

Roundtable Summary Report, Dubai, 14 November 2012

Gulf Perspectives on Humanitarian Action

On 14th November 2012, the Norwegian Refugee Council, with the support of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) Gulf Office and in collaboration with the Gulf House for Research and Consulting, held a round-table in Dubai, entitled; *Gulf Perspectives on Humanitarian Action*. The roundtable was the third in a series of events organised by NRC as part of the broader, Strengthening Principled Humanitarian Response Capacities project. The project is supported by the European Commission's department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA). The round table was moderated by Dr Khalid Al-Yahya, President, Gulf House for Research and Consulting.

1. PRESENTATIONS AND REMARKS

The Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Ms. Elisabeth Rasmusson gave welcoming and opening remarks, followed by a key note speech by Her Excellency Shaima Al Zarooni, Chief Executive Officer of the International Humanitarian City in Dubai. Mr. Khalid Khalifa Head of Gulf Liaison Office, OCHA and Dr Khalid Al-Yahya, President, Gulf House for Research and Consulting presented challenges and trends with regards to Gulf States and global humanitarianism. The discussions explored the Gulf perspective on humanitarian action.

2. DISCUSSION POINTS

a. Concepts

The discussions illustrated the differences in conceptual thinking, where the Gulf actors to a lesser extent operate with a clear distinction of humanitarian assistance and development aid. Yet, humanitarian assistance were by the Gulf actors seen to be largely allied with distribution of goods such as tents, blankets, medicines and food while components such as those linked to protection and/or livelihood were associated with development programming.

b. Motivations for humanitarian assistance

In contrast to the Western donors, where aid is largely secularised, religion stood out as a guiding and driving force, deeply enshrined in the religious principles of zakat and sadaqa. However, the underlying incentives for humanitarian assistance seemed to be much the same for both Western and the Gulf donors; to alleviate human suffering.

c. The Gulf States and foreign aid

Since the early 2000s, the Gulf States have emerged as key humanitarian actors within the global humanitarian system. Most of the aid has been concentrated within the region and provided to Muslim/Arab states and communities. The participants underlined that similar approaches were found amongst other large donors as well, with the specific mentioning of Australia. Different rationales for regional approach to foreign aid were discussed: cultural and historical bonds as well as a means to exercise political influence. Saudi Arabia's immediate extensions of humanitarian aid to the UN Emergency Response Fund-Haiti, despite their limited diplomatic and strategic relationships were mentioned as an example of how emergency aid is provided outside of the region.

d. Differences between government and non-government actors

Participants discussed the different approaches in assistance of government and non-government actors in the Gulf. Governments in the region were largely seen to favour bilateral engagements with other governments, emphasize sovereignty and territorial integrity of nation states and large expensive development projects. Non-governmental actors, on the other hand, were seen to be more engaged in humanitarian assistance. The participants stressed that there are no clear distinction between governmental and non-governmental actors in the Gulf, as these tends to be closely linked.

e. Western humanitarian agencies, the UN and partnership with Gulf actors

The Gulf based agencies expressed a presiding sentiment of inequality and frustration towards western organisations and the UN. Western humanitarian actors were considered to be driven by cultural and political motives, exemplified by the western engagement in Palestine and Afghanistan. Participants furthermore expressed that Gulf actors do not feel equally respected for their work, and claimed that discussions around coordination are often perceived as instructions from the UN and western agencies rather than a constructive dialogue. Some participants expressed a fundamental mistrust between the east and west, and that trust only can be overcome by working respectfully together over a time.

3. WAY FORWARD

- The roundtable confirmed the importance of building trust through a continued dialogue between western humanitarian agencies and Gulf actors.
- Strengthening of partnerships between agencies with diverse capacities and entry points were encouraged, especially in the light of increasingly complex crises, such as in the Sahel.
- With their growing importance, it is vital that Gulf agencies participate in all processes, including assessments and coordination mechanisms on equal terms as their Western counterparts.
- Good collaboration should be fostered by a solution focused approach, the solution rather than the problems will improve partnerships between actors from the east and the west.

Annex 1: Participants

Panel

HE Shaima Al Zarooni – CEO, International Humanitarian City, UAE

Elisabeth Rasmusson – Secretary General, NRC

Khalid Khalifa – Head of Gulf Liaison Office, OCHA

Dr Khalid Al-Yahya – President, Gulf House for Research and Consulting

Participants

Mr Ahmed – Al Basar International Foundation, UAE

Ahmed Yousuf Al-Awadhi – Human Appeal International, UAE

Eid Al Eid – The Saudi Development Fund, Saudi Arabia

Rashid Al-Khamisi –Red Crescent, UAE

Dr Ali Alkreedees – Physicians Across Continents, Saudi Arabia

Dr Adil Al-Qusadi – Red Crescent, Saudi Arabia

Abdelwahid Al-Sayaah –Red Crescent, UAE

Heba Aly – IRIN, UAE

Hani Al-Zubaidi – Life UAE

Hazem El Mahi – Relief Avenue, UAE

Muiz Hamdato – Al Ihsan Charity Association, UAE

Talha Mohammed – Human Appeal International, UAE

Abdullatif Ourahou – Direct Aid, Kuwait

Amina Zoubairi – IRIN, UAE

NRC

Erik Abild – NRC

Saeed Hersi – NRC

Corinna Kreidel – NRC

Moamar Merzouk – NRC

Nicolay Paus – NRC