

# Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre (HERE)

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A large, faint background graphic consisting of several stylized human figures in light blue, grey, and pink, arranged in a circular pattern, suggesting a community or network.

# Annual Report 2016

## Message from the Executive Director



Whether the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) was a success or not will be answered differently by different humanitarian actors. The fact is that the event was unique in its kind, and it is very unlikely that there will many other similar opportunities to set the humanitarian agenda on the world stage in our lifetime. As a think-tank, HERE made an effort to provide a contribution.

Through a year-long consultative process, it developed its report “On the right track? Reasserting the Priorities of Humanitarian Action”, seeking to identify the core components of the identity of humanitarian action. Essentially, HERE concludes that without the four humanitarian principles, and concerns for protection and accountability, the label “humanitarian” would be meaningless. Yet, these three inter-linked components did not receive the attention that they deserved during the Summit. Each of them carries certain controversies, which do not fit a summit that is supposed to showcase consensus among a large and wide audience. There is clearly no unified approach to the way in which humanitarian organisations understand and apply the principles. At the same time, the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian action depend on the four core principles to be used as a common denominator within the humanitarian community.

Keeping “On the Right Track” in mind, HERE will remain focussed on the core elements of humanitarian action. In 2017 and beyond, HERE will continue to press humanitarian organisations to spend more time and attention to including the principles in their decision-making.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop', written over a light blue grid background.

**Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop**

## About HERE

HERE is a young, Geneva-based independent think-tank. In a world where humanitarian needs remain unmet, HERE's mission is to contribute to improving humanitarian performance in order to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action. HERE drives evidence-based dialogue and identifies solutions for rebooting the humanitarian system. We create synergies by bridging action and policy, and by engaging actors involved in humanitarian responses. Working in close collaboration with operational humanitarian actors, we feed the humanitarian community with independent reports, policy papers, and studies based on applied, mixed-methods research and analysis with a view to influence policy, fuel debate and dialogue and change behaviour.

Our focus is on situations of armed conflict, where the most urgent needs are found. Crisis in humanitarian terms emerges not just from the existence of conflict, but in particular from its conduct. States and other armed actors consistently defy the obligations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, with devastating consequences for affected communities and for the delivery of aid. As challenging as this may sound for organisations delivering humanitarian responses, these obstacles should not become excuses for staying absent, or prioritising more stable areas, but should be drivers to try harder to deliver aid where it matters most.



Since its creation, HERE's portfolio consists of two work streams:

- Self-initiated reviews and studies, covered by funds from public and private donors, and based on HERE's own observations and gap analysis; and
- Commissioned pieces of work.

Our research is primarily at the policy and strategic level: how can humanitarian action be made more effective? In addressing this issue, the question is not only if humanitarian organisations are 'doing things right', but also if they are doing the 'right things'? In a world with scarce resources and multiple and multi-faceted challenges, humanitarian organisations must set priorities taking into account the four core principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence). These principles will help them in making hard choices and in being accountable for their decisions.

## The Year at a Glance

### The World Humanitarian Summit

Much of HERE's work in 2016 capitalised on the opportunity to inform and influence discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), which was held in Istanbul, Turkey, 23-24 May 2016. Whether working with partners or developing its own research and analysis, HERE actively engaged throughout the year with key stakeholders in the humanitarian community, from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to UN Member States, on the expectations of what should be achieved at the Summit and how its conclusions should be taken forward.

On 25 April 2016, **HERE hosted a public debate** - [30 Days to Istanbul: Expectations for the WHS and its Outcome](#) - at the ICRC's Humanitarium, to explore whether the WHS would meaningfully recognise and address the underlying obstacles that have long stood in the way of effective humanitarian action. The event also sought to clarify the most important outcomes to be expected from the Summit. In a debate moderated by Ambassador Tania Dussey-Cavassini, Dr Jemilah Mahmood (Under Secretary General for Partnerships, IFRC), Mr Bruno Jochum (General Director of MSF Switzerland) and Mr Berk Baran (Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office at Geneva) had a frank and honest debate on the expectations towards the WHS, the first-ever global meeting on humanitarian action. The audience comprised both State representatives, humanitarian practitioners, and other policy-makers, who all contributed to the discussion with



thoughts and personal/institutional expectations about the Summit.

Right before the Summit, on May 19, 2016, **HERE issued its report** "[On the right track? Reasserting the priorities of humanitarian action](#)". The report was the culmination of an 18-month project – Priorities and Commitments in Humanitarian Action, launched in late 2014. The objective of the Humanitarian Priorities Project was to provide purpose and direction to the increasingly broad agenda of humanitarian action. The project saw the organisation of three expert working meetings on humanitarian principles, protection, and accountability, respectively. "On the right track" builds on the results of these meetings, and it draws attention to two conditions as being indispensable to effective humanitarian action, particularly in situations of armed conflict: without greater political respect for international

law and existing policy commitments, strengthening humanitarian action will remain of relatively limited value. Equally important, humanitarians will need to be clear on who they are – humanitarian and development work are complementary but should not converge – and what they do – being transparent about the choices made as principled actors. Ahead of the WHS, the humanitarian news outlet IRIN highlighted the report as “a frank and reflective paper” asking probing questions about humanitarian principles and accountability.<sup>1</sup> The report was also picked up by ACF in their reflexions on the WHS,<sup>2</sup> informed an article in the Guardian,<sup>3</sup> and referred to by ICVA<sup>4</sup> and in various blogs.<sup>5</sup> It was also used by SAVE team in their final report “What it Takes”.<sup>6</sup> HERE’s Executive Director, Ed Schenkenberg, amplified the messages from “On the Right Track” throughout his participation at the Summit, and the paper serves as the basis for HERE’s Strategy going into 2017-2018.

While the bulk of the [Humanitarian Priorities Project](#) was carried out in 2015, the last **expert meeting on accountability**, was held in Geneva on 3 February 2016. It [highlighted](#) in particular the need for humanitarians to take responsibility for the way they operate, be it at the individual, institutional, or collective level. The meeting was attended by some twenty participants from different backgrounds, from academia, to government, to operational humanitarian organisations.

Following discussions at the meeting, HERE concluded that to move forward, discussions on accountability should be expanded beyond the heavy focus on results, and should look at ‘if’ and ‘how’ organisations incorporate the humanitarian principles and protection considerations in their work. To do so, humanitarians need to recognise the dilemmas inherent in humanitarian action.

After the Summit, many wondered what truly came out of it. How many of the Summit’s commitments were new intentions or just repetitions of earlier ones or even existing obligations? And, in addition, did the Summit prioritise the right issues? Most urgent needs are seen in situations of armed conflict, whereas many of the topics that scored high in terms of attention and commitments from participants do not directly strengthen the capacity of humanitarian actors in these situations.

Taking the Humanitarian Priorities Forward, **HERE convened a working meeting** on 10 June 2016. The meeting was used to reflect on the outcomes of the WHS and its follow up. It was held at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva, and gathered a small group of independent experts, representatives of operational NGOs, donor governments, and of the WHS’ Secretariat, who had all attended the Summit. The two central questions of HERE’s expectations for the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.irinnews.org/content/world-humanitarian-summit-blog>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.grotius.fr/acf-reflections-on-the-whs/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/may/12/dont-blur-the-lines-between-development-and-humanitarian-work>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.icvanetwork.org/key-ngo-whs-commitments-and-calls>.

<sup>5</sup> See for example <https://fm-cab.blogspot.fr/2016/05/news-world-humanitarian-summit.html>,

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/save\\_principled\\_pragmatism.pdf](https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/save_principled_pragmatism.pdf)

Summit outlined in “On the right track” – how to improve respect for the law?; and how to strengthen humanitarian identity? – were used as a framework to structure the discussions. Participants expressed the desire to nuance the localisation debate, and leave space for impartial international humanitarian action. The group saw the Grand Bargain as the only key technical outcome of the Summit, and concluded that it was too early to judge the scope and impact of the commitments, especially since these were on an individual and not a collective basis. Protection was highlighted as one of the missing pieces of the WHS.

In 2016, HERE also helped partners shape their own messages, either ahead of or in follow up to the Summit. In May 2016, **HERE contributed to the drafting** of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement’s [perspectives and pledges](#) on the occasion of the WHS. Following the Summit, and responding to increased calls for national and local actors to be at the forefront of humanitarian responses, the **HERE Executive Director drafted a paper** on the topic of localisation as part of the Emergency Gap series developed by the Barcelona-based operational centre of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF – OCBA). The paper on “[The challenges of localised humanitarian aid in armed conflict](#)” called for a more nuanced discussion around the so-called localisation agenda and a need for more context-based considerations highlighting some of the challenges national and local actors may be confronted with especially in situations of armed conflict.

## Understanding humanitarian response gaps in armed conflict

In 2016, **HERE continued its investigative work** to better understand the factors that enable humanitarian organisations to achieve the shared goal of protecting and assisting those populations who are most affected by armed conflicts. While the humanitarian sector has grown exponentially over the past 10 to 15 years, its capacity to operate in armed conflict remains limited. When it comes to identifying sources to, and remedies for, this problem, there are studies that have considered specific elements and contexts, such as for example the needs-based funding gap, or the issue of securing access in volatile environments. Little attention has however been given to operational ‘mandates’, and the way in which organisations following their mandates set different priorities in delivering humanitarian response in armed conflicts.

Recognising that the majority of international non-governmental organisations active in humanitarian response define their purposes broadly, as of 2015, HERE has been engaged in a project on “The role of ‘mandates’ in humanitarian priority settings for international non-governmental organisations in situations of armed conflict”, or the “Mandates Study”. **HERE finalised the inception phase** of the Mandates Study in 2016, with the publication of a detailed [literature review](#) and methodological note and [project brief](#). The literature review first takes a look at how the term ‘mandate’ has been framed in humanitarian discourse, and the various ways in which organisational mandates can be classified. It then considers whether

organisational mandates have been found to inform the way activities are conceived and carried out, and whether differences in approaches can lead to practical tensions and/or complementarities. In doing so, it considers an organisation's decision-making and priority-setting broadly, bearing ideological, operational, and qualitative perspectives in mind, while highlighting practical examples that have been found in the literature. Finally, the review explores the extent to which humanitarian organisations have been seen to work with each other, and the degree to which the literature has identified functioning mechanisms of strategic complementarities/comparative advantages. The findings of the literature review have fed into the methodological approach of the study, as detailed in the methodological note.

**A meeting with the focal points** of the organisations participating in the Mandates Study<sup>7</sup> was held on April 6, 2016 to discuss the findings from the literature review and agree on next steps with regard to the methodology. The meeting allowed participants to clarify the expected investments from the participating organisations, and paved the way for the preparation phase and the Headquarters (HQ) visits. This first level of investigation seeks to explore how organisations see their 'mandates', prioritise their work and what they perceive their comparative advantages are in working in situations of armed conflict. The first HQ visit took place in Copenhagen with DanChurchAid on 6 June 2016, followed by one in Barcelona

on 19-20 June 2016 with MSF-Spain, and a last one on 17-18 August 2016 in Dublin, with Concern Worldwide. In line with the Mandates Study methodology, the HQ visits all involved semi-structured interviews with senior staff members, and led to a series of preliminary findings which will in a subsequent step be tested at field level, in four different locations. HERE concluded the year processing the data collected through the three visits, and preparing for further visits to be held in 2017.

## Influencing the humanitarian agenda

Through its role in facilitating dialogue and promoting an exchange of views and perspectives, HERE seeks to influence the thinking of policy makers in the humanitarian sphere. At several moments throughout the year, HERE staff participated in forum discussions and panels, sharing insights from HERE's own research and analysis. In June, for example, the HERE Executive Director delivered a key-note address to the General Assembly of MSF-international about the value and relevance of the four humanitarian principles. In the case of MSF, independence may have been confused with isolationism, which is not the same. Earlier, in April, the HERE Executive Director held a workshop with a group of students at Yale University on the challenges and opportunities involved in the concept of accountability in the context of humanitarian action. Accountability is particularly relevant with

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<sup>7</sup> These include: Action contre la Faim, Concern Worldwide, DanChurchAid, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF-OCBA), Norwegian Refugee Council, Welthungerhilfe, World Vision.

regards to how humanitarian organisations take decisions. Do they take into account all relevant considerations and commitments? And do they want their decisions and operations to be reviewed? The latter question is also relevant in the context of the humanitarian quality assurance initiative (HQAI) of which the HERE Director is a board member. For humanitarian actors, the question should not only be if they are doing things right, but also if they are doing the right things? Thanks to the efforts of the HERE Director, the HQAI Board has recognised the latter question as relevant and sees the principle of impartiality as one possible yardstick in answering it. It will devote a learning event in June 2017 to the issue.

## Other Selected Commissioned Pieces of Work

Inherent to HERE's business model is the focus on tailored and commissioned pieces of work. Based on strategic discussions with its Board of Trustees in 2015, HERE decided to focus on pieces of work that would be in line with its mission and core research focus.

In 2016, HERE's work with partners included:<sup>8</sup>

- IFRC, ICRC: [Istanbul and beyond, Joint publication of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for the World Humanitarian Summit](#). Drafting of a publication on behalf of the Movement for the WHS. (March – May 2016)
- Swiss Solidarity: generic funding guidelines; development and presentation of guidance (April - June 2016)
- British Red Cross: Local Leadership and Response Capacity in the Syria Conflict: The Syrian Arab Red Crescent and International Partners. Presentation of the Report in Beirut (August 2016)
- MSF-OCBA: the [The Challenges of Localised Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict](#). Development and presentation of Research Paper (October - December 2016)
- DFID (on behalf of a steering group made up of donors and humanitarian agencies): [Real Time Evaluation: Response to Hurricane Matthew in Haiti](#) (November 2016 – January 2017) , real time evaluation mission undertaken in November together with URD.

<sup>8</sup> Not all final reports are publicly available.

# A Bird's Eye View of 2016



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Let us start with the basics. New meeting report [#HEREGeneva](#) [#HumanitarianPrinciples](#) available [bit.ly/1mQ0Sau](http://bit.ly/1mQ0Sau)

11 Jan 2016



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Coming clean on neutrality and independence. Check out our article <http://bit.ly/24nC0bk> [#humanitarianprinciples](#)

23 Feb 2016



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Check our video on the values and principles underpinning humanitarian action [bit.ly/24nC0bk](http://bit.ly/24nC0bk)

5 Apr 2016



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Mark your calendar for April 25 – we will hold high-level discussion at ICRC Humanitarium «30 days before WHS»

7 Apr 2016



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What we can expect after [#WHS2016](#) [#HEREPanel](#) started. Expectations vs realistic commitments



25 Apr 2016



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[#HEREpanel](#) Is the [#humanitarian](#) sector the only one where regulations are not needed? [#WHS2016](#) won't solve all our problems

25 apr 2016



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Join us for a live-streamed public event tomorrow looking at insecurity in [#Yemen](#) [@MSF\\_espana](#) [@HEREGeneva](#) <http://bit.ly/1Oargmq>

2 May 2016



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The video from [#HEREPanel](#) '30 days b4 [#WHSummit](#)' is available on our site

19 May 2016



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Reasserting the priorities of [#Humanitarian Action](#) - [#HEREGeneva](#) latest paper available <http://bit.ly/1OOiXSF>

19 May 2016



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Congratulations Antonio Guterres! Finally a piece of good news [#NextSG](#)

6 Oct 2016



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[#Guterres](#) Refugees have the right to be protected <https://www.ted.com/talks/antonio> via [@TEDTalks](#)

6 Oct 2016

## HERE Supporters

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We also thank our partners for their collaboration, in particular Syni and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and colleagues at the ICRC's Humanitarium.

## About us

### Board of Trustees:

Niels Dabelstein, Martha Maznevski, José Antonio Bastos, Kathleen Cravero-Kristofferson, Tania Dussey-Cavassini, Mahmoud Mohamedou, Ben Ramalingam, Balthasar Staehelin.

### The Team

Executive Director: Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop

Programme Manager Enrique Jimenez

Research Director: Marzia Montemurro

Researcher: Karin Wendt

Research Assistant: Heleen Hiemstra

Special thanks also to Anna Bykowska for her communications support during the year, as well as to Jakob Wendt for valuable *pro bono* multimedia design assistance.

Complete financial statements are available upon request.

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