

Humanitarian Aid Organizations and Sustainable Development – Break-out Panel

Moderator: Rachael Kohn: ABC Radio National Australia

Panelists:

- Sharon Eubank – Director of LSD Charities
- Talia Pura, Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan
- Kerem Kinik, President, Doctors Worldwide, Turkey
- Peter Howard – Sr. Director, Emergency Response

Thank you to the organizers –

Outline:

1. **Story**
2. **Characteristics of faith-inspired humanitarian work**
3. **Challenges faced by the faith community in humanitarian work**
4. **Recommendations**

Opening Story:

I have been privileged to travel regularly to Lebanon as Food for the Hungry engages in responding to the Syrian crisis. Pastor X in the Bekaah Valley of Lebanon – exemplifies to me what true faith-inspired humanitarian response can look like. As a young Lebanese man – the Syrian's were his enemies and in fact occupiers...and for years he wished evil on them. As he matured he became a pastor of a small Lebanese church not far from Syria...but he still harbored his anger at the Syrians. But when civil-war broke out in Syria and they began arriving into Lebanon – not as occupiers but as refugees in need – he allowed God to transform his heart with forgiveness and mercy...and over time he convince his congregation to embrace forgiveness and to turn their church into a place of refuge and aid for the Syrian refugees. Today their church and wider volunteer community host a school and adult learning center and partner with the UN and other international organizations to provide food and other essentials to thousands of refugee families. **Pastor X now lives in community and relationship with his former enemies...he now calls his former enemies friends.**

I asked Pastor X: Why do you serve the Syrians so sacrificially? He responded: **“because we have gone through the same thing – wars with Syria and our own civil wars...and b/c this is our faith, this is what Christians do...”**

Many of you could share similar stories of faith inspired action:

I tell this story because I think it hints at some of the distinguishing characteristics of faith inspired humanitarian response.

I am going to suggest 6 characteristics that I trust are present and strengthen faith driven humanitarianism:

1. **Sacredness of Life:** Faith inherently understands the sacredness, dignity and transcendence of each person.
 - a. A “rights based approach” can sometimes seem like a base-line – focused on the lowest common denominator of need (rights to asylum, food, shelter, etc) – but when we understand people are created in the image of God with transcendent sacredness we can engage the other with greater honor – and instead of thinking of rights in terms of minimum standards of asylum, food, or educations we can think of rights in terms of

abundance and community...how can we help the other achieve their full God given potential?

2. **Presence:** Faith brings to bear one of the strongest and most **sustainable** local and global networks – think churches, mosques, temples and other houses of worship the world over.
 - a. With global presence comes global “faith assets” (people, networks, leaders, infrastructure, buildings) all of which become critical in emergencies. These assets can be mobilized immediately and anywhere – even as it may take 48-72 hours for the international response to begin.
 - b. Faith communities also can be present in suffering – we are present when we journey with, sit with, cry with, pray with and hope with those impacted by war or disaster.
 - c. Sustainable presence – as one pastor in Honduras put it after a hurricane: *“We (the church) were here before the disaster, we were here during the disaster and we are here after the disaster. [International agencies will come and go] but the church will always be here.”*
3. **Conscience:** Faith communities are advocates for the poor and most vulnerable in humanitarian response. (b/c of our presence have our finger on the pulse of need)
 - a. We can link the most vulnerable to the larger international response (i.e. the UN)-
 - b. Translators of need
4. **Hope:** Faith has a redemptive narrative of hope in the midst of suffering
 - a. Because of the sacredness and transcendence of life suffering can be redeemed...and
 - b. the faithful believe God suffers with us and will one day will redeem this earth’s groaning’s.
 - c. Hope is critical to recovery
5. **Mercy:** Faith brings a theology of Forgiveness and Mercy which can stop cycles of violence:
 - a. This coming year was declared by Pope Francis to be a Jubilee of Mercy.
 - i. “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36)
 - ii. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to those in captivity; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Is 61:1-2).
 - b. In a world of complex and violent wars – we need merciful peacemakers and humanitarian responders – people who understand and embrace mercy and forgiveness – bearing witness to a merciful God.
 - i. People like Pastor X mentioned at the beginning who stop the cycle of violence w/ mercy instead of revenge.
6. **Charity:** Faith brings values based **sustainable** giving vs tax based (or forced giving).
 - a. Faith has a theology of sacrificial living and giving (think of some of the sacred Old Testament texts that speak of giving to God and the poor the first fruits of the harvest)
 - b. Voluntary giving of time or money (or of our firstfruits) is qualitatively different than forced giving of time or money.

Challenges faced by people of faith in the humanitarian community: (from a conversation w/ Sharon Eubank of LDS Charities.)

1. Diverse religious motivations for humanitarian intervention (i.e. conversion as the reason for charity) or proselytism (Mahmut Aytakin – spoke of this yesterday in the refugee panel)
2. Distrust by the secular international community (i.e. local and donor governments as well as the United Nations)
 - a. Even though up to 40% of health care in Africa for example is provided by faith groups
3. Lack of coordination between faith groups – thus a loss of collective impact.

(for discussion & input: are there other challenges?)

Recommendations as we work to overcome some of these challenges:

1. To counter the international community's fears of proselytism and the challenge of our own constituencies who may engage in humanitarian work for the purpose of conversion we can:
 - a. Speak the language of the International Community: Become familiar w/ the **Red Cross Code of Conduct**:
 - i. *Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.*
 - ii. *Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.*
 - b. Pope Benedict in his Encyclical "God is Love" wrote beautifully: **Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practiced as a way of achieving other ends. But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practice charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak.** ([God is Love: Pope Benedict's Encyclical. Part 2, Section 31, C](#))
2. Finally I'd like to close with what I believe can be a **distinguishing ethos of Faith motivated Humanitarian Response** and which maybe can help bring together the often uncoordinated but sincere faith driven humanitarian responders. It comes from an 8th Century BC Jewish prophet named Micah who challenged the rich and powerful on behalf of the poor. He wrote: **"He (God) has shown you what is good. And what the Lord requires of you. To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."**

Three pillars of faith-inspired humanitarianism:

1. **Do justice** (everyone does this)
2. **Love mercy** (everyone does this)
3. **Walk Humbly with God** – (humble obedience) – **this humility before God and subsequently with others is – I would argue - the defining pillar that transforms humanitarian response from a material "rights based" activity of physical aid to a sacred act of faith that is worthy of the dignity and transcendence of those we are called to walk with in their suffering.**

(For discussion/input: Are there other recommendations?)