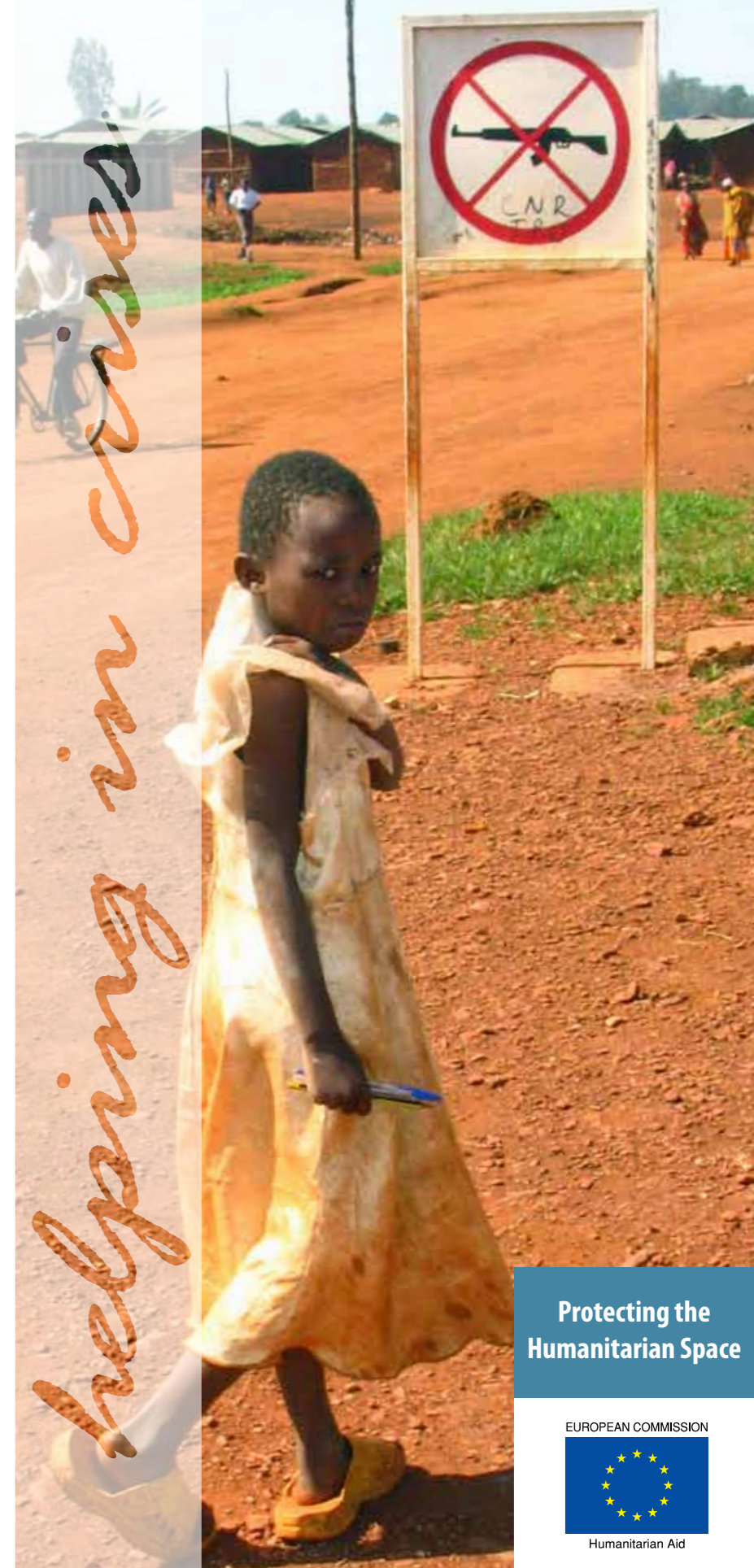


Humanitarian Aid

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helping in crises

Protecting the  
Humanitarian Space

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Humanitarian Aid





## WHAT CONCRETE ACTIONS IS THE EUROPEAN UNION TAKING?

**The EU contributes to the preservation of the humanitarian space through its own external action, its outreach diplomacy and its financial and operational support to humanitarian organisations.**

### 1. Compliance of EU external action with humanitarian principles and humanitarian law.

**Humanitarian principles.** Strict respect of humanitarian principles when delivering assistance (see back of leaflet) is essential for the protection of humanitarian workers. It ensures that they are identified as neutral and impartial and not as a part of any political agenda. The EU fully endorses the humanitarian principles and has incorporated them in all aspects of its own external and humanitarian activities.

**International Humanitarian Law (IHL).** IHL, provided through the Geneva Conventions, aims to protect non-parties in armed conflicts (such as civilians, aid workers, former soldiers) but is too often violated. In recent decades, the nature of armed conflict has changed considerably. Today, armed conflict often takes place between warring, non-state factions. Tragically, civilians often get caught in the fighting, or are directly targeted, and in many cases these armed groups have no respect for IHL. Advocating for IHL at a political level and raising awareness among states and non-state parties of their obligation to respect IHL, is therefore a key aspect of the EU's humanitarian aid strategy (see below).

**The EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** (Official Journal 2005/C 327/04) were issued on 23 December 2005, and updated in December 2009. These guidelines provide operational tools for the EU, in its political relations and dialogue with third countries, to promote compliance with IHL and to underline its commitment to promoting such compliance in a visible and consistent manner.

**The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid** was adopted at the end of 2007 by the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission. This landmark document underscores the need to preserve humanitarian space to ensure access to vulnerable populations and the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. It reaffirms the EU's commitment to upholding and promoting the fundamental humanitarian principles. It also commits the EU to advocating strongly and consistently for the respect of International Law, including IHL.



**Advocating for the security of humanitarian aid workers:** For World Humanitarian Day 2010, commemorated each year on 19 August, Commissioner Georgieva launched the campaign "Don't shoot, I'm a humanitarian worker!" highlighting the various actions already taken by the European Commission to improve the security of humanitarian workers. For more information: [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/georgieva/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/georgieva/index_en.htm)

### 2. International advocacy and outreach

**A principled approach to civil/military cooperation.** The blurring of lines and roles between humanitarian and military actions can expose relief staff to greater insecurity. The EU humanitarian Consensus underlines that military and humanitarian interventions are of a different nature and need to be clearly separated accordingly. Their interaction should be governed by the respect for humanitarian principles and internationally agreed guidelines regarding the involvement of international military forces in humanitarian contexts. The provision of relief assistance by EU military missions in the context of humanitarian operations can be considered as a last resort in **certain exceptional circumstances, and when it does not affect the work and security of relief workers.**

**The United Nations General Assembly has discussed the Safety and Security of humanitarian personnel and protection of the United Nation's personnel** annually for over a decade. It has consistently called on States to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, in particular by ensuring effective implementation of the relevant provisions of international law. The EU has continuously supported this process and in 2010 actively facilitated a proposal for a resolution.

**Fighting against impunity.** The deliberate targeting of relief personnel is a war crime under international conventions. The perpetrators of such acts should be subject to prosecution and justice, a strong deterrent in the fight against impunity. When local judicial systems are unable or unwilling to act, international action is required. In this context, the EU supports the action of the ICC (International Criminal Court) whose mandate and action represents a major step in the fight against impunity, enabling prosecutions against the perpetrators of war crimes.

### 3. Direct support to partner humanitarian organisations

**A strong collaboration with international partners.** The European Commission, in particular its department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), supports the activities of a number of humanitarian actors in reinforcing safety and security measures and promoting the fundamental humanitarian principles and IHL. Notably, in this context, ECHO supports the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for coordination, advocacy activities and dissemination of security information, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for promoting and disseminating IHL.

**Support to Partners' safety.** ECHO has contributed to several research studies and issues guidelines and reports regarding security for humanitarian organisations to provide Commission staff and partner humanitarian organisations with a standardized approach to security in the field, giving practical information on preventive measures and strategies. In that context it has also initiated a review of standards and practices for the security of humanitarian personnel and advocacy for securing the humanitarian space. Furthermore, ECHO's Headquarters and Field Security Teams provide regular analyses and updates to partners on the security situation in the field. Commission humanitarian funding of partner organisations also covers security-related expenditures.