

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO HUMANITARIANISM, & HUMANITARIAN STANDARDS & CODES OF CONDUCT¹

Historical Background to Humanitarianism²

Whilst Christian charity extends back to medieval times, many of the traditional church and welfare groups have their origins in the nineteenth century. Complementary to this, charitable giving has also been a part of Islamic society for fourteen centuries. The Red Cross (and later Red Crescent) movement was established in 1863 by Henri Dunant, following his experiences of the battle of Solferino in Italy in 1859. The twentieth century, and particularly the two World Wars, and intervening and subsequent conflicts, saw the genesis of many of the world's largest and best-known NGOs. Examples of these are Save the Children (1920s); CARE/OXFAM (World War 2); World Vision (Korean war); and MSF (Biafran War). The United Nations was formed in 1945, this replacing the earlier League of Nations. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950.

The 1980's, and particularly the famine in Ethiopia, increasingly saw a major role played by the media (eg Live Aid/Band Aid). Following the end of the Cold War (1989-91), other stakeholders, particularly military peacekeepers, began to taking increasing roles in humanitarian work. An early, relatively positive, resettlement and reintegration program, was that in Cambodia from 1992-3. However, this was followed by a succession of somewhat less successful peace-keeping Complex Emergency (CE) operations, these including Somalia (1992-5); Rwanda (1994); and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-5). Increasingly, non-Western troops began to take on major roles in UN peace-keeping operations, examples of this including Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Haiti. There has also been an increase in *non-UN* military and police intervention in complex political/military/ humanitarian operations³.

Humanitarian Laws, Standards & Codes of Conduct

Since the early 1990's there have been a series of standards and codes of conduct, designed both to protect and guide key stakeholders involved in humanitarian assistance, and also to contribute towards improvements in the professionalization of the humanitarian sector. Three key sets of standards, particularly tailored for the work of NGOs, have been:

- The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and NGOs in Disaster Relief (sometimes just called 'The Code')⁴. This has ten key Principles of Conduct.
- The Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. The Minimum Standards include Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene

¹ This article can also be accessed at www.torgaid.com/humanitarian-standards-codes

² A useful background reading is Barnett's 'Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism', cited at the end of this article.

³ Examples being NATO forces in Kosovo (1999 onwards); West African ECOMOG³ forces in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone; African Union Forces in Somalia (AMISOM) from 2007; NATO forces (although sanctioned by the UN) in Afghanistan from 2001; 'Coalition of the Willing' (mainly US/UK forces, but not sanctioned by the UN) in Iraq (2003-2010); a NATO-led, but UN/Arab League/African Union-supported, 'No-fly Zone' established over Libya in 2011

⁴ The Code of Conduct, with its ten Principles, is found at Annex 2 of the Sphere Project (pages 385-392)

Protection; Food Security and Nutrition; Shelter, Settlement and Non-food Items; and Health Action.

- The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on Quality and Accountability

The Code was developed in the early 1990's, whilst the Sphere Project was formalised in the mid 1990's following the Rwandan debacle in 1994. The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)⁵ then evolved in 2014 from these and other complementary set of humanitarian standards and codes of conduct which had developed over the previous years⁶. The CHS is guided by four widely accepted Humanitarian Principles to be used in support of communities and people affected by crisis, namely, Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Independence. Nine Commitments and Quality Criteria are then spelled out.



⁵ www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

⁶ These being the Red Cross/Red Crescent Code of Conduct, the 2010 Humanitarian Accountability Standard (HAP) and the People in Aid Code of Good Practice.

Development, promotion and maintenance of the CHS is carried out by the CHS Alliance⁷. This agency leads and facilitates CHS training and capacity building to its 240+ members, as well as to the wider humanitarian and development sector.

Complementary to the CHS is the Agenda for Humanity's⁸ five-point plan, which was developed from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. This outlined the changes needed to alleviate suffering, reduce risk and lessen vulnerability on a global scale. In the Agenda, humanity—people's safety, dignity and the right to thrive— is placed at the heart of global decision-making.

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Background Reading & References

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World Humanitarian Summit, 2016, *World Humanitarian Summit: Five Core Responsibilities & Seven Core Commitments*. <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/summit/#high-level-leaders-roundtable>

⁷ www.chsalliance.org

⁸ www.agendaforhumanity.org