

Humanitarianism and the Principles of Humanitarian Action in Post-Cold War Context

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1. Introduction

The life of Jean-Henri Dunant (1828-1910), the founder of the Red Cross, acts as a metaphor for humanitarianism: born to a well-off family, he ended his days in a hostel for the poor, drifting in a few years from fame to oblivion, from wealth to bankruptcy. Marginalised by Geneva's high society whose protagonist he had been for many years, he died in loneliness. Humanitarianism had been the passion of his life and the Red Cross his monument. In the same way, contemporary humanitarianism has reached a low-point, despite- somewhat counter intuitively – gaining widespread popularity. The adjective “humanitarian” has never been so widely or so incorrectly used.

The concept of humanitarian aid has an almost innate quality: assisting your brother or sister when their life is endangered is an instinctive expression of the survival of the species. The concept has also been internalised in international law through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the four Geneva Conventions (1949). The process whereby humanitarianism assumed a position within international law was not automatic. Instead, it required grim experience, reflective practice and juridical precedent over many decades to develop what is now termed ‘humanitarianism’: an ensemble of doctrine, solidarity, action and aspirations towards fairer justice for human beings.

In its pure form humanitarianism adopted three fundamental deontological principles: the obligation to assist (the “humanitarian imperative”), impartiality and neutrality. The first stressed the independence of aid from any consideration of interest, opportunity or prodigality: humanitarian assistance was simply a duty. Impartiality reaffirmed that all humans were equal and that all civilians were innocent in a war and all had a right to equality of treatment. Neutrality meant a complete unrelatedness to

the political and military aspects of conflict. The concept of neutrality aimed to ensure respect and immunity for third parties, and allow them to operate unmolested by the antagonists in a conflict.

Given the above principles and its universal applicability, humanitarianism was apolitical. Yet it was born in a very political world and so was the product of an alchemic mixture of philanthropy and politics. In the nineteenth century an essentially charitable ethic characterised humanitarianism: that victims were deserving of help simply because of their status as victims. By the 1960s and 1970s this had developed to the extent that visions of humanitarianism were based on a strong political view of human rights and social justice. The context of this new, more politically aware humanitarianism is important: decolonisation processes, liberation struggles and the growth of the United Nations system all contributed to the new perspective.

In the global North the humanitarianism of the 1960s and 1970s was accompanied by the multiplication of solidarity movements and NGOs dedicated to ‘removing the deep causes’ of war and poverty. Importantly, many of these organisations emphasised development aid and the protection of human rights (tools for the progress of peoples), rather than relief and humanitarian assistance that was often limited to relieving the symptoms of conflict or complex political emergencies.

In parallel with the proliferation of intra-state armed conflicts and the subsequent operational challenges faced by the field of humanitarianism there has been an increased attention to humanitarian principles since the early 1990s. The Providence Principles identified by Brown University, the Red Cross Movement’s Code of Conduct, and the Sphere Project are just some of the initiatives that have attempted to form a set of principles for humanitarian action. However, the notion that humanitarian agencies can perform their work, basking in the glow that emanates from the principles of humanitarian action, appears somewhat paradoxical. Given that humanitarian agencies operate in the midst of highly politicised environments, it is extraordinary that attempts are still made to uphold these principles. On the other hand, it might seem to be desirable to hide from politics and all its incumbent ills. Nevertheless, politics is an inseparable part of life. All actions are political; even to do nothing is political, since it implies acceptance of the status quo.

This chapter will investigate the context of these principles, discuss their meaning and consider how effective they can be in guiding humanitarian work in the current environment of war-affected areas. The primary purpose therefore, is not to show the necessity of having those principles as part of humanitarian action, but to consider the possible challenges that may be faced in their interpretation during the implementation process. In order to achieve this objective, the chapter will first outline contemporary characteristics of the operational environment for humanitarian work. Secondly, the context of the twin principles of ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’ will be explored, and the chapter will examine other core values of humanitarianism by focussing on the above-mentioned attempts at the formation of principles for humanitarian action. Thirdly, the challenges of ‘new humanitarianism’ in the post-Cold War context will be investigated by focussing on the role of European agents. Finally, the discussions will elaborate the way forward for the implementation of these principles at the field level.

2. Humanitarianism and Politics

For much of its history, humanitarianism has managed to keep some distance from politics, interests and partisanship. There were exceptions, of course, with the Holocaust providing a salutary lesson in impotency and partisanship. A delegate at a Geneva conference some years ago colourfully summed up the fine line between politics and principle that humanitarians had to tread: “Humanitarians have to swim into politics as in a sea of *mud*: floating but making sure not to swallow a drop”.

Yet political winds constantly chilled the humanitarian world through the post-WWII era. The birth and success of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the political alternative to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was indicative of trends during this period. *Soigner et témoigner* (heal and witness), the MSF slogan, became the emblem of a new approach to humanitarian aid, still based on the three principles but conscious of the grey area between neutrality and inactivity. One cannot remain neutral and quiet vis á vis war crimes or abominable violations of human rights, without becoming an accomplice. Bearing witness is an important humanitarian activity. When MSF won the Nobel Prize in 1999, Bernard Kouchner,

one of its founders, stressed this defining mark of the organisation: “MSF’s work was political from the start. I hope the prize marks the recognition of a type of humanitarian work which fights injustice and persecution”.

The issue that Kouchner raised (political pro-activity on behalf of relief and development NGOs versus unbending neutrality) has presented many NGOs with a dilemma. Indeed the issue fragmented MSF in its early years and produced a constellation of humanitarian agencies in France. Still from France, a new model of modern hero was born and exported around the world: the humanitarian aid worker, who lives dangerously while suffering and fighting for the desperate victims of conflict and emergencies. The iconography associated with *esthétique humanitaire* has found new life through the broadcast media: beautiful white faces, marked by painful solidarity, a backdrop of a black and destitute humanity; white hands relieving pain, feeding babies, conveying brotherhood; the generous and tired smile of the do-gooder, and finally the cheerfulness of the grateful victim. They say if you ask French kids what they want to become when they grow up, half will answer: “MSF!”

The phenomenon of humanitarianism became tremendously popular following the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia. Bob Geldof and the Band Aid initiative were in large part responsible for the development of a consensus on humanitarian assistance: governments and the UN were mobilised, NGOs reacted massively and the sector expanded rapidly. Thus far, NGOs had generally prioritised development projects, as emergency aid was considered as a mere short-term palliative. But the *zeitgeist* changed in the 1980s, with the emphasis on development diminished, while the political agenda witnessed a corresponding increase in the priority given to crisis response. At this juncture, many independent humanitarian organisations realised that they needed to adapt to a changing environment. The days of quietly working in the background were gone. Organisations now had to reckon with governments, international institutions and the mass-media. Essentially, they had to operate in a different way and pay attention to communication, the maintenance of good relations with the political establishment, organisational management and marketing. The entry of a large number of development NGOs contributed to this change, as they were more acquainted with the political environment and was concerned to underline their specific ‘developmentalist’ identity, also when dealing with humanitarian work.

2. 1. Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict

The literature in the humanitarian field tends to refer to 'humanitarian principles' and the 'principles of humanitarian action' interchangeably. However, as Leader (1998:14) reminds us, a distinction between them should be made as the former is about regulating and mitigating the effects of war, while the latter deals with guidelines such as impartiality and neutrality for agencies operating in war-affected areas. Such a distinction is necessary because the current emphasis on the responsibilities of agencies somehow deflects attention from the responsibilities of those warring with each other. For example, recognition of the special status of non-combatants by warring parties is no less crucial for the humanitarian needs of war-affected populations than the issue of how agencies can best tailor their programmes according to the principles of humanitarian action. Nevertheless, in line with the purpose of this chapter, the focus here will be only on the latter. As far as the definition of humanitarian action/assistance is concerned, this chapter will adopt a similarly expansive understanding to that employed by Minear and Weiss (1993:9) which encompasses: "...activities covering a full spectrum, from the supplemental feeding of infants during famines to longer-term measures such as the strengthening of indigenous social and institutional coping mechanisms to avoid future crises".

Such an expansive definition of humanitarian action is considered contentious, because it is seen as blurring the boundaries between humanitarian and development work. Macrae (2001) defines this as the 'new aid orthodoxy' with a number of distinctive characteristics. First, there is a strong perception of aid within the international community as a vehicle for addressing the root causes of conflict, which considers conflict as mainly the result of underdevelopment. According to this view, only by dealing with poverty and inequality can one also prevent conflicts. However, Macrae (ibid: 39) argues, such a view ignores the powerful role of political elites in the creation of armed conflicts, as the "...comparative wealth of a group may render it more vulnerable to the threat of violence". Secondly, according to the new aid orthodoxy, it is also believed that most conflicts are the result of misunderstanding between the different parties. Subsequently, the psychosocial aspect of conflict resolution has become an important component of humanitarian assistance. It is

thought that aid can be used as an incentive for institutional change in this process. Finally, the blurring of boundaries between relief and development have resulted in a direct danger to the perception of traditional humanitarian assistance as 'neutral', causing a substantial shift in the political meaning of these interventions and the way they are perceived by warring sides and beneficiaries (ibid:43).

In conjunction with the highly politicised environment of contemporary war-affected areas, humanitarianism also faces the danger of being involved in the dynamics of armed conflict. Boyce (2000:367) uses the analogy of water and fire in order to explain the possible negative implications of aid in relation to conflict: "Aid is not like water, which sprayed on the flames or embers of conflict invariably helps to extinguish them. Indeed, it can be more like oil. Appropriate aid can diminish the risks of conflict, but inappropriate aid can fuel it". According to Bryans, et al, (1999:10), humanitarianism becomes "...at best another source of economic extraction, either directly through theft and hijacking, or indirectly through manipulation of distressed populations". In addition, humanitarian practitioners are sometimes perceived as "...an obstacle to be overcome, increasingly through violence". In other words, as Slim (1995:111) eloquently states, in the operational environment of today's intra-state armed conflicts, relief workers can no longer enjoy the 'camouflage' of 'saintliness' as they are often considered to be part of the world of conflict. This is obviously all about the assumption that humanitarian action can actually be 'neutral', but as the discussions in the next section will suggest this might be only wishful thinking even if it is not totally impossible.

Prendergast (1996) identifies three primary ways in which aid sustains conflicts. First, aid can be an instrument of war, for example through the manipulation of its access and population movements, and its diversion for the purposes of conflict. Secondly, aid can exacerbate conflict dynamics as it might increase the resources available to prosecute conflicts, and warring sides might sometimes hijack humanitarian infrastructure. Finally, aid can exacerbate the causes of war in a number of ways: by increasing competition between governments, rebel movements and neighbouring communities; by targeting certain communities, instead of others even though this may be done for the best humanitarian objectives such as addressing the needs of

vulnerable groups; and through the effects of humanitarian assistance on local authority structures and power balances.

Elaborating on the impact of aid on conflict, Anderson (1999) explains that armed conflicts have profound effects on the local economy, imposing major shifts in employment, production and trade patterns. Ironically however, humanitarian responses may also reinforce economic systems of conflict. It is in this context that hiring guards from local militias in order to protect humanitarian assistance and relief agency staff can easily become a difficult dilemma, as this is likely to feed the war economy. In addition to hiring guards, another dilemma is the payments that aid agencies often have to make to those in control in their areas of operation. As a result of such payments, further resources are available for warring sides to buy more weapons. It is also argued that the more humanitarian agencies take over the responsibilities of local authorities in the provision of shelter, infrastructure, food and security, then the more resources are available for investing in the armed conflict itself. The issue of targeting for assistance those people perceived to be most vulnerable or needy, when judged according to set criteria can also turn into a source of conflict. For each targeted group receiving assistance, there is likely to be another war-affected group that may feel discriminated against because of their exclusion. This is likely to fuel tensions between different ethnic and religious groups and displaced and host communities.

Even the presence of the international humanitarian community is likely to have profound implications on the local economy, as aid tends to create its own industry in recipient countries. For example, after humanitarian crises local prices for housing, office space and hotel rooms increase rapidly in parallel to the influx of expatriates. The aid system also has a dramatic impact on local wage and employment structures, as those able to speak a foreign language can easily earn three to four times more as translators than those highly qualified local people such as doctors, university lecturers and engineers (Barakat and Kapisazovic, 2003).

As preceding discussions show it would be naïve to assume humanitarian assistance can be provided in a vacuum of neutrality. Most of the above- mentioned impacts of aid on conflict are in fact, unavoidable. It is true that some can be mitigated through

more effective coordination of relief agencies, a wider accountability of programmes and a greater level of professionalism in implementation. However, it is also a fact that relief agencies often find themselves in a position in which they have no choice but to make payments to facilitate their work and hire local militia as guards. The alternative is simply not to operate in such environments. Therefore, it is important to understand the challenges of the new aid orthodoxy and the constraints of such an operational environment on the principles of humanitarian action. The ensuing section will focus on the twin principles of neutrality and impartiality, before exploring other core values of humanitarianism.

3. Principles of Humanitarian Action

3.1. The Twin Principles of Humanitarian Action: Neutrality and Impartiality

The twin principles of impartiality and neutrality, which are enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols of 1977, have been central to most approaches to humanitarian action in war. According to The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which exemplifies this tradition, the principle of impartiality means that the organisation “...makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.” On the other hand, the principle of neutrality is defined as follows: “In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Red Cross may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.” (Roberts,1996:51). In other words, impartiality is about providing humanitarian assistance on the basis of ‘need’ and need only, whilst neutrality is about not taking sides in any type of hostilities. Elaborating on the meaning of neutrality, von Flue (1999:127) states that it is “...a way of facilitating impartial action, action devoid of discrimination”. However, he urges that when it comes to helping the victims of armed conflict and all those not (or no longer) taking part in the hostilities the ICRC is actually not ‘neutral’ as it “... actively defends their interests”.

Furthermore, von Flue (1999) alleges that although most humanitarian agencies claim to adhere to the principles of impartiality and neutrality, their actions face the risk of

being politicised, which would make those principles totally defunct. It is stated that humanitarian assistance should dissociate itself “...from any effort to resolve a conflict” (ibid, 129), because as Macrae and Leader (2000) claim, without adhering to these twin principles, humanitarian action is only a facade. In other words, in the absence of these principles, partisan politics will dictate the nature and scale of external assistance, thus humanitarian action effectively becomes ‘political action’. De Waal and Rakiya (1994) specifically criticise the lack of appreciation for neutrality among relief agencies (excluding ICRC) operating in Africa arguing that neutrality for them is an aspiration rather than a fact. Another frequently voiced criticism is that for some aid agencies neutrality is used as a ‘fig leaf’ to hide their lack of accountability, needs assessment and other formalised operational procedures.

Elaborating further, Bradbury (1995) and Macrae (1996) assert that the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian action are in fact, in crisis due to a number of reasons. Firstly, in today’s armed conflicts there is great difficulty in distinguishing who is a combatant and who is a civilian, which acts as a constraint on the ideal of helping ‘innocent victims’. Secondly, as explained earlier, humanitarian assistance contributes to the political economy of armed conflicts in a number of ways. Thirdly, effective assistance can sometimes require ‘pragmatic’ solutions, such as making certain commitments to warring sides in order to assist war-affected populations. Finally, as it is often used by donor states as a substitute for political action, humanitarian assistance itself becomes ‘non-neutral’. Furthermore, the involvement of governments and their bilateral agencies in humanitarian action creates more obstacles to adherence to these principles, as NGOs often become “...the channel by which governments, international organisations and major foundations distribute their humanitarian aid” (Roberts, 1996:52).

According to Prendergast (1996:40), another possible challenge to the principle of neutrality is “...the trap of allowing balanced objectives to take precedence over objective assessment”. It is possible that by attempting to be neutral, a humanitarian agency can easily find itself in a non-neutral position. If the assessment of needs for example, is compromised in order to remain or be seen as neutral, such an attempt can lead to programmes, which are effectively far from being neutral. It is also the case that humanitarian agencies often find themselves needing to explain to war-affected

communities and warring sides that their action is actually 'proportional' to needs. This is a contentious issue, since a common misconception of impartiality is that it equates to 'equal' assistance to all sides. Obviously however, if needs are greater on one side than the other, then the provision of assistance should be proportional to this reality. Nevertheless, this is interpreted as partial assistance by different sides of the conflict. It should also be emphasized that neutrality should not be deployed as an excuse for ignoring local political dynamics as "...ignorance can be deadly" (ibid, 41). It is noted that there is in fact "...no panacea for the neutrality conundrum" and it is suggested that humanitarian policy "...should include the principles of independence and responding proportionately to need and should prioritise the gathering and analysing of information on socio-economic dynamics so that these principles can be carried out astutely" (ibid, 42).

On the other hand, according to El Bushra (1999:129), it would be "...fallacious to think that humanitarian agencies can, or should, remain neutral during conflict situations". Considering their central position in controlling certain key resources and even sometimes, simply for their presence in the field, "...NGOs are inevitably and actively implicated in conflicts". This view obviously represents one end of the adherence-to-the-twin-principles spectrum, and completely the opposite end of where the ICRC idealistically positions itself on that spectrum. In fact, El Bushra (ibid) believes that "...in certain situations they [NGOs] may deem it necessary to take sides" if they are "...convinced that the best way to serve the poor is to oppose the individuals or factions behind corruption and injustice". In regard to the principle of impartiality, El Bushra states that it is "...scarcely of greater use than neutrality" (ibid).

Trying to find a via media between the above-mentioned opposite perceptions of the twin principles, such terms as 'independence' or 'detachment' were suggested as more appropriate alternatives to 'neutrality' in order more accurately to reflect the activities of many agencies in the field of humanitarianism (Prendergast, 1996). For example, Minear and Weiss (1993:23) prefer 'nonpartisanship' over 'impartiality' and 'neutrality', and define it as follows: "Humanitarian action responds to human suffering because people are in need, not to advance political, sectarian, or other extraneous agendas. It should not take sides in conflicts". However, no matter what

term is used in order to describe these principles, a more comprehensive understanding of these two opposite perceptions of the twin principles can only be effectively understood by exploring the concepts of 'deontological' and 'teleological' approaches in humanitarianism.

In ethical theories, a deontological approach may be represented as: "...what is moral is that which is imposed on us as obligatory". In other words, it considers assistance as a duty "...in a list of rules and norms that are characterised by both restrictions (on freedom) and universality". On the other hand, the teleological approach considers what is moral "...as that which we estimate to be good: ethics makes reference here to what comes to a satisfactory end (happiness, a fulfilled life), which is desired and must be achieved through actions that are considered good to the extent that they achieve that end"(Etxeberría, 2001:90). For example, according to the deontological approach, healing a combatant's wounds is itself something good and therefore it is a duty to do this. However, the teleological view considers this as a limited perspective, since it is possible that the person being helped, could return to the armed conflict and kill children (Slim, 1996). Therefore, without considering possible consequences of humanitarian action, the teleological view believes that humanitarianism would always be far from achieving its primary objectives. It can clearly be seen that the approach taken by the ICRC can be described as 'deontological', while the approach advocated by El Bushra is more 'teleological'.

A wide range of humanitarian agencies represents different positions between the deontological and teleological approaches. Apart from the ICRC, it would be rather difficult for many agencies to define a clear position in this spectrum. Some agencies such as MSF would probably position themselves much closer to the teleological end of the spectrum. However, attempting to place humanitarian agencies on a spectrum like this does not aim to define one approach as better than the other, because both of them are in fact, essential aspects of humanitarianism. Depending on the principles that shape the mandate of an agency, its action would be perceived at a particular position along this spectrum. For example, if saving lives were the only objective of an agency then a deontological focus would be more appropriate, while another agency that based its work on a wider range of principles such as political

empowerment and the protection of human rights would need to adopt a more teleological focus in its action.

The significance of these approaches is more likely to arise in humanitarian situations where it is difficult to assess whether various options would have positive or negative consequences. Known as the dilemmas of humanitarian action, such situations can easily pose serious challenges to the integrity of humanitarianism. Depending on their position along the deontological-teleological spectrum, different humanitarian agencies respond to such situations in different ways. For example, if a humanitarian agency is aware of gross human rights abuses by authorities and armed factions, should it denounce them publicly, which might lead to the organisation's expulsion from its area of operation and therefore an increase in the suffering of its targeted population, or should it ignore those abuses as the trade-off for ensuring the continuation of its programmes? A humanitarian agency with a teleological approach is likely to denounce them, while a deontological organisation is likely to ignore or at best, pass such information to a specialised human rights organisation. In another scenario, should a humanitarian agency accept some complicity with local militias in its area of operation in order to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians, and if it does, what would this mean to the integrity of the twin principles of impartiality and neutrality? Once again, whether it is a deontological or teleological approach, the decision making of different agencies in such an environment is likely to vary considerably (Etxeberria, 2001).

3.2. Other Principles of Humanitarian Action

There have been numerous attempts over the last decade to establish a set of principles to guide humanitarian action. The Providence Principles by Brown University consist of the following eight principles: 1. Relieving life-threatening suffering 2. Proportionality to need 3. Nonpartisanship 4. Independence 5. Accountability 6. Appropriateness 7. Contextualization 8. Subsidiarity of sovereignty (Minear and Weiss, 1993:19). The first four Providence Principles are in fact, direct interpretations of the twin principles of impartiality and neutrality.¹ Subsequently, their interpretation during the implementation of humanitarian programmes would face similar challenges to those faced by the principles of impartiality and neutrality.

The fifth principle calls for a transparent humanitarianism, reporting fully on activities not only to donors but also to beneficiaries. The principle of ‘appropriateness’ advocates the need for humanitarian action to tailor itself to the local socio-economic, cultural and physical environment, and to aim to enhance, not supplant, locally available resources.

The principle of ‘contextualization’ is probably the most contentious one, since it states, “Effective humanitarian action should encompass a comprehensive view of overall needs and of the impact of interventions. Encouraging respect for human rights and addressing the underlying causes of conflicts are essential elements.” (ibid, 35). It seems that this principle in fact, contradicts the principle of ‘nonpartisanship’. As the discussions in the previous section indicated, to deal with root causes of conflicts would inevitably bring with it the need to deal with local political balances, empowerment of disfranchised communities and taking direct action against human rights abuses. However, this would also mean the politicisation of humanitarian assistance thereby posing a direct challenge to the principle of neutrality. Therefore, the Providence Principles themselves present a contradictory approach in the guidance they offer to humanitarian organisations. On the other hand, ‘Subsidiarity of Sovereignty’ should be seen as an important breakthrough in humanitarianism. Considering that these principles were put together in 1994, a principle stating the need for sovereignty to defer to the relief of life-threatening suffering in situations where humanitarianism and sovereignty clash, should be considered as an important step forward. This concept went on to become for example, one of the underlying justifications for the development of guiding principles for the protection of internally displaced persons in the late 1990s.

Another important initiative in assembling a set of principles for humanitarian action was the International Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGO Code of Conduct which established some measure of regulation of disaster assistance in 1994.² As with the Providence Principles, so the twin principles of impartiality and neutrality resonate throughout this Code of Conduct.³ There are also contradictions within the Code of Conduct, for example, the ‘humanitarian imperative comes first’ principle states that “When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such”. However, principle number eight urges that humanitarian assistance

“...must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs”. Considering that most vulnerabilities are likely to have root causes in the sphere of power balances and access to resources, an attempt to reduce future vulnerabilities would effectively mean dealing with political structures and mechanisms. In other words, the use of relief aid to address vulnerabilities faces the risk of the politicisation of humanitarian assistance. It should be noted that the issue here is not whether relief aid should be utilised in the reduction of future vulnerabilities or not, as it is a crucial necessity for effective assistance particularly in protracted emergencies. However, what is required from humanitarian practitioners is to have a full awareness of the possible implications of such an undertaking in terms of the politicisation of humanitarian action.

It should also be borne in mind that unless the practice of humanitarian assistance undergoes drastic institutional, financial and organisational changes some of the principles in the Code of Conduct are likely to remain as little more than ‘ideals’. For example, the fourth principle claims that non-governmental humanitarian agencies (NGHAs) would “...not act as instruments of government foreign policy”. Although this principle states an important ideal for humanitarian work, it also seems to be completely unrealistic in a context in which most NGHAs rely heavily on government funding for their programmes. In other words, having such a principle in the Code of Conduct is obviously no guarantee of its realisation unless there is true financial independence of NGHAs from governments. The ninth principle, which urges NGHAs to be accountable to both donors and beneficiaries, also faces a similar challenge, as the likelihood of agencies actually holding themselves accountable to their beneficiaries, particularly in an emergency, is rather questionable. Unless there are drastic changes in funding policies, this principle is also likely to remain as little more than a piece of ‘politically correct’ rhetoric.

The principle of respecting local culture and custom can also be contentious. Humanitarian agencies sometimes need to make difficult choices between their principles and what is considered to be acceptable within local culture. Such issues as the participation of women’s, women’s rights, female literacy, or humanitarian programmes specifically for women may clash with restrictions imposed on women by conservative regimes or cultures. For example, this was one of the most contested

issues faced by the humanitarian community in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. It was in response to the restrictions imposed on women (particularly in relation to employment, education and access to health care) that some donor and implementing agencies decided to suspend their involvement in the country. However, according to Barakat and Wardell (2001), this policy ironically, had particularly negative consequences for women themselves as it left many female-headed households without assistance. Furthermore, those agencies with a more deontological approach, which chose to remain despite the restrictions, were nevertheless able to secure concessions from the regime, which resulted in modest improvements in the lives of Afghan women.

Having accepted the importance of establishing such principles for humanitarian action, Prendergast (1996:46) identifies some of the dangers of codes of conduct. The first being their vulnerability to possible political manipulation, he states that such codes and resulting sanctions "...can be invoked for subjective reasons and can create dilemmas and interruptions in resource-scarce, volatile regions marked by divided authority and mixed front lines." Therefore, as well as establishing codes of conduct the field of humanitarianism also needs transparent procedures for their utilisation in war-affected areas. Another potential danger stated by Prendergast (ibid) is the challenge of including rebel movements in ground-rule signing and dissemination. In other words, the implementation of codes of conduct in situations of disputed, divided, or unclear authority is likely to face huge obstacles. It is also noted that the introduction of such codes may ignore the existence of traditional legal principles inherent in a war-affected community. There may be situations in which international principles might not be relevant "...in the context of what are often richly developed indigenous principles of group interaction and justice" (ibid). Finally, Prendergast once again, rightly points out that another difficulty with the implementation of codes of conduct concerns how best to ensure the coordination of all, or some of those agencies involved in response to a humanitarian crisis.

As a response to criticisms of the effectiveness of such Codes of Conduct, the next important step in the formalisation of principles of humanitarian action was the launching of the Sphere Project by a number of, mainly European relief agencies in 1997. The project was initiated "...to improve the quality of assistance provided to

people affected by disasters, and to enhance the accountability of the humanitarian system in disaster response” by proposing a set of Minimum Standards and a Humanitarian Charter. The Minimum Standards relate to the sectors of food, nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter and site planning, and health. As indicated by the Project itself, although the establishment of such Minimum Standards and accompanying indicators were not altogether new, they “...represent a remarkable consensus across a broad spectrum of agencies, and mark a new determination to ensure that humanitarian principles are realised in practice.” (www.sphereproject.org). Although the Sphere Project has faced criticism for creating a parallel set of guidelines, which conflict with those long-standing standards established by some specialised UN agencies such as the UN Fund for Children (UNICEF), World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP), nevertheless, it was a crucial step forward for the realisation of principles of humanitarian action into practice. The earlier initiatives did not go any further than putting forward a set of principles at a conceptual level, however, the Sphere Project actually brought about a set of minimum standards and their accompanying indicators.

4. Challenges of ‘New Humanitarianism’ in Post-Cold War Context

The early 1990s gave rise to hopes for a co-ordinated approach to crises, involving military, diplomatic, humanitarian and developmental instruments within an integrated political framework. There were a growing number of ‘success stories’, from Mozambique to Cambodia and Central America. In these cases the use of the military component essentially had been aimed at supporting and protecting relief operations while establishing a broader climate of security. The military had been subordinate to humanitarian activity. Such operations were based on a new approach to peacekeeping and humanitarian relief, with a pivotal role for the United Nations-United States-European Community partnership. The new context, with the attention put on appropriate reconstruction and development policies, gave the EC the opportunity to display its considerable capacity in this field and allowed space for the now heavyweight role of NGOs, whose spectrum of competencies was easily (though sometimes superficially) converted to the new challenge.

Abruptly, the tragic experience of Somalia placed the new generation of operations on hold. After the initial shock, the international community became more reluctant in its willingness to get involved in new missions and assume new responsibilities. More and more often, the Security Council's members – vis á vis major complex emergencies - were capable only of agreeing on the lowest common denominator of international politics: relief. The new philosophy could be summarised as dispatching humanitarian aid but disdaining any political engagement. The case of Rwanda was paradigmatic: an ethnocide was carried out in full view of the media and international community, yet the latter's response was sluggish. However, over four hundred and fifty NGOs descended on the country, creating a major coordination problem.

By 1994-95, many international NGOs, reinforced by academics and institutions, were acutely aware of the insufficiency of international political responses to crises, namely the tendency of institutions to agree on relief as the sole solution. In France, the expression *piège humanitaire* (humanitarian trap) reflected the increasing frustration of aid organisations facing endless engagement in complex emergencies on an almost biblical-scale. “The humanitarian organisations either find themselves alone in coping with situations of chaos and unbridled violence that go beyond their capacity for action and far exceed their mandates, or, at the other extreme, see themselves relegated to the sidelines of operations conducted by those same States in conflicts where the political interests of the latter happen to coincide with the concerns of the humanitarian community” (Pasquier quoted in Macrae, 2001a:page no?).⁴

Commento: Gianni, page no?

At this stage, institutions and NGOs, as well as academics, undertook a series of major critical reviews of contemporary humanitarianism. Recurring themes arising from these deliberations included: concerns for efficiency and effectiveness; the need for coordination; a lack of broader policy frameworks for operations; hazy relations between governmental, non-governmental and military actors; a growing awareness that third party assistance might extend conflicts; and increasing interference of the political sphere in neutral humanitarian space. The central role of UN agencies in operations had contributed to an increasing politicisation of aid, at the same time that the space for the UN-led peacekeeping actions was shrinking. While the UN role was

discussed, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) now the largest donor in humanitarian aid, decided to develop its own 'European way'.

The situation changed again in 1995, after the NATO decision to intervene in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite a traditional awkwardness in relations with military actors, many humanitarian organisations welcomed the role of military intervention as the catalyst in ending five years of bloodshed. The working relationship forged in Bosnia and Herzegovina went some way towards eroding the traditional lack of trust between the military and humanitarian sectors and contributed towards the creation of the cultural and political conditions that made a new multidisciplinary approach possible.⁵ Europe became a major player in this new environment.

4.1. ECHO and NGOs

Established in 1992, ECHO has worked in 85 countries including Central and Eastern Europe, and Former Yugoslavia. It manages funds from the European Commission budget and the European Development Fund. In the period 1992-1995, 1176 million Ecu were allocated to former Yugoslavia, 48% of the total European humanitarian aid (Commission plus Member States), which totalled 2270 million ecu.⁶

In order to strengthen its links with operational organisations, ECHO worked with a selected group of partners (UN, NGOs and the Red Cross) through a specific Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). Its stated purpose was "... to define roles and responsibilities in the implementation of humanitarian operations financed by the European Community."(www.europa.eu.int). In fact, the FPA included execution modalities, objectives, principles, values and criteria and "the rules governing humanitarian operations, which may be adjusted to suit different situations or changing circumstances." It also operated with two main purposes: "the formulation of coherent strategies and the development of new initiatives for humanitarian operations so as to make humanitarian aid financed by the European Community more effective." It also sets out among its common goals, to "highlight the (European) Community nature of the aid and to increase understanding of humanitarian issues, especially in Europe and in third countries where the (European) Community is funding major humanitarian operations." In 1992 ECHO had 25 implementing

partners. Within seven years the number of implementing partners had mushroomed to 220, and its budget had risen from 195 to 812 million euro. The interaction between social actors and policy was considered one of the central aspects in EC development co-operation and humanitarian relief. The 1990s had witnessed the establishment of a plethora of interlocutors as well as lobbying groups, NGOs networks, and associations. This presented the Commission and ECHO with a challenge in the creation of consultation mechanisms. Initially, NGOs were recipients of about one third of the ECHO budget, with this figure increasing to 67% by 1999. Crises in Rwanda and the Former Yugoslavia served as catalysts in this process of devolution to NGOs. A growing sensitivity in European civil society, touched by its proximity to the theatre of war, encouraged responses with a 'social' quality, while the crisis of development policies pushed many NGOs to look at humanitarian aid as a compatible alternative. Last but not least, while the international budget for humanitarian aid grew, funding for development aid declined dramatically.

The presence of European humanitarian actors bloomed quickly in all major crisis areas. Normally this was a long-term engagement that also covered the post-emergency and reconstruction phases. ECHO's mandate had been conceived as short-term and initially was emergency focussed, but since the EC was unable to define political and administrative responsibilities for these transitional phases, ECHO persisted. This long-term engagement allowed the organisation to capitalise on a growing pool of expertise and fuelled Commissioner Bonino's ability to give European humanitarian aid a high political profile (Ryfman, 1999).

As politics seemed to be increasingly concerned with peace, stability, democratisation and human rights the concept of a multi-faceted international community working within the same framework began to appear more plausible. Intertwining political objectives such as development and democracy building with humanitarian ones appeared to be an inevitable (though delicate) step towards a new vision of security. This was a vision, which included on the one hand sustainable development, on the other control of migration flows and economic stability. A vision mirrored, on the humanitarian side, by the new theoretical approach called New Humanitarianism.

4.2. Focus on quality

Very soon NGOs were encouraged to invest in this partnership and somehow to give-up their traditional political role, based on independence and advocacy. Many organisations focused their efforts on efficiency, quality and professionalism, as increasingly required by donors. British NGOs along with MSF, Caritas and the Red Cross family, focused their attention on quality through projects like Spehere, the Humanitarian Accountability Project, People in Aid and others. Steps towards coordination were also made at the international level through networks like the Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response. Occasionally, some of these umbrellas also opened coordination offices in the field.

New Humanitarianism had the potential to simplify many of the challenges facing the humanitarian sector, particularly the obstacle that prevented governments from integrating humanitarian aid into their foreign policy toolboxes. A new activism pervaded humanitarianism: wider peacekeeping, *droit d'ingérence*, military-humanitarian standing forces, continuum and other concepts emerged, to offer a methodological framework for the new broader humanitarian community. The European Commission focused on Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) - a single doctrinal framework encompassing all the components of crisis response. The new approach embraced all stages of a crisis: prevention, diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, institution building, reconstruction and reconciliation, conflict resolution and crisis management.

By the turn of the century, 'new' humanitarian aid had reached a critical phase: "First, the blurring of humanitarian and political objectives has meant that the motivation behind humanitarian decision-making has become much less clear. It has become easy for conditions for effective humanitarian action to be, or be seen to be, de facto political conditionally, this has been the case with regard to the UK/US approach to security in Afghanistan, and in relation to energy needs in Serbia. ...Second, the integrationist approach assumed that because conditional humanitarianism is being implemented as part of a wider ethical international policy framework it too is necessarily ethical. ... It assumes that not engaging on humanitarian issues with

certain parties, because of their human rights, records are an ethical approach. ... The idea of the ‘bad victim’ becomes legitimised” (Macrae, 2001a:page|no?).

Commento: Gianni, page no?

The climax of this trend was the Kosovo war: when the overlapping between combatants and humanitarians, victims and slaughterers, aid and war was brought into sharp focus. The situation subsequently worsened with Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003): humanitarian principles are systematically invoked and violated to justify ‘humanitarian wars’ in the name of ‘human rights’; and NGOs bring relief through funding from the same governments which waged the war, working side by side with the soldiers who fought it. It is the end of independence and neutrality, perfectly symbolised by the simultaneous dropping of bombs and food rations from US Air Force planes in Afghanistan. Impartiality ceased to be a taboo since the programme ‘Energy for Democracy’ was carried out in Serbia in 1999-2000. Respect for civilian lives –a fundamental principle of western good governance – has been neglected since.

Led by the Red Cross family, a number of organisations, as well as voices from within the establishment, have called for a full return to humanitarian purity, strictly based on the three principles of neutrality, impartiality and the humanitarian imperative, cutting all links with political actors. But Afghanistan and Iraq have confirmed that this is not in keeping with the *zeitgeist*. In fact, as politics increasingly relies on ‘relief’ as a major tool for response to crises, it wants it to be useful for political goals. The point is that trying to exploit humanitarian aid for political purposes normally reduces effectiveness, results in partisanship, a waste of resources and, quite frequently, scandals. It hampers its same meaning and purpose and, eventually, destroys citizens’ confidence. Asking politics to withdraw from the humanitarian arena and respect its autonomy is mere good sense, for the sake of politics itself.

4.3. Europe is missing an opportunity

For many NGOs and commentators the European institutions present themselves as the most likely political actor in the search for an acceptable overarching policy framework for humanitarianism. In total, the European Union provides some 55 per

cent of total international Official Development Assistance and more than two thirds of grant aid. The Commission is also the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world, with political and financial responsibility for more than 10 per cent of total ODA worldwide (European Commission, 2000).

The process of drafting the European Convention presented an opportunity of reaffirming the principled nature of European aid but unfortunately it was a missed opportunity, preventing Europe from becoming the first sovereign entity whose fundamental charter is entirely based on international law. The Convention has just drafted the legal framework for the future of EU humanitarian interventions. A large group of humanitarian organisations (through the networks VOICE, Solidar and Eurostep) have expressed strong criticisms on the draft (VOICE, et al, 2003). These are articulated into four main points:

1. The Convention draft states that the Union's humanitarian aid "shall be conducted within the framework of the principles and objectives of the external action of the Union" while humanitarian aid should be delivered on a needs-basis to the most vulnerable populations, independently from any political considerations.
2. Article III-218.1 affirms that 'Humanitarian aid operations shall be conducted in compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination'. The third fundamental humanitarian principle of neutrality has mysteriously disappeared from the text.
3. Article III-218.5 proposes to establish 'a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian actions of the Union, a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.' This recalls a resolution by the Parliament proposing the creation of a European volunteer corps, similar to the 'US Peace Corps' mainly employed in development contexts. Quite apart from any consideration on the political meaning of organising voluntarism on a semi-institutional basis, there is unanimous consensus among experts that humanitarian assistance requires sound professionalism. 'Humanitarian aid functions in emergency contexts such as war and natural disaster, where know-how and quick reactions are essential, and dangerous, horrific and traumatising events are the norm. Humanitarian aid is

a setting for experienced, trained professionals such as NGOs and international organisations. While the idea of bringing young Europeans in touch with third-country realities is interesting, a Voluntary Corps might be more appropriate in the context of long-term development cooperation.’ (ibid).

4. In the text proposed by the Presidium, humanitarian aid “may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories.” NGOs reply that “the only fight to which humanitarian aid should be called is the fight against poverty and human suffering.” (ibid). The proposed text, reflecting the dominant anti-terrorist discourse, constitutes a miserable sell-out of humanitarianism.

5. Conclusions

Humanitarian action in conflict affected countries takes place in a highly politicised environment in which political, operational and humanitarian decisions are made in an overlapping and interchangeable manner. They are often used as a substitute for each other as humanitarian assistance is increasingly used as a compensation for the lack of willingness to bring about a political resolution to armed conflicts. Furthermore, the boundaries between civilians and combatants are no longer clear. Those working as farmers during the day may be waging a war at night. The response to such crises comes from a wide range of governmental, non-governmental, multilateral and local actors, as well as the international military, each with totally different mandates thereby adding to the overall confusion and complexity of the situation. Some of common features of today’s humanitarian response are unfortunately, power wrangling, ‘turf wars’ between different actors and competition for funding among NGOs. It is in such an environment that relief agencies are required to observe the above-mentioned principles of humanitarian action. Whether they are in the form of a list of commitments, ideals or minimum standards, the scope for obstacles to their realisation is clearly enormous. Consequently, humanitarian agencies often find themselves making difficult judgements on how best to help war-affected populations, whilst not exacerbating the conflict’s root causes and sustaining its dynamics. It was in response to this challenge that Anderson’s ‘Do No Harm’ concept attracted considerable breadth of interest in the field of humanitarianism. Organisations at the

teleological end of the spectrum have been eager to adopt this concept, as they rightly emphasize that humanitarian assistance does not operate in a political vacuum. It is thought that through the provision of minimal amounts of material input humanitarian agencies might reduce the possibility of their assistance becoming a factor in sustaining the conflict. Such organisations were also eager to advocate the deployment of ‘developmental relief’ in their programmes. In other words, they insist that addressing root causes should be considered as a more appropriate approach to the realities of today’s armed conflicts.

It is also accepted that although, often well intentioned, some humanitarian assistance programmes might exacerbate crises by feeding war economies, thereby posing an obstacle to self-sufficiency and more sustainable solutions. Experience shows that humanitarianism can no longer hide behind the façade of ‘altruism’ and expect that all its actions will simply result in something good. Goodness as an outcome is not an inherited part of the intention and motivation of humanitarianism, but can only be achieved through a dedicated professionalism at both policy and field levels. In order to ensure this however, humanitarianism should base its actions on certain principles that are widely accepted and endorsed by a broad range of agencies. Nevertheless, this needs to be done by bearing in mind the fact those principles such as ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’ in particular, may be impossible to adhere to in certain circumstances. Humanitarian agencies cannot simply be compelled to act when and where possible, regardless of the possible negative impact of their actions. As the teleological perspective advocates, the consequences of humanitarian action should be weighed carefully, and if necessary the decision to reduce humanitarian assistance or to provide no assistance at all in some circumstances, should be one of the possible options open to agencies.

A relief agency’s position on the humanitarian spectrum is defined collectively by its actions and stated mandate. For an agency like the ICRC, adherence to the principles of humanitarian action is of the utmost importance and it is this that makes ICRC particularly distinctive among other humanitarian agencies. However, for many other agencies, neither in terms of resources nor in the reality of their operational environment, could they ensure the same level of adherence to the principles of ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’. It should also be recognised that, because of the special

status of the ICRC, its donors would know that they have little or no influence over its activities, giving the ICRC the advantage of being totally independent. However, this does not mean that agencies with a more teleological approach cannot have a similar independence. For example, MSF refuses funding from some donors in order to maintain its independence. Besides, even the ICRC has to accept that the belligerents of today's conflicts have little recognition or understanding of the Red Cross emblems or principles. The recent proliferation of aid agencies also makes it hard for combatants to differentiate the one from the other (Barrow and Jennings, 2001:39).

On the other hand, by acknowledging that humanitarian action might sometimes need to disregard the principles of impartiality and neutrality in order to be more careful about possible negative consequences, the new aid orthodoxy also runs the risk of blurring important boundaries between humanitarian work and political action. If this is deemed to be absolutely necessary on humanitarian grounds as well as the grounds of the agency's mandate, then the most effective approach would be to identify mitigation strategies for the possible consequences of reducing activities or providing no assistance at all. In other words, the 'Do No Harm' concept should not be hijacked as a rationale for not taking any action, but instead should be used as guidance for the design of appropriate mitigation strategies for the possible negative consequences of reduced involvement or no action at all. The important distinction to be made here is that, while aid should be politically informed, as it increasingly is, it should not be politically driven. In order to address the root causes of conflict and provide political solutions, it should be accepted that political engagement is necessary. However, it is not the role of aid workers to serve this purpose, as political responsibility lies in the political not the humanitarian sphere. Ironically, the alternative to the principles of humanitarian action would be Slim's (1997) contrasting list of 'principles' which he sees as central tenets of today's humanitarianism: misunderstanding, isolationism, unilateralism, fluctuating and limited multilateralism, selectivity and containment.⁷ Although this is a disparaging view of current humanitarian environment, it perhaps serves well to demonstrate how the role and importance of central tenets such as neutrality and impartiality have been seriously diminished in the eyes of many in the field of humanitarianism.

Furthermore, policy trends, from 1999 on, have heightened the need to re-establish clear boundaries for humanitarian action, as well as an ad hoc political framework. If the future European constitution as discussed earlier, is not able to provide an appropriate framework for humanitarian decision-making processes, then the international community needs to look at other possibilities such as, for instance, the establishment of a mechanism, perhaps a technical-ethical committee - independent from Governments, the Security Council or the European Commission - aimed at ensuring that humanitarian aid is not dependent on or exploited by political agendas or vested interests. The credibility of any such mechanism should be above suspicion.

The main task of such a body would be promptly to analyse a crisis, assess the needs and decide or, at least, recommend the volume and forms of assistance. This would have to be done as soon as possible after the outbreak of the crisis and then subjected to an ongoing review. The mechanism could also be entrusted with post-facto evaluation. Its tasks need not necessarily be limited to specific crises. The independent body could also address general recommendations on the conduct of humanitarian assistance and perhaps, at least informally, propose draft legislation. In short, it would have both monitoring powers and powers of political and normative initiative in the field of humanitarian assistance. The key element of the envisaged mechanism's success would have to be its moral authority. Nonetheless, assigning some sort of semi-binding force to its recommendations is an option that should not be ruled out: for instance, further procedural requirements for decision-making could be added in case its recommendations are not followed. International practice provides examples of independent bodies, including numerous international fact-finding bodies and commissions of inquiry, although no model is likely to be suitable without adaptation. The composition and functioning of this independent monitoring body would have to be carefully considered in order to combine independence and credibility with the necessary technical expertise, effectiveness and capacity for rapid-response.

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Endnotes

¹ Relieving Life-Threatening Suffering: “Humanitarian action should be directed toward the relief of immediate life-threatening suffering.” Proportionality to Need: “Humanitarian action should correspond to the degree of suffering, wherever it occurs. It should affirm the view that life is as precious in one part of the globe as another.” Nonpartisanship: “Humanitarian action responds to human suffering because people are in need, not to advance political, sectarian, or other extraneous agendas. It should not take sides in conflict.” Independence: “In order to fulfil their mission, humanitarian organizations should be free of interference from home or host political authorities. Humanitarian space is essential for effective action.”

² As well as ICRC and IFRC, the following NGOs participated in the preparation of the Code of Conduct: Caritas International, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children Alliance, Lutheran World Federation, Oxfam and the World Council of Churches.

³ The Red Cross Movement’s Code of Conduct: 1. The humanitarian imperative comes first. 2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone. 3. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint. 4. We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy. 5. We shall respect culture and custom. 6. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities. 7. Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief. 8. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs. 9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources. 10. In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects.

⁴ André Pasquier, Political Adviser, International Committee of the Red Cross

⁵ In 1999, a few months before the Kosovo crisis, Commissioner Emma Bonino (in charge of humanitarian aid for the EC) proposed the systematic use of military logistics for humanitarian purposes. In an article published by a British journal, she suggested an agreement between ECHO and the Western European Union (WEU) aimed at ensuring military logistics for the transport of food aid and further possible developments. The WEU welcomed the proposal, assuming that ECHO was ready to pay the cost of such operations. After being checked against the budgets, the proposal was dismissed.

⁶ Court of Auditor, Special Report 2/97 of Court of Auditors concerning Humanitarian Action from the European Union between 1992-1995; C4-219/97. OJ CE n. 143/1, 12.5.1997.

⁷ **Misunderstanding:** An increasingly ignorant international community with less diplomatic representation in ‘marginal’ parts of the world will continue to shape policy without the real depth of understanding that it seeks to achieve in its priority areas of the globe. **Isolationism:** Powerful members of the international community will, on occasion, sometimes become isolationist in the belief that many parts of the world are not their concern. **Unilateralism:** In many instances particular major international or regional powers will act unilaterally (but often with UN blessing) in areas they consider to be ‘their own backyard’ or in situations where they see an important national strategic interest. **Fluctuating and Limited Multilateralism:** The difference of interest which makes up the

international community will continue to produce a variable and often limited multilateral action through the UN with a particular civil war seldom able to galvanise universal and concerted political and humanitarian action simultaneously and sustainably. **Selectivity:** The result of these tendencies will be a continuing selectivity and inconsistency of international response to the humanitarian tragedies caused by civil war around the world. **Containment:** International action towards many civil wars may continue to be primarily driven by a policy of containment rather than robust and conclusive engagement.