

European Humanitarian Forum

Forum humanitaire européen



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Aid under fire: protecting humanitarian actors and fighting against impunity

22 March 2022 – 9:00 – 10:45

Moderator: *Cathy Smith*

Panelists: *Esther Kuisch Laroche (Director of Specialized Operations Support, UN Department for Safety and Security), Anton Leis Garcia (Director, Agencia Espanola de Cooperacion Internacional para el Desarrollo, Spain), Antonia Mulvey (Founder and Executive Director Legal Action Worldwide), Eman Ismail (Director of the International Council of Voluntary Agency - ICVA for the MENA), Jean-François Riffaud (Director-General, Action Contre la Faim), Christina Wille (Director, Insecurity Insight and Aid in Danger Project), Claude Maon (Director of Médecins Sans Frontières's International Legal Department), and Nic Lee (Executive Director, International NGO Safety Organisation).*

Interventions from the floor: *Daniel Beck (Deputy Head of Division, German Federal Foreign Office - Division for International Humanitarian Organisations and Multilateral Policy on Humanitarian Assistance); Selena Victor (Senior Director for Policy and Advocacy for Mercy Corps Europe); Andre Krummacher (Vice CEO Programmes, Impact & Accountability at ACTED)*

Executive Summary: The session built on and focused on implementing the Outcome Document of the 2021 Discussion Series on “Ensuring the protection, safety, and security of humanitarian workers and medical personnel in armed conflicts”. The protection of humanitarian and medical workers in armed conflicts remains a major challenge.

Besides major attacks that may amount to violations of IHL, there is also a “normalization” of harassment and day-to-day violence against aid workers. “If we can’t protect aid workers, we can’t deliver aid to people.” IHL can serve as a shield to protect aid workers, but it is important to ensure that this shield is upheld, including by not criminalizing humanitarian work through counter-terrorism or sanctions regimes. It is equally important to invest more into the security infrastructure of humanitarian actors, including having an effective multidimensional security risk management. This should also include strengthening the capacity of local actors who are on the frontline.

The session highlighted that protection of aid workers also requires high-quality data collection, compilation, and analysis mechanisms that will afterwards feed humanitarian partner’s, as well as donors’ and states’ own decision making process. Good progress has been already made on this. For example, INSO’s Conflict and Humanitarian Data Center (CHDC), to be launched on 1 April, includes an overview of all incidences reported in different contexts.

With the European Commission’s support, Insecurity Insight and IRC were also working on integrating data on attacks on healthcare and connecting the dots. Panellists equally stressed that the fight against impunity must be improved. Among others, the international community needs to provide more high quality legal service for humanitarian workers in the field. There are many difficult challenges, with survivors of violence’s fear to report for retaliation mentioned as a particular example.

Recommendations from the panel:

- Safeguard the impartiality of humanitarian workers on the ground, including by humanitarian exemptions in sanctions regimes.
- Show flexibility in delivering humanitarian assistance.
- Further support for innovative and ambitious solutions in order to provide legal aid to humanitarian worker was requested: 1) independent report systems, 2) a rapidly available body of independent and impartial investigators, 3) free and high-quality legal assistance to aid workers and their families.
- Continue promoting compliance with IHL, including through implementing UNSC Resolution 2286 and supporting the setting up of the position of UN Special Representative on Humanitarian Access.