



Joint NGO Statement on the Protection of Humanitarian and Medical Personnel

April 1, 2019

On behalf of Action Against Hunger, CARE, Concern Worldwide US, Humanity and Inclusion, Medecins du Monde, Oxfam, and Save the Children, I want to thank the French and German governments for hosting today's Arria-Formula meeting on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel.

Every day our colleagues—particularly our national colleagues—face threats, intimidation, and violence as they strive to assist civilians in desperate need of protection and assistance. In 2017, 313 aid workers, including 285 national humanitarian workers, were victims of major attacks, according to the Aid Worker Security Report. Female humanitarian staff face particular challenges.

As front-line responders, local, national, and international organizations face constant threats—including actions by UN Member States—that hinder our ability to provide assistance in accordance with the four humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality, and humanity. Actions which erode or restrict humanitarian space risk the lives of the millions of vulnerable women, men, and children we support.

Throughout the world, civil society space is shrinking, including for humanitarian organizations. All too often, national governments—including members of this Council—make negative statements about humanitarian organizations, undermine our principles, and promulgate national legislation which limits our ability to operate. Promoting negative perceptions about humanitarian organizations reduces our acceptance with communities, placing humanitarian personnel at risk. We urge the Security Council to call on national governments to refrain from negative and harmful rhetoric about humanitarian organizations.

We collectively call on the UN Security Council and all UN Member States to protect and respect humanitarian action and the lives of humanitarian and medical personnel by taking the following steps:

- **Respect and comply fully with your obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, and ensure that other member states and armed groups do too.**

This should include clear and consistent condemnations of direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, denial of humanitarian access, deliberate targeting of schools, hospitals, and other civilian infrastructure, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

- **Address the impact of counterterrorism measures on principled humanitarian action.**

Increasingly stringent counterterrorism measures often compromise our ability to assist all civilians in need by rendering operations nearly impossible, for example, due to financial de-risking. In addition, broad interpretations of what constitutes support to terrorism can potentially lead to the sanctioning and criminalization of activities which are exclusively humanitarian and impartial in nature. We urge the Security Council to take steps to prevent or at least mitigate these unintended consequences by ensuring respect for international law in counterterrorism measures and by including clear humanitarian exemptions in sanctions regimes and counterterrorism legislation.



- **Ensure that humanitarian assistance is not used to achieve political and military objectives.**

Politicizing humanitarian assistance clearly disregards humanitarian principles and has a devastating impact on our safety and security by encouraging perceptions that we support political agendas. This poses particular risks for national and local organizations and their personnel operating in conflict areas. For example, a clear separation between humanitarian aid and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) funding, as a measure to address the perceived radicalization risk of a given community, is required to protect principled humanitarian action.

- **Express concern and minimize the militarization of humanitarian assistance.**

When humanitarian actors are co-located with security forces, we become targets. When humanitarian actors are forced to use military escorts, we become targets.

- **Protect humanitarian space within the mandates of peace operations.**

All too often, peace operations undertake humanitarian activities through quick impact projects or through their participation in or facilitation of the returns of displaced people. This role confusion places humanitarian actors at risk of violence.

- **Develop concrete solutions to strengthen the protection of humanitarian workers and enable the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2175 (2014), by supporting the creation of an independent Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General in charge of monitoring, reporting, and following-up on incidents against aid workers, with a focus on national personnel.**

As local humanitarian actors play an increasingly crucial role in delivery of humanitarian assistance, the Special Advisor could reinforce political support from the UN system for national humanitarian staff and support risk management in line with New Way of Working/Grand Bargain commitments.

- **Ensure that national and local organizations, including women's rights and women-led organizations, are effectively supported and financed to advance the localization of humanitarian assistance in conflict settings, as they face particular**

risks. Local humanitarians are often responding in areas that international organizations cannot reach.

- **Finally, the Security Council must ensure accountability for attacks on humanitarian personnel and should consider sanctions, arms embargoes, and referral into accountability mechanisms in cases where national governments are unable or unwilling to prosecute perpetrators of harm against humanitarian and medical personnel.**

We should never again have to mourn a single lost colleague.