



WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY 2021

AUGUST 2021

## HUMANITARIAN AID: CAPTIVE TO BUREAUCRACY

## INTRODUCTION

August 19 marks the day in 2003 when a bomb ripped through U.N. Headquarters in Baghdad, killing 22 women and men. World Humanitarian Day commemorates humanitarian workers killed and injured in the course of their work, while honoring all who continue, despite the odds, to provide lifesaving support, services, and protection. With the COVID-19 pandemic as a backdrop, climate shocks and conflict are contributing to historic levels of emergencies and widening inequality. Humanitarian needs are greater than any time since WWII, and aid workers are being targeted more than any other time on record, making a dire situation worse. Health facilities, humanitarian supplies, and convoys in countries around the world are being destroyed. As of mid-August, 78 aid workers have been documented as murdered in 2021 alone. Humanitarian action is not only faced with rising insecurity and violence, increasing authoritarianism, and lack of respect for international humanitarian law—it faces an upward trend in restrictive measures which impede non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs’) ability to operate in humanitarian settings.

**Yet, humanitarian action—and aid workers—cannot stop.** This week alone, there is devastation in Afghanistan and a major earthquake in Haiti. Climate disasters and extreme weather conditions will spur increased displacement over the coming decade and beyond. Yet—with humanitarian need at historic levels—governments are instituting increased bureaucratic and administrative impediments (BAI) that intentionally and unintentionally target humanitarian action. Humanitarian programming is suffocating in the very contexts where aid is needed the most.

On this year’s World Humanitarian Day, we NGO fora representing more than 1,500 NGO country-level offices in 17 contexts wish to call attention to how increasingly challenging the current operational environment is for humanitarian actors worldwide and what can be done about it right now.

**We make the call in honor and remembrance of our colleagues who lost their lives in the service of humanitarian aid and for those who are currently working on the front lines.**

While governments around the world unite to address climate change, there are immediate bureaucratic and administrative impediments and solutions that can be implemented NOW to enable communities adversely affected by climate change to access the services they need to survive.

## NEXT STEPS FOR ACTORS WORKING IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Too often, NGOs shoulder the burden of managing BAI on their own as these challenges disproportionately affect implementing NGO actors. Yet—given that NGOs comprise the majority of frontline providers of relief—if a problem impacts the NGO community, it impacts the entire response and people’s ability to access the aid they are entitled to.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has [identified a gap](#) in collective understanding, analysis, prioritization, and collective action associated with addressing BAI in humanitarian settings. The IASC will release a framework for action to support Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (R.C./HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) around the world to better collectively and effectively address BAI in the Fall of 2021.

**In the meantime, the following steps must be taken:**

- Donors and headquarters must better resource country offices to collectively track, analyze, and engage on BAI, emphasizing the uniquely influential role and capacities national staff provide in many contexts related to addressing BAI and liaising with government administrative officials.
- Humanitarian leadership in-country must increase collective understanding and analysis of BAI at the country level through increasing data collection, analysis, and use of mechanisms for early detection of threats and risks.
- Critical BAI issues—and collective action to address them—must be strategically prioritized by the highest level of humanitarian leadership in-country, including the R.C./H.C. An HCT-level advocacy and engagement strategy must be in place to strategically and collectively respond to existing and emerging threats.
- Senior humanitarian leadership in-country must engage global IASC stakeholders early on emerging BAI threats to stave off risks before they become a reality codified through law and practice.
- Donors must engage in-country authorities on the critical role of civil society, the NGO community, and humanitarian action and principles. They must be prepared to leverage humanitarian diplomatic channels in support of addressing BAI at the country level as the need arises.

- Humanitarian leadership at the global level must prioritize finding safe, collective ways to continue supporting those in need while ensuring agencies can fulfill their duty of care to protect aid workers—something also essential for the continuity of assistance.

Humanitarian aid workers—and the families and communities they serve—need increased support to navigate and manage increasingly complex, restrictive, unpredictable, and therefore insecure operating environments worldwide. Climate change increases the magnitude of disasters and conflict worldwide, and it is key to ensure a facilitated operational environment so that INGOs can continue providing lifesaving and sustaining services to people being denied their entitlements.

We cannot provide these services without support. At a time when there are historical levels of humanitarian need across the globe and limited resources, we call on all actors to take responsibility and join us to collectively address bureaucratic and administrative impediments humanitarian actors face. NGO workers cannot overcome these impediments alone, but they are manageable when collective action is taken. Addressing bureaucratic and administrative impediments provides conflict- and climate-affected populations increased access to humanitarian assistance—and thus, an opportunity to recover and regain control of their lives and futures.

## SIGNATORIES



NGO Coordination Committee for  
Iraq (NCCI)



Syrian INGO Regional Forum  
(SIRF)



Jordan INGO Forum (JIF)



Association of International  
Development Agencies (AIDA)



Nigeria INGO Forum



South Sudan NGO Forum





DRC INGO Forum



Somalia NGO Consortium (SNC)



Libya INGO Forum



Agency Coordinating Body for  
Afghan Relief (ACBAR)



Pakistan Humanitarian Forum  
(PHF)



Foro de Organizaciones  
Humanitarias en Colombia-  
FOHC2



Foro de Organizaciones  
Internacionales Humanitarias en  
Venezuela-Foro INGO



CHINGO (Cameroon)



Burkina Faso INGO Forum



Syria Northwest NGO Forum

NGO Platform, Cox's Bazar,  
Bangladesh & Rohingya  
Response Forum

## COUNTRY EXAMPLES

### SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan has struggled with violent conflict and civil war since its independence in 2011. However, the impacts of climate change in South Sudan, and resulting effects on conflict, are perhaps less well-known. In the past 30 years, [mean annual temperatures](#) across South Sudan have increased by more than 0.4 degrees Celsius every decade and are projected to increase between 1 and 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2060. In 2020 alone, [severe flooding across the country](#) has resulted in large-scale displacement. Today, the country simultaneously struggles with flooding and drought in different areas, both of which [significantly disrupt livelihood patterns and exacerbate food insecurity](#). These [impacts disproportionately affect female-headed households](#) and girls who depend on agriculture to sustain their families and bear the brunt of negative coping strategies. In addition, [climate stress can feed national political instability](#) and conflict, such as in the Pibor, Tonj, Wau, and Upper Nile regions. As a result, humanitarian needs have increased to the highest levels since 2013. Yet, the Government and non-state actors continue to implement bureaucratic hurdles and administrative impediments, preventing aid from reaching needy populations. [Fees and taxes on NGOs, restrictions on the import of medical or other critical supplies, denying physical access](#) to areas of the country, [and direct attacks on humanitarian personnel](#) and facilities are among the factors that prevent aid from reaching the [8.3 million people in need](#) across South Sudan.

### THE SAHEL (BURKINA FASO, MALI, NIGER, AND NORTH CAMEROON)

In the Sahel, the impacts of climate change are seen daily. In a pastoralist society, [livestock herders](#) move their herds according to the availability of water and pastureland, as 75% of the region is too dry to allow for a sedentary existence. Pastoral herders, using their [extensive method](#) of livestock raising and the mobility of herds, provide essential services and help improve vast tracks of non-arable land—living eco-friendly before anyone else was. Using long-standing routes, [herders have forged long-lasting links with resident farmers](#). However, water is [increasingly scarce](#), migrant herders are arriving earlier and earlier, and [available land continues to shrink](#). Temperatures in the region are increasing (it is believed the region could see [temperature increases](#) of up to 3 to 5 degrees Celsius by 2050), the length and timing of seasons are changing, and there are [increasingly long periods of drought](#). Diminishing access to [resources](#) such as grass and water is simultaneously triggering violent conflict, and the security situation in the region has deteriorated rapidly in recent years. As a result, displacement within the region has increased significantly,

along with the level of humanitarian need. Large-scale floods also regularly occur during the rainy season, with devastating impacts on farming lands and living conditions. In the face of rising needs, humanitarian actors face significant bureaucratic roadblocks to reaching the populations they serve and, in some regions, insufficient funding to address humanitarian needs. Regionally, a focus on securitization and the security response more broadly has negatively impacted the ability of NGOs to respond to dire humanitarian needs. In Niger, for example, humanitarians are required to use armed escorts to travel within the country, undermining neutrality and placing staff at risk. This focus on security is linked with political positioning, which risks the politicization of aid and undermines the safety and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

## SYRIA

For the past decade, the conflict in Syria has been one of the most catastrophic humanitarian crises of recent times, causing [massive destruction](#), [millions of injuries](#), and hundreds of thousands of deaths. Two-thirds of the Syrian population has been displaced, and several million have been forcibly displaced multiple times. [Humanitarian workers continue to work and deliver aid every day](#) despite serious risks to themselves, including death, injury, arrest, abduction, and separation from family and community. Recently, [the country has been in the midst of a dire water crisis](#) that is affecting access to drinking water, power generation, and irrigation water for millions of people living in Syria. At least [5.5 million people are at risk of having reduced access to drinking water, while 3 million people risk reduced electricity access](#). In addition, [5 million have livelihoods that depend on agricultural production](#). The current crisis has several drivers: [climate change, including low rainfall](#) resulting in significant crop yield reductions; the release of low levels of water into the Euphrates River on the Northeast side from the Turkish side; [disruptions to Alouk water station](#), the main water station serving Hassakeh and its surrounding areas including camp settings in the Northeast; and the degradation of infrastructure due to years of conflict and a battered economy. Currently, this multifaceted water crisis is already giving rise to [rapidly rising humanitarian needs, including water scarcity, water-borne diseases and malnutrition](#), and is thus compounding the impact of more than ten years of conflict, displacement, and destruction; the COVID-19 pandemic; the collapse of the Syrian economy; and environmental degradation. Meanwhile, bureaucratic and administrative impediments limit or block people's access to humanitarian services both inside Syria and in neighboring countries, as well as through cumbersome and sometimes opaque compliance procedures imposed by donor countries. There is a need for high-level humanitarian diplomacy to minimize bureaucratic barriers

to effective and efficient aid delivery, in alignment with guidelines on promoting International Humanitarian Law

## **NIGERIA**

An over 10-year-long conflict and increasing violence in northeast Nigeria—coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic—have deepened humanitarian needs there. Vulnerabilities are compounded by climate change effects, with rising temperatures, droughts, and floods. The impact on already-severe socioeconomic challenges and hunger is massive. [Food insecurity levels are currently at the highest since 2017](#), at the peak of the crisis, and projections keep worsening despite collective efforts by the humanitarian community. Scarcity of food—fueled by climate change and violence—contributes to conflict over resources across Nigeria. This has deepened the farmers-herders conflict across the country, where an increasing number of regions are now facing great violence and humanitarian needs.

In Northeast Nigeria, while humanitarian actors strive to provide the assistance needed due to violence, conflict, and climate shocks, over 1 million people in need cannot receive it due to insecurity and bureaucratic and administrative impediments. Humanitarian workers are trapped between a rock and a hard place. The government imposes major restrictions on NGO operations based on overapplication or abuse of its counterterrorism measures due to the unfounded yet widespread suspicion that NGOs support non-state armed groups (NSAGs). On the other hand, the impossibility of engaging with NSAGs because of government policies furthers NSAG's negative perception of humanitarian workers. This has resulted in an increasing series of attacks against NGOs since the beginning of 2021 in Borno and Yobe States (Dikwa, Damasak) and the killing of aid workers whom we commemorate today.

## **IRAQ**

The effects of climate change are felt by the world's poorest, and Iraq is no exception. Iraq is classified as the [fifth most vulnerable country](#) in the world to decreased water and food availability, extreme temperatures, and associated health problems. Over 90% of the country is characterized as drylands and at risk of desertification. Rural communities are already experiencing drought conditions that are affecting rural livelihoods. It is vital that adaptation efforts engage rural communities directly, or else rural livelihoods may quickly become unviable, leading to migration to urban areas and social tension. A recent NGO assessment highlights the impact of drought, with 97% of 780 farmers across Ninewa governorate



reporting complete crop failure (citation: implementing NGOs in Iraq). This is leaving farmers unable to feed their livestock, forcing them to sell them at a reduced rate (200 USD compared to 800 USD). All parties must ensure that rural communities are a priority in advancing the climate change adaptation agenda in Iraq and respond to data and policy frameworks gaps concerning access to health, protection, and education services for the approximately 70,500 children currently displaced for water scarcity reasons.

## JORDAN

Jordan is one of the most water-scarce countries globally and will face significant challenges as climate change threatens to exacerbate the Kingdom's existing water challenges. Jordan's water availability is [already less than 100 cubic meters per person per year](#) compared to the standard water poverty threshold of 500 cubic meters per capita. [Yearly precipitation levels](#) have been declining across Jordan for the last several decades and the frequency of drought is increasing as [Jordan currently faces one the most severe droughts in its history](#). The combined effects of reduced water availability and climate change, [compounded by population growth and the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in household water consumption increasing by 10%](#), will directly impact agriculture, food security, livelihoods, and health in the Kingdom, ultimately exacerbating humanitarian needs. Furthermore, the impact of climatic change is expected to threaten poverty levels and efforts at sustainable development, as well as have disproportionate effects on [women, rural populations, and refugees](#). Sustained dialogue and action between the government, humanitarian and development actors, and donors are critical to make water management systems more efficient, look at longer-term solutions to address root problems, and increase the resilience of vulnerable communities to the impacts of climate change.

## SOMALIA

Extreme weather conditions are increasing in frequency and intensity, creating a worrying pattern in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia. [According to UNHCR](#), in 2020, flash floods and riverine flooding caused by seasonal rains displaced over 650,000 in Somalia. This year alone, [approximately 400,000 people have been affected](#) by flooding, with 101,300 displaced. The floods are deadly—but their aftermath can be even more dangerous. [Increased cases of water-borne disease and malaria](#) have been reported, putting the health of the most vulnerable people at risk. An [increase in Acute Watery Diarrhea/Cholera \(AWD\)](#) cases in various flood-affected regions was also recorded. And the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) is still raging.

Moreover, Somalia's re-occurring climate-related emergencies [result in devastating impacts](#) on communities that heavily rely on farming and livestock for their livelihood. In some areas, prices of basic food items, particularly milk and vegetables, shot up by between [20% and 50%](#). Severe weather extremes created a perfect environment for desert locust breeding and subsequently [caused the locust populations to explode](#). The infestation in Somalia has destroyed tens of thousands of hectares of cropland and pasture, [severely impacting](#) the livelihoods of many Somalis who were already facing high levels of food insecurity. An estimated 19,000 tons of 2020 food production has been lost to desert locust, [enough to feed over 281,000 people for six months](#). According to the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU), an estimated 5.9 million people are expected to need humanitarian assistance, and over 2.7 million people across Somalia are expected to face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity by mid-2021. However, humanitarian partners estimate that [this number will likely continue to grow](#) in the latter half of the year.

Amid this, security remains a major constraint to humanitarian operations in Somalia. In the first half of this year, 33 security incidents against humanitarian operations have been recorded in the country. Bureaucratic impediments in government-controlled areas where humanitarian organizations are required to adhere to regulations set forth by both the Federal Government and member states [led to considerable administrative barriers to humanitarian operations](#). In some areas controlled by organized armed groups, [operations are severely restricted](#) or impossible. Humanitarian agencies with even adequate resources and with national partners are unable to reach more than a minority of the targeted people who need assistance.

## ETHIOPIA

In Ethiopia, recurrent natural hazards—including rain shortfalls in parts of the country and floods in others—together with the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflict has resulted in displacement and increased humanitarian needs. Like its neighbor, Somalia, in 2020, Ethiopia experienced one of the most intense desert locust invasions ever recorded—a byproduct of severe weather conditions. In 2021, [heavy rain and flooding beginning on April 26 displaced an estimated 90,000 people and killed at least 16](#), mainly in the Afar, SNNP, and Somali regions. More floods and landslides are expected in the upcoming Kiremt rainy season. In Tigray and areas bordering neighboring Afar and Amhara regions, food

insecurity for the accessed population is estimated to be at crisis levels (IPC Phase 3). Amidst all this, *Ethiopia is the second-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa*, hosting a total of 769,310 refugees as of July 2020. Shelter, safe access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), basic health services, and critical non-food items (NFIs) are urgent for all. [According to Oxfam](#): “The three lethal Cs—conflict, coronavirus and climate change—have pushed millions of Ethiopians in Tigray to the brink. Even before the conflict, people had lost up to half their crops due to climate-fueled plagues of locusts and they were struggling due to the devastating health and economic impacts of coronavirus. The conflict erupted in the middle of the harvest season, halting attempts to gather the remains of already depleted crops.”

## BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is prone to recurring natural disasters, and 2021 has been no different. However, the situation [has been exasperated](#) by the current COVID-19 situation and the subsequent government-imposed restrictions in the camps hosting the Rohingya Refugees in Cox’s Bazar. This has made it difficult for humanitarian agencies to respond to refugees’ and host communities’ existing needs or even take preventive action to mitigate the impacts of the disasters before they occur. As the rain continues, the risk of unsanitary conditions and the spread of water-borne diseases increases, which could be disastrous considering hundreds of cases of Acute Watery Diarrhea have already been identified in the camps. In this context, all concerned parties must join together to minimize bureaucratic and administrative barriers that prevent people from accessing their entitlements, including humanitarian aid.

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

In recent years, the impacts of climate change have become more and more apparent in the DRC in the form of severe flooding, landslides, and water level rise in Lake Tanganyika. These disasters compound the already immense needs in this immense country. The scale and multitude of crises are difficult to grasp. DRC has the second largest displaced population in the world after Syria—[5.2 million people](#). The country faces the worst hunger crisis in the world, with [27.3 million people acutely food insecure](#). There are epidemics of cholera, measles, bubonic plague, Yellow fever, Ebola, and now COVID-19. The economic decline in the aftermath of the pandemic has dragged vulnerable households even further into poverty. Conflicts, attacks against civilians, and widespread sexual and gender-based violence give rise to serious protection concerns.

Despite being rated one of the largest crises in the world today in terms of the number of persons in need, DRC ranked 27th in terms of funding coverage in 2020, [only funded at 40% at year-end](#), marking the country as one of the most neglected and underfunded in the world. While NGOs' responses on the ground are more needed than ever in this context, bureaucratic and administrative impediments have always been a significant obstacle to safe and effective aid delivery. In 2020 and 2021, the operational context has become even more challenging. It has, for example, been over a year since the National Government signed any "Arrêtés Interministériel," the documents enabling the importation of humanitarian aid. This has caused immense difficulties for NGOs attempting to import goods, massive costs to be paid for customs and storage at borders, and a clear impact on the population in need—lack of lifesaving medicine or malnutrition complements in whole areas of the country where NGOs are the only one providing support to communities and health centers.

## COLOMBIA

In Colombia, there are [more than 9 million people](#) in humanitarian need due to a complex situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; the migration crisis; the persistence of armed conflict, violence and disasters; and climate change. Humanitarian organizations face many difficulties accessing the most vulnerable populations. Restrictions on mobility imposed by non-state armed actors, armed clashes, or the use of anti-personnel mines limit access to territories. According to the Ministry of Health, since the beginning of 2020, there were 325 attacks against health providers, the highest figure recorded in the last 24 years. Since 2020, [more than 200 massive displacements have affected at least 102,700 people, hundreds of thousands were forcibly displaced individually](#). Additionally, 121,400 people [were affected](#) by confinements caused by armed actors. Colombia received 2.2 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela, most of them with intense humanitarian needs, and many are also affected by the armed conflict in our country.

## ABOUT INTERACTION

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for nearly 200 NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

## COVER PHOTO BY SYED MAHABUBUL