

# World Humanitarian Summit

## Istanbul, 23-24 May 2016

### Preliminary reflections

The first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) took place in Istanbul on the 23rd and 24th of May 2016. The purpose of this historical event was to redefine humanitarian action in the context of international increasing crises and to reinforce the respect for international norms. However, it is difficult to give a final assessment due to the fact that it has only been two weeks since the Summit took place and that a number of important documents are provisional (like the « *Chair's Summary* »),<sup>1</sup> missing, or have not yet been published (like most of the « *Commitments* »).

## Introduction

Different Secretary-Generals have left different legacies:

- **Dag Hammarskjöld** wrote a mystical diary *Vägmärken* (« *Markings* »)<sup>2</sup> and his life commitment ended tragically in Africa on a peace mission
- **Boutros Boutros Ghali** showed his intellectual vision with both an « *Agenda for Peace* » (1992)<sup>3</sup> and an « *Agenda for Development* » (1994)<sup>4</sup>
- **Ban ki-moon**: will the « *Agenda for Humanity* »<sup>5</sup> be his legacy? The WHS was indeed an initiative of the UN SG Ban Ki-moon, in January 2012.

This was the first (and certainly not the last) World Humanitarian Summit.

The idea of organizing international Summits is not new at the United Nations (U.N). A comparison with **other Summits** (on Climate Change in Paris in December 2015,<sup>6</sup> on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai<sup>7</sup> also in 2015, the 2014 U.N Security Council Summit,<sup>8</sup> the 2000 Millennium Summit in New York,<sup>9</sup> the G7<sup>10</sup>) could be useful on more than one aspect.

**A comparison between the Climate Change Summits in Copenhagen and Paris COP21** might help to assess the Istanbul Summit. The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (December 2009) raised climate change policy to the highest political level. Close to 115 world leaders attended the high-level segment, making it one of the largest gatherings of world leaders ever outside UN headquarters in New York. More than 40,000 representatives of Governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations, faith-based organizations, media and UN agencies applied for accreditation.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it was only at COP 21 in Paris (December 2015) that Parties to the UNFCCC reached a landmark agreement to combat climate change,<sup>12</sup> largely due to the effort of the host country, France,<sup>13</sup> with the support of China and the U.S.A. The struggle against climate change goes on. The same should be said about humanitarian action: Istanbul was a first of many steps on a long road.<sup>14</sup>

## I. Preparation (2014-2016)

During two years of regional, thematic and global consultations that were held from 2014 to 2016, 23,000 people from 153 countries were consulted. This includes Members of Governments, civil society, academia, NGOs, private businesses, religious and local communities.

In fall 2015, immediately after the *Geneva Global Consultations*,<sup>15</sup> the **change of leadership** at the helm of OCHA and of the WHS Secretariat may have caused a loss of momentum and, in some areas, a change of policy. In March 2016, there was a reorganization of the Summit management team with **UNOCHA assuming direct management control**. Stephen O'Brien, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, assumed full management for the Summit preparations. Gwi-Yeop Son, Director of UNOCHA Corporate Programmes, was placed in charge of all aspects of the Summit logistics, including liaisons with the Government of Turkey. In March and April 2016, UNOCHA reassigned over 140 of their staff, from existing emergency operations, such as South Sudan, and headquarter functions, to support the Summit preparations.

## II. Participation

6.000 participants were expected, 9.000 came, from 173 countries, including a relatively limited number of Heads of State (22) and Government (28),<sup>16</sup> Heads of UN agencies and humanitarian organizations (such as the ICRC President, the Secretary-General of the IFRC, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies...) <sup>17</sup>, 350 private sector representatives, and 2000 people from civil society, including NGOs, local communities, religious leaders.

The non-participation of *Doctors Without Borders* was well publicized in a communiqué released on the 5th of May, entitled “*MSF to pull out of World Humanitarian Summit*”:

“We no longer have any hope that the WHS will address the weaknesses in humanitarian action and emergency response, particularly in conflict areas or epidemic situations. Instead, the WHS’s focus would seem to be an incorporation of humanitarian assistance into a broader development and resilience agenda. Further, the summit neglects to reinforce the obligations of states to uphold and implement the humanitarian and refugee laws which they have signed up to.

As shocking violations of international humanitarian law and refugee rights continue on a daily basis, WHS participants will be pressed to a consensus on non-specific, good intentions to ‘uphold norms’ and ‘end needs’. The summit has become a fig-leaf of good intentions, allowing these systematic violations, by states above all, to be ignored.

Summit participants, whether States or UN agencies or non-governmental organisations, will be asked to declare new and ambitious “commitments”. But putting states on the same level as non-governmental organisations and UN agencies, which have no such powers or obligations, the Summit will minimise the responsibility of States. In addition, the non-binding nature of the commitments means that very few actors will sign up to any commitments they haven’t previously committed to.”<sup>18</sup>

MSF also published on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 “*MSF’s reflections on the World Humanitarian Summit. Emergency Now. A Call for Action Beyond Summits*”.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the large number of participants, **this Summit was not inclusive enough**. Many organizations and individual participants had to struggle to participate. Even Governments had their speaking time limited or had no chance to take the floor, due to time constraints.

**Side-events were also strictly limited** in number, time and space.<sup>21</sup> The Order of Malta participated in a Side-event entitled “*Evidence for Religious Groups*’

*Contributions to Humanitarian Response*”, co-hosted by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities, Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN), Soka Gakkai International, the World Evangelical Alliance, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Religions for Peace, World Vision International and Malteser International. During this side event the Order of Malta spoke on the theme “*Religious & Humanitarian Law and Action. A much needed dialogue and mutual support*”.<sup>22</sup>

The difference with the **Sendai Conference** (*Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction* Sendai, Japan, 14-18 March 2015)<sup>23</sup> was striking: the *Sendai Conference* drew 6,500 participants to its formal portion, while the related *Public Forum* attracted 50,000 local residents and visitors from around the globe who seized the opportunity to engage with an array of players from the disaster risk reduction sector.

#### **IV. Outcome of Istanbul: from words to action?**

The *Chair’s Summary* is non-committal, vague in wording and attribution and most of the *Commitments* are not easy to collect,<sup>24</sup> formulated in general terms, not all meant to be really binding: the “*Political Communiqué for the World Humanitarian Summit*”, signed by more than 70 Governments (including France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, U.S.A., and the European Union) clearly states:

“This Communiqué is not legally binding and does not affect the signatories’ existing obligations under applicable international and domestic law. Rather, the signatures below reflect the high-level political commitments of the Member States represented”.<sup>25</sup>

**UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson** – who played a very important role in Istanbul - says the commitments made during the Summit will be reviewed with participants over the summer and presented to the UN General Assembly in September in the form of a report by the Secretary-General. Next steps could include inter-governmental processes to follow through on those commitments, but the exact approach has yet to be decided.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless the WHS is **opening a new channel of international humanitarian diplomacy within the UN System**. Some countries – like Switzerland – even wonder if it could be a competition to the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.<sup>27</sup>

#### **V. Real results to be expected from real Powers?**

The **multi-stakeholder** participation was a strength and a weakness of the WHS. Indeed in the words of Nicolas Borsinger, Chairman of VOICE, Istanbul was “*A Jamboree of Good Will People*”.<sup>28</sup> According to the Swiss Ambassador Manuel Bessler “*Let’s walk the talk*”. We need to create a surge in « *public conscience* » to pressure Governments and parties to conflicts to abide by the fundamental principles of the Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law. We could do this in the spirit of the Open Letter to all UN Member States published the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May by the ICRC, with a number of National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (“*A strong resolve to end violence against health care*”)<sup>29</sup> published the same day the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2286 (2016).

## VI. Possible Follow-ups in the months and years to come

The Secretary-General declared at the Closing Session of the Summit

“It is not an end point, but a turning point”, adding “In September, I will report to the United Nations General Assembly on the Summit’s achievements. I will propose ways to take our commitments forward through intergovernmental processes, interagency forums and other mechanisms”.<sup>30</sup>

In the meantime, many **follow-up meetings**, formal and informal, are planned within the UN system and in other forum:

**In 2016 the following meetings will be held:**

- **Academia**,
  - USIP in Washington, (on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June),<sup>31</sup>
  - Geneva University (on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June),
- Humanitarian Segment of **ECOSOC** in New York (from the 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of June),<sup>33</sup>
- Round Table in **San Remo** (from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of September)
- **New York Summits** (on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of September)

**In 2017**, the Order of Malta will host a Symposium in Rome.

**In 2020**, a Second World Humanitarian Summit might take place, although it was not yet formally announced.

## VII. What could we do now?

**First of all, we could take stock of what we could accomplish** by participating in the preparatory meetings (European Consultations in Budapest in February 2015 and Regional Consultations in Geneva in October 2015) and at Istanbul’s Summit. We could reflect on how we could achieve more in the future.

**Second, keep an eye on future follow-up meetings of the WHS**, participate whenever possible and be informed of the outcome in all cases.

**Third have in mind the two Summits planned in New York:**

- on the **19th of September** the « *UN Summit on managing large-scale movements of migrants and refugees* ». Mrs. Karen AbuZayd of the United States is the Special Adviser and could be contacted in New York<sup>34</sup>
- on the **20th of September**, President Barack Obama will host a « *Leaders’ Summit on the Global Refugee Crisis* » on the margins of UNGA 71 on September 20, 2016 to galvanize significant new global commitments to:
  - 1) **increase funding** to humanitarian appeals and international organizations,
  - 2) **admit more refugees** through resettlement or other legal pathways, and
  - 3) **increase refugees’ self-reliance and inclusion** through opportunities for education and legal work.

**Last, plan follow-up events, whenever possible in partnership** with Governments, UN Agencies (UNHCR in particular), IOM, ICRC, NGOs, Academia, religious leaders and FBOs, media.

On a local level, the Permanent Mission in Geneva of the Order of Malta was contacted by Ms. Floriana Polito from *Caritas Internationalis*, which will be organizing a **side-event to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on the afternoon of the 28<sup>th</sup> of June**. They will take the format of the side-event originally planned for the WHS in Istanbul on the role of religious leaders and FBOs on prevention and resolution of conflicts. The Mission in Geneva shall co-sponsor this side-event and will contribute to this reflection.

The months and years to come shall be crucial for the UN and the humanitarians with a new Secretary-General, a new WHO Director-General, a new President of the U.S.A. Continuing or even increasing crises with a greater need for humanitarian assistance and protection, a better synergy between stakeholders, a constant attention to what we could all learn from each other in improving our action.

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Vice-President, IIHL

Geneva, 6 June 2016

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Advance, Unedited Version: <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/.../Chairs%20Summary.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/rg\\_to\\_waymarks.pdf](http://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/rg_to_waymarks.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> As well as the « Supplement to an Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations » A/50/60\*  
<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/UNRO%20S1995%201.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> A/48/935, 6 May 1994, online at:

<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/PBC%20A48935.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://sgreport.worldhumanitariansummit.org>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cop21.gouv.fr/en/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordren.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordren.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48824#.V1FLh1dRTUY>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/millennium\\_summit.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/millennium_summit.shtml)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.japan.go.jp/g7/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://unfccc.int/meetings/copenhagen\\_dec\\_2009/meeting/6295.php](http://unfccc.int/meetings/copenhagen_dec_2009/meeting/6295.php)

<sup>12</sup> <http://bigpicture.unfccc.int/#content-the-paris-agreemen> and <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a01.pdf>

« Framework Convention on Climate Change »

<sup>13</sup> See among others: Nicholas Buhne « COP21 : A Triumph of French Diplomacy » McGill International Review (18 January 2016) <http://mironline.ca/?p=7846> :

“The 21st Conference of Parties (COP) summit held in December was, by most measures, a landmark success in climate policy – or as French President Hollande put it more grandly: “History is Here”.[i] There have been a number of explanations proposed as to why a conference that seemed to share many of the same inherent flaws as 2009’s Copenhagen summit succeeded in securing a legally binding\* agreement. A growing impetus in the scientific community, public pressure, changing conceptions of national security, and new power relations have all contributed towards the end result, but oftentimes the actual preparatory groundwork, hosting, and chairing of negotiations by the French government is overlooked”.

- [www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/13/paris-climate-deal-cop-diplomacy-developing-united-nations](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/13/paris-climate-deal-cop-diplomacy-developing-united-nations)
- [www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/news/cop21-hailed-as-shining-example-of-french-diplomacy/](http://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/news/cop21-hailed-as-shining-example-of-french-diplomacy/)

<sup>14</sup> See Alex Thier “Istanbul Summit a positive first step” Chicago Tribune, May 23, 2016 “But let's be real. There will be no peace agreements signed in Istanbul this week. The countries intentionally bombing civilians aren't showing up to announce they will stop. In the months to come, the number of displaced people worldwide is likely to go up, not down. And the root causes of these global catastrophes will not be pruned at the summit.

But there is more money going from more organizations to more people in need than ever before in history, and preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit has forged a consensus that the international community can, and must, do better. It's not a cure-all, but an important first step”.

<sup>15</sup> [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WHS\\_GloCon\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WHS_GloCon_final_report.pdf)

<sup>16</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “Perspectives and pledges of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement on the occasion of the World Humanitarian Summit” (18 May 2016) Online at: <http://www.ifrc.org/whs> (with interesting links to the 2015 International Conference) <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WHS%2520report-A4-EN-LR.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.msf.org/en/article/msf-pull-out-world-humanitarian-summit>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/whs\\_report.pdf](http://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/whs_report.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> List of Side-Events at the WHS:

<https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/cbf30d7f810a375ec640baf61ef9dda6634ca5e2?vid=580589&disposition=inline&op=view>

<sup>22</sup> See the video of the Side-event online: <https://youtu.be/8abqLaXsj8Q>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.wcdrr.org>

<sup>24</sup> Here are samples of «Commitments » to be found online :  
- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the heads of UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, OCHA, WFP, FAO, UNFPA

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and UNDP, with the endorsement of the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration, launched a “Commitment to Action” in which they agreed to put in place a new way of working in crises that will aim to not only meet humanitarian needs but also reduce them over time : <https://www.iom.int/news/un-launches-commitment-action-whs-moving-delivering-aid-ending-need>

NGOs (ICVA): <https://icvanetwork.org/world-humanitarian-summit-0>

Mercy Corps : <https://www.mercycorps.org/press-room/releases/world-humanitarian-summit-whs-commitments>

<sup>25</sup> <https://fr.scribd.com/doc/313373351/World-Humanitarian-Summit-Political-Communique>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.irinnews.org/content/world-humanitarian-summit-blog>

<sup>27</sup> The International Conference meets every four years. In December 2015, representatives of 169 States Parties to the Geneva Conventions, 183 National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, International Federation, ICRC and 102 partner organizations gathered in Geneva for the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. See more at: <http://rcrcconference.org>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.ngovoice.org/index.php?page=105> VOICE stands for ‘Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies’. VOICE is a network of 84 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor on EU humanitarian affairs and disaster risk reduction and it promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

<sup>29</sup> [www.icrc.org/en/document/open-letter-un-strong-resolve-end-violence-against-health-care](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/open-letter-un-strong-resolve-end-violence-against-health-care)

<sup>30</sup> This could most probably include the UN General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) : <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org>

<sup>31</sup> See the video online at : [www.usip.org/webcasts](http://www.usip.org/webcasts) or [www.usip.org/events/world-fire-strengthening-humanitarian-response-0](http://www.usip.org/events/world-fire-strengthening-humanitarian-response-0)

<sup>33</sup> ECOSOC’s Humanitarian Affairs Segment is a unique platform that brings together UN Member States, UN organizations, humanitarian and development partners, the private sector and affected communities. Monday, June 27, 2016 (All day) to Wednesday, June 29, 2016 (All day). The 2016 session of the UN Economic and Social Council will focus on the theme "Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results". The Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS) will discuss how the outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit 2016 will help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). : <http://sd.iisd.org/eents/ecosoc-humanitarian-affairs-segment-2016/>

<sup>34</sup> See more online: [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52944#.V06ox1fbqQs](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52944#.V06ox1fbqQs)

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## **APPENDIXES (to be changed)**

1. Chair's Summary
2. WHS Programme
3. Grand Bargain
4. Global Humanitarian Lab
5. List of participants (High-Level Segment)
6. List of participating organisations
7. List of academic participants
8. Political Communiqué
9. Statement by Dr. Angela Merkel (Prevent Conflicts)
10. Statement by Cardinal Parolin (Uphold the Norms IHL)
11. Statement by Cardinal Parolin (Migrants & Refugees)
12. ICRC President Statement (Uphold the Norms IHL)
13. Statement by D. Burkhalter, Switzerland (IHL)
14. Statement by D. Burkhalter, Switzerland (Migrants)
15. IHL WHS Summary of Statements (Unphold the Norms)
16. Istanbul and Beyond (Red Cross/Crescent Movement)
17. MSF Call for Action Beyond Summits
18. ICRC & Others - A strong resolve to end violence against health
25. European Union Statement in Plenary