

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ORDER

# A GLOBAL COMMON GOOD

Improving Financing for UN Humanitarian Aid

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In numerous crisis areas humanitarian organizations both inside and outside the UN system have insufficient funds, while existing aid resources are often not employed according to needs.



Key donor countries prefer the existing approach, in which humanitarian aid is primarily implemented in accordance with their own geostrategic regional priorities.



Reform discussions should take into account variants of a mandatory humanitarian budget, similar to the assessed contributions of Member States to the UN's peacekeeping budget.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The scope and structures of the funding of international humanitarian organizations often provide a clearer indication of the foreign policy interests of donor governments in crisis areas than their general diplomatic statements. A description of the funding structures of this aid and of the international debate over their further development and reform can therefore also offer insights into the actual political dynamics in this policy field.

As regards political rhetoric, there seems at first sight to be broad international agreement that, for example, humanitarian assistance, as a response to violent conflicts and natural disasters, should be impartial and tailored to needs and should not be instrumentalized for political purposes. These principles were confirmed in May 2016 at the UN World Humanitarian Summit, in which 180 states, the UN humanitarian agencies, and over 700 non-governmental humanitarian organizations participated. There was also widespread consensus when it came to the description of the major weaknesses of the funding system, including underfunding of individual crises or sectors, frequent delays in delivering funding, and the overdependence of the entire system on a few donor governments, e.g. on the US and EU governments. When it comes to what a reform of this system could look like, on the other hand, different or even opposing positions have been held for decades.

For example, important donor governments and the overwhelming majority of large humanitarian NGOs rejected the proposal by former UN High Commissioner for Refugees and current UN Secretary-General António Guterres that a large portion of the budgets of humanitarian UN organizations should no longer be funded through voluntary contributions but instead—analogue to the financing of UN peace missions—through assessed contributions from all UN Member States: »As [UN] peacekeeping operations are funded by assessed contributions I think that at least major emergencies like Syria should benefit from assessed contributions that all member states contribute to« (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2015). In his role as UN Secretary-General, Guterres described the effects of inadequate resources on the threat of famine in parts of sub-Saharan Africa at a meeting of the UN Security Council in October 2017: »It is unconscionable that aid agencies must make life-or-death decisions about who gets aid, because of a shortage of resources« (UN Secretary-General, October 2017).

Kristalina Georgieva, Chairwoman of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing set up in 2015 by then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, also criticizes the existing funding system for humanitarian aid: »We collectively spend as much on chewing gum as we do on humanitarian aid. In 2014, the world's military spending amounted to \$1.7 trillion« (Georgieva/Shah 2016). Occasionally incumbent politicians also chime in with similarly drastic descriptions. For example, former German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel said in his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2017, »It cannot be that those in positions of responsibility at the

United Nations spend more time distributing begging letters to find the necessary funding than in organizing effective assistance. We have to change course here. We have to grant the United Nations more freedom, in exchange for greater transparency on the use of funds« (Gabriel 2017).

So there is no mistaking the major discontent with the serious shortcomings of international humanitarian financing mechanisms. In fact, however, many governments have thus far shown no interest in a reform that would address these shortcomings and establish structures for stable and needs-based financing of UN humanitarian assistance. This is also a reflection of the dilemma facing the general funding of the UN.

## 2 GENERAL FUNDING OF THE UN

The mandates and resources of the UN organizations and the various units of the UN Secretariat in the areas of peace, human rights, the environment, development, and humanitarian assistance are laid down by the UN Member States. The financing is based on both assessed and voluntary contributions, whereby the latter are granted by the donor governments either as earmarked funding or as core funding (i.e., funding not tied to specific projects). As a general rule, the higher the proportion of assessed contributions and non-project-specific funds, the greater the independence of a UN agency or unit of the UN Secretariat from the donor governments concerned. The scale and nature of the respective funding provide an indication of how strongly the Member States are interested in endowing the respective agencies and units with political and organizational relevance. Most of the time this endowment is the result of extremely lengthy negotiations between different states or groups of states.

The UN Secretary-General estimates that the annual expenditures of UN agencies and units of his office in the fields of peace, human rights, the environment, development, and international humanitarian aid in recent years amount to just under 50 billion US dollars. Only a total of around 10 billion US dollars of this comes from the UN budgets from assessed contributions into which all UN Member States pay—namely, the program (or regular) budget, which covers two calendar years, and the one-year peacekeeping budget (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 shows, on the one hand, the estimated assessed contributions to the UN program and peacekeeping budgets for the calendar year 2017 of the largest eleven contributors to the program budget and their respective percentages of these budgets.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the table lists the international humanitarian aid donated by these eleven countries in

<sup>1</sup> In order to standardize accounting, the UN Secretary-General proposed in 2017 that from 2020 onward the program budget should also be adopted on an annual basis (UN Secretary-General, September 2017: 1).

<sup>2</sup> Peacekeeping budgets are adopted for a single fiscal year (1 July–30 June). However, there are also data sets that refer to calendar years, and these are used in Table 1.

Table 1.

**Government Contributions: UN Program and Peacekeeping Budget, International Humanitarian Aid\***

	UN Program Budget 2017**		UN Peacekeeping Budget 2016/2017***		Humanitarian Aid 2017****	
	USD millions	Percentage	USD millions	Percentage	USD millions	Percentage
<b>USA</b>	611	22.0	2,244	28.5	6,491	37.6
<b>Japan</b>	269	9.7	764	9.7	673	3.9
<b>China</b>	220	7.9	811	10.3	129	0.7
<b>Germany</b>	177	6.4	504	6.4	2,785	16.1
<b>France</b>	135	4.9	496	6.3	235	1.4
<b>UK</b>	124	4.5	457	5.8	1,864	10.8
<b>Brazil</b>	106	3.8	63	0.8	4	0.02
<b>Italy</b>	104	3.7	291	3.7	190	1.1
<b>Russia</b>	86	3.1	315	4.0	18	0.1
<b>Canada</b>	81	2.9	228	2.9	655	3.8
<b>Australia</b>	65	2.3	181	2.3	252	1.5
<b>Sum</b>	<b>1,978</b>	<b>71.2</b>	<b>6,354</b>	<b>81.0</b>	<b>13,296</b>	<b>77.0</b>
<b>Total resources allocated</b>	<b>2,777</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7,874</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>17,265</b>	<b>100</b>

\* »International humanitarian aid« refers to governmental aid for projects outside the donors' home states.

\*\* Source: UN Secretariat (2016). The countries listed here are the eleven largest contributors to the program budget. The figures refer to the contributions budgeted for the calendar year 2017; the amounts actually paid may differ slightly.

\*\*\* Sources: UN General Assembly (2016 a, 2015). The figures refer to the contributions budgeted for the fiscal year July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017; the amounts actually paid may differ slightly. The calculations of the percentage country contributions are based on an average of the percentage annual country contributions to the peacekeeping budget determined by the UN for the calendar years 2016 and 2017.

\*\*\*\* Source: Financial Tracking System (FTS)/OCHA (as of January 1, 2019). The total of the humanitarian aid resources (17,265 million US dollars) for 2017 includes all government grants for humanitarian aid reported by governments to the FTS/OCHA (as of January 16, 2019), most of which were used to fund UN humanitarian agencies and, to a lesser extent, actors outside the UN system.

2017 and their respective percentages of global government international humanitarian aid, according to the data of the Financial Tracking System (FTS) of the office responsible for coordinating humanitarian affairs (UN OCHA). It is apparent that in the case of some countries there is a considerable divergence between their respective percentages of the program budget and of global humanitarian aid; for example, the shares of Germany, the USA, and the UK in humanitarian aid are significantly larger than in the program and peacekeeping budgets, whereas the situation is the reverse for France, China, and Russia.

UN program and peacekeeping budgets are adopted by the UN General Assembly based on proposals from its Administrative and Budgetary Committee, the so-called Fifth Committee, which (with very few exceptions) makes its decisions in a consensual decision-making procedure without votes and draws upon proposals from the Committee on Contributions. The latter calculates the national contribution rates to these two budgets, where the rates are based on economic strength and vary accordingly. Correspondingly, the recalculated national contribution rates for the program budget 2019 to 2021 (UN General Assembly December 2018: 3-7) reflect the increasing economic power of China, which is rising to become the second-largest contributor (12%) after the USA (22%), followed by Japan (8.6%) and Germany (6.1%).

Proposals for an increase in the program budget generally trigger lengthy negotiations and are often rejected. In 2017, for example, the UN General Assembly voted against Sec-

retary-General Guterres' proposal to fund the UN Resident Coordinators (the highest UN official and the chief of UN diplomatic mission in a country) and their offices in more than 125 countries from the program budget with 255 million US dollars annually (Adams 2018: 5; UN General Assembly May 2018; UN Secretary-General 21 December 2017: para 155/p.36; UN Secretary-General 2018).<sup>3</sup> The current two-year program budget for 2018 to 2019 amounts to a total of 5.4 billion US dollars (UN General Assembly 2017: 3; UN Information Center 2017) and, at 2.7 billion US dollars per year, is slightly lower than that of the previous year 2017 (see Table 1). Funds are provided from this budget for the various departments and offices of the Secretary-General, for the »Special Political Missions« of the UN and for some UN organizations. In addition, most UN departments, offices, and missions are heavily dependent on additional voluntary contributions from the donor governments (UN MPTFO 2017: 21/22; UN OCHA/CERF 2016b: 10). The mixed funding, and thus the political dependence on the donor countries, applies especially to UN organizations. Two types must be distinguished here:

- a) UN Funds and Programs. These include the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the

<sup>3</sup> In humanitarian or political crisis areas, these Resident Coordinators also assume the functions of the Humanitarian Coordinator and of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General who heads UN civil-military missions (UN Secretary-General, 21 December 2017).

UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The UN General Assembly, which established these special bodies, also decides on the extent to which their respective budgets are financed through the program budget.

- b) UN Specialized Organizations. These include the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These organizations were founded by a group of states outside the UN system and, consequently, the UN General Assembly is not responsible for the budgets of these specialized organizations. Instead, funding only comes from the group of states who have acceded to these specialized organizations, although this often includes almost all UN Member States. Because these specialized organizations are as a result very closely related to the UN system, they are referred to as part of that system.

### 3 THE COMPLEX AND FRAGILE FUNDING STRUCTURES OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Among the most important UN organizations working primarily in the field of humanitarian assistance are the WFP, the UNHCR, UNICEF, and the WHO. Their coordination (and that of other UN agencies) is the responsibility of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), headed by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. The UNDP also assumes important functions in crisis areas. Although the UN OCHA is part of the Office of the Secretary-General, only 6 per cent of its nearly 270 million US dollar budget was financed from the program budget in 2017, so that 94 per cent was covered by voluntary government funds (UN OCHA 2018a: 45). The UN humanitarian and development agencies are also funded predominantly or entirely through voluntary government grants, with only a slight percentage being covered by government assessed contributions, sales revenues or fees. In 2016, the budgets of UNICEF, the WFP, and the UNDP did not receive any government assessed contributions at all (UN MPTFO/Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2018: 25); only one per cent of the UNHCR budget and 20 per cent of the WHO budget were funded from assessed contributions in 2016 (UN MPTFO/Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2018: 27).

This fluctuating funding of UN humanitarian agencies based primarily on voluntary contributions leads to fragile, failure-prone, and underfinanced humanitarian aid structures. Oftentimes donor governments do not distribute their funds in accordance with the actual need for humanitarian aid in individual crises, but according to the political and media relevance of a particular crisis, with the result that there are a number of »underfunded crises« (Swithern 2019). The special »donor conferences« often convened under time pressure by individual states or UN actors are just one con-

sequence of this financing structure. Inadequate funding was also the reason for the reduction in rations distributed to Syrian refugees in the Middle East by the UN World Food Program in 2015—and this in turn was one of the reasons for the increase in the number of refugees reaching EU shores across the Mediterranean in 2015.

Another effect of the voluntary and fluctuating funding is the vulnerability of humanitarian organizations to political pressure. In June 2016, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon informed the public that he had been politically blackmailed by UN member states with the threat that they would reduce or suspend funds for humanitarian aid. The background was that in June 2016 states whose military operations were leading to high levels of casualties and deaths among children were listed in a draft report by the Secretary-General. Among those named was the coalition led by Saudi Arabia, which has been intervening militarily in the civil war in Yemen since 2015. Ban Ki-moon reported that Saudi Arabia had announced that it would stop funding humanitarian aid for Palestinians, South Sudan, and Syria if the coalition countries were not removed from the list. After carefully weighing up all of the advantages and disadvantages, he said that he ultimately decided to give in to the pressure and removed the relevant countries from the list (UN Secretary-General 2016, Sengupta 2016).

Another problem with the funding of international humanitarian aid is identifying the exact number of people who depend on this aid and the corresponding global, regional, and local financial needs. The »Global Humanitarian Overview« published each year in December in Geneva by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and his or her office, the UN OCHA, contains a global, regional, and local needs assessment for the following year, which is also an important basis for calculating the annual global, regional, and local funding gaps. In spite of the fact that the quality and accuracy of these overviews are criticized in particular cases by governments and NGOs, UN OCHA’s data are not questioned in principle by the vast majority of UN Member States and NGO networks, who regularly also use them to justify their own funding commitments or plans. In this respect, these members and networks generally share the assessment continually put forward by the UN OCHA and other UN agencies and actors that a humanitarian »funding gap« exists for some large and small crisis areas. These »Global Humanitarian Overviews« in essence refer to humanitarian crisis areas caused by violent conflicts and natural disasters, but not systematically to humanitarian emergency situations that exist permanently, for example, in many rural areas and in metropolitan slums.

Unlike the UN OCHA, the above-mentioned High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing took a daily income of less than 1.25 US dollars as a basis for calculating the need for humanitarian aid for 2015, thereby also taking into account these rural areas and slums, among others.<sup>4</sup> The resulting

<sup>4</sup> In this way, the panel’s report estimates the global financial requirements for humanitarian aid in 2015 at 40 billion US dollars; based on this need and the state funds and private donations for international

Table 2.

**Global Funding of International Humanitarian Aid: Requirements, Funds Made Available, »Funding Gap«**

	2015	2016	2017
a) Global number of people depending on humanitarian aid at the beginning of the year (in millions)	78	125	129
b) Volume of global financial requirements at the beginning of the year (calculated according to UN OCHA figures) (in billions of US dollars)	26.0	29.1	35.0
c) Number of people to whom the UN appeals for donations relate at the beginning of the year (in millions)	58	88	93
d) Volume of UN appeals for donations until the end of the year	19.4	20.5	25.2
e) Volume of UN appeals for donations funded by donor governments (in billions of US dollars)	10.8	12.5	15.1
f) Proportion of UN appeals for donations funded by donor governments (in %)	56	61	60
g) Volumes of government funds spent on foreign aid outside of the UN appeals for donations (in billions of US dollars)	7.9	7.9	5.8
h) Volume of private donations for humanitarian projects in foreign countries (in billions of US dollars)	6.9	6.0	6.5
Magnitude of the global »funding gap« (b-(e+g+h) in billions of US dollars)	0.4	2.7	7.6

(a) Sources: UN OCHA (2014: 4; 2015a: 4; 2016: 4).

(b) Calculated by the author based on UN OCHA data on the total number of people dependent on humanitarian aid, the volume of UN appeals for donations and the number of people who were supposed to be served by these projects (UN OCHA 2014: 4; 2015: 4; 2016: 4): magnitude of the »Global financial requirements« =  $d \times a \div c$

(c) Sources: UN OCHA (2014: 4; 2015a: 4; 2016: 4).

(d) Source: Swithern (2019: 26).

(e) Source: Swithern (2019: 26).

(f) Source: Swithern (2019: 26).

(g) Source: Development Initiatives (2018: 26/27).

(h) Source: Development Initiatives (2018: 26).

financial requirements and the determination of the funding gaps are therefore significantly higher than those identified by the UN OCHA in its »Global Humanitarian Surveys« and the resulting gaps.

A »Global Humanitarian Overview« contains the following information (see Table 2): First, an estimate of the number of people worldwide who will be dependent on humanitarian aid in the following year; Second, the number of people to whom the planned projects of UN agencies in the following year relate and the corresponding financial needs of all planned UN humanitarian aid projects (as a general rule, these projects relate to three-quarters of all those people worldwide who from the perspective of the UN OCHA depend on humanitarian aid); Third, detailed descriptions of these UN humanitarian assistance projects planned in the individual crisis areas for the following year by the individual UN agencies in the UN appeals for donations. In the course of the following year, these forecasts and plans will be expanded or corrected by short-term appeals for donations. According to the UN OCHA, the provision of the quarter of those in need who are not included by the UN OCHA in its planning is either undertaken by local governments, donor governments, and private actors, in particular NGOs, outside the UN system or it is not possible due to »capacity

constraints« of UN humanitarian organizations (UN OCHA 2017c: 17).

The »Global Humanitarian Overview« for 2017 estimated that a total of 129 million people were in need of humanitarian aid globally. The financial requirements for these people are not specified directly by the UN OCHA in the overviews; however, an approximation for 2017—and for other years—can be derived from UN OCHA data: it amounted to approximately 35 billion US dollars in 2017 (see Table 2). In 2017, donor governments, on the one hand, financed with 15.1 billion US dollars just 60 per cent of the UN appeals for donations, which related to a total of 93 million people and amounted to 25.2 billion US dollars; on the other hand, these governments funded humanitarian projects outside these UN appeals to the tune of 5.8 billion US dollars. If the global private donations for humanitarian aid projects totaling 6.5 billion US dollars are also taken into account, the result is—according to the data of the UN OCHA and the non-governmental organization Development Initiatives—a global »funding gap« in the order of 7.6 billion US dollars for 2017. In 2015, this gap—according to these data—amounted to around 0.4 billion US dollars and in 2016 to around 2.7 billion US dollars (see Table 2).

humanitarian aid employed within and outside the UN system, the panel identifies a global funding gap of 15 billion US dollars for that year (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing 2016: V, 2; Georgieva/Shah 2016). The panel does not specify how many people worldwide are dependent on this aid.

## 4 DEBATE ON REFORM OF THE HUMANITARIAN FUNDING SYSTEM

The various positions in the debate over how the funding of humanitarian assistance should be reformed can be classified into four schools of thought. The *conservative* school advocates slowly expanding existing structures based on maintaining the principle of voluntary provision of state funds. The *civil society* school—represented, for example, by the NGO Doctors Without Borders—advocates the strong expansion of international and local humanitarian NGOs, more extensive networking between NGOs, significantly greater independence from government grants and strict adherence to the norm of humanitarian neutrality by donor governments and conflict parties. Very few NGOs support the proposal to promote the independence of UN humanitarian agencies through a new UN humanitarian mandatory budget. The *reformist* school upholds the voluntary principle, but favors in general a significant increase in state funding: more money should be allocated to aid organizations within and outside the UN system, as well as directly to local NGOs, for specific projects. Finally, the *radical structural change* school argues for a far-reaching or even complete abolition of the current financing of UN humanitarian agencies by the UN Member States, which is based almost exclusively on voluntary contributions. It should be replaced either by a UN budget based on assessed contributions (analogous to the two UN mandatory budgets, the program and peacekeeping budgets) or by a new UN tax for development projects and humanitarian aid to be levied globally, on the grounds that development and humanitarian aid are *global common goods*. This proposal is modeled on the so-called »Tobin Tax,« which would place a tax on foreign-exchange transactions. There are, of course, also reform concepts that can not be clearly assigned to one of the four schools of thought or that combine elements from different schools.

The third-mentioned *reformist* school is the dominant one in the current reform debate. This can be seen from the results of the *World Humanitarian Summit* organized by the UN in May 2016, at which over 20 OECD governments, 15 international organizations within and outside the UN, and around 20 international NGO networks agreed on the so-called Grand Bargain on a reform of the humanitarian funding system. The ten objectives agreed upon at the summit include: an increase in direct allocations of funds to local aid agencies in crisis areas; increased cash payments to people in need; an improvement in the determination of the actual global and local needs for humanitarian aid; the expansion of multi-year project planning and the corresponding financing; and an increase in non-project-related funding. According to estimates by members of the UN's humanitarian Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), in which, among others, all UN humanitarian agencies, the largest humanitarian NGO networks, and the World Bank are represented, the full implementation of the goals of the Grand Bargain would lead to savings of only around one billion US dollars globally through the more effective use of funds, resulting in only a slight reduction in the humanitarian funding gap (IASC 2018).

To date, the fourth, *radical structural change* school has been far less influential than its reformist counterpart, although this seems to be changing gradually and its concepts are gaining recognition as at least a possible option for reform. Its most prominent advocate—as outlined above—is current UN Secretary-General Guterres. As early as 2014, while still serving in his former capacity as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he spoke before a committee of the General Assembly in favor of assessed contributions and a strengthening of the UN's Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF), which had already been set up in 1991 and whose use of funds is decided upon solely by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator: »I believe that in the future, humanitarian response should be able to rely partially on assessed contributions, which could be envisaged to fund a kind of »super CERF« for L-3 emergencies. This would be a way to minimize the dramatically increasing gap between needs and available resources in humanitarian response« (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2014).<sup>5</sup> In 2015 Guterres reiterated his proposal (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2015) and again in 2017, now in his capacity as UN Secretary-General: »I was among the first to propose a »super CERF« for the biggest emergencies, in my previous role as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees« (UN Secretary-General, 8 December 2017). Between 2016 and 2018, the CERF received approximately half a billion US dollars annually exclusively from voluntary government funds.<sup>6</sup> Although in 2016 the General Assembly declared that these funds should be increased to one billion US dollars per year beginning in 2018 (UN General Assembly 2016 b: 2), that year the CERF had only about 560 million US dollars at its disposal.<sup>7</sup>

According to the estimate of the chairwoman of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, Kristalina Georgieva, the actual introduction of a humanitarian funding system based on assessed contributions will take »years, even decades«: »As a panel, we ruminated over making humanitarian aid funding, for the first time, an object of core funding from the same pool as that of Member States' assessed contributions. While we agreed that this was desirable, we wanted to remain focused on proposing solutions with a genuine possibility of success. Unfortunately, it is clear that it would take years, even decades, for such a proposal to be accepted« (Georgieva/Shah 2016). The »pool« financed from assessed contributions to which Georgieva refers is the program budget. It is difficult to understand why, even though this financing system was acknowledged to be reasonable, doubts concerning its possible immediate political implementation dissuaded the panel from describing this proposal in greater detail in the main text of its report published in early 2016. Instead, the panel relegated the proposal to the following footnote: »... a reasonable case may be made for funding part of the bill through assessed contributions. However, the panel is aware that the challenges in the way of achieving

5 The UN refers to »major« humanitarian crises, such as in Syria, un-specifically as »L-3« crises.

6 See the annual data on the CERF website <https://cerf.un.org/our-donors/contributions>.

7 See note 6.



this make such a proposal for now unrealisable and for this reason we have decided not to make a recommendation but to draw attention to the potential for future consideration« (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, 2016: 29, n. 16). After all, the panel's task was to develop perspectives and initiate discussions.

The study »Review of the Potential of Assessed Funding for the Central Emergency Response Fund« (CERF), also published by the UN OCHA in 2016, argues—similarly to UN Secretary-General Guterres—for the introduction of assessed contributions on the grounds that they correspond to the central role of humanitarian assistance in and for the UN system: »Humanitarian assistance is universally regarded as a core function of the UN system and assessed contributions for the CERF will reinforce the central role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordination of such assistance« (UN OCHA/CERF, ed., 2016: 7). As early as 2004, Antonio Donini, Larry Minear and Peter Walker spoke out in favor of converting the funding of humanitarian aid over to assessed contributions: »One obvious way of expanding the consensus around humanitarian action, at least at the UN to begin with, is through some form of assessed contributions from all member states. Such contributions are obligatory for peace operations, why not for humanitarian work? Such an approach would go a long way towards solidifying a more universal humanitarian consensus, in which all UN member countries would have a voice and a stake« (Donini/Minear/Walker 2004: 268). A study published by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate in 2015 also mentions this option of assessed contributions, but, like Kristalina Georgieva, points to the lack of political support: »Perhaps the costs of United Nations humanitarian agencies could even be met through assessed contributions, although it seems that there is little political appetite for this at the moment« (OECD 2015: 7).

## 5 CAUSES OF THE BLOCKAGES TO REFORM: INTERESTS OF GOVERNMENTAL AND NONGOVERNMENTAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

The international structures governing the financing of humanitarian assistance are a product of the diverging interests and activities of a large number of actors, including donor governments and recipient states, the UN General Assembly, UN aid agencies, humanitarian actors of the UN Secretary-General, international networks of secular NGOs and religious relief agencies, local NGOs in crisis areas, foundations, small and large donors and, finally, print and online media. These interests can lead either to close cooperation between organizations or to strong competition. Major blockages to reform exist on three levels:

1. Donor countries: The policy of the majority of OECD donor governments advocates and promotes a UN humanitarian aid structure based on the following three premises: a) the nature and scope of the UN response in the individual crisis areas can be largely steered through the project- or country-specific allocation of funds by the major donor governments; b) the donor governments' room for maneuver in deploying humanitarian assistance in accordance with foreign policy priorities and not strictly according to needs is not restricted by UN humanitarian actors; c) the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, the UN OCHA and the UN aid organizations have the necessary logistical capabilities to deal with major crises if the large donor governments provide them with sufficient financial means. The nearly 30 governments represented in the UN OCHA Donor Support Group, almost all of whom belong to the OECD, finance over 90 per cent of the UN OCHA budget of almost 270 million US dollars through their voluntary contributions. This dependence enables the donor group to exercise direct and indirect control over both the logistical-organizational and the public-political activities of the UN OCHA and its head, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. The concrete form this control assumes varies depending on the objectives of individual key members of this group of countries.
2. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator: In 1991, the UN General Assembly created the new post of UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, with the rank of a UN Under-Secretary-General, and entrusted its incumbent with the following extensive tasks: a) identifying global, regional and local humanitarian needs; b) coordinating corresponding regional and local projects of UN humanitarian agencies; c) ensuring their funding and maintaining effective coordination of humanitarian actors inside and outside the UN system (UN General Assembly 1991). However, the UN Member States do not equip the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator with the necessary comprehensive administrative and financial resources to fulfil his or her tasks. Furthermore, the individuals appointed as UN Emergency Relief Coordinators are usually former diplomats with administrative experience, whereas what is actually required are internationally-known, influential personalities with political and media experience. In addition, the majority of the governments outside the OECD, such as many G77 countries, are skeptical or passive toward the UN humanitarian structures dominated by OECD Member governments.
3. Civil society: Humanitarian actors of the UN and civil society (including NGO networks and religious aid organizations) cooperate in humanitarian lobbying, advocacy, and media work, but also compete with each other when it comes to the acquisition of state and private grants. A majority of civil society humanitarian actors reject a financial, logistical strengthening of their UN counterparts and instead try to strengthen their own international and local structures. The relationship between civil society humanitarian actors is also characterized by cooperation and competition,

including in the market for donations. The volume of donations for certain crisis areas depends heavily on the media presence of a particular crisis, which depends in turn on the competition for market shares (circulation, ratings) and on the rapid cycles of fluctuating demand from media consumers. This volume of donations is distributed very unevenly between internationally operating NGOs and smaller local NGOs; large NGOs are more likely than smaller NGOs to be in a position to receive government grants.

## 6 THE NEED FOR A DEBATE ON A MANDATORY HUMANITARIAN BUDGET

Although the Grand Bargain adopted at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 has improved the financing of humanitarian assistance in some sectors in recent years, it is not able to resolve the serious structural problems. Unfortunately, a concept has not yet been developed for a new humanitarian funding system based—in part or entirely—on a UN compulsory budget. Such a concept could provide important stimuli to the ongoing reform debate and facilitate discussion of different variants of a mandatory humanitarian budget and their respective advantages and disadvantages.

The view already held by a majority of humanitarian actors inside and outside the UN system that the prevention of existential need in humanitarian crises is a global common good that implies an obligation to provide international assistance can serve as a suitable starting point for such a debate. With a vote in the UN General Assembly on a new mandatory UN humanitarian budget containing a needs assessment, project planning, and a financing plan, the UN Member States would acknowledge—not only rhetorically but also practically—that this aid is a global common good and no longer a service based on quasi-charitable motives or a mere instrument of national foreign policy. The mandatory humanitarian budget would ensure that humanitarian actors in the UN system, such as the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and the UN aid organization, could enjoy greater independence from individual donor governments, or at least could be less subject to their control. On the other hand, civil society humanitarian actors such as international, regional, and local NGOs would not automatically suffer a loss of influence as a result of this new funding system, provided that they expanded their cooperation in lobbying and advocacy work with donor governments, UN aid agencies, and UN bodies.

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## A GLOBAL COMMON GOOD

### Improving Financing for UN Humanitarian Aid



In numerous crisis areas humanitarian organizations both inside and outside the UN system have insufficient funds, while existing aid resources are often not employed according to needs. Yet fundamental structural reforms of the international financing of humanitarian assistance are hindered by the particular interests of influential governments in the UN system.



Key donor countries prefer the existing approach, in which humanitarian aid is primarily implemented in accordance with their own geostrategic regional priorities, while some NGO networks are predominantly interested in an increase in public funding for their own projects.



Reform discussions should take into account variants of a mandatory humanitarian budget, similar to the assessed contributions of Member States to the UN's peacekeeping budget. Such an arrangement could lead to greater financial independence for UN humanitarian agencies and it would also establish the prevention of existential humanitarian crises as a global common good.

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