

## Is Humanitarian Aid's Neutrality in Conflict Areas Possible?

The first step in combating humanitarian crises is undoubtedly the swift elimination of grievances and aid delivery to the victims. Decades of experience have created a technically and legally mature humanitarian aid sector, while at the same time contributing to the formation of a legitimate system. Among these contributions, humanitarian principles come first. In 1991 United Nations General Assembly, four basic humanitarian aid standards were determined for humanitarian institutions, namely:

- Humanity
  
- Neutrality
  
- Impartiality
  
- Independence

Accordingly, in the context of humanity; It has been declared that regardless of religion, language, nationality, political opinion and socioeconomic position, meeting victims' urgent needs without discrimination should be a priority. Neutrality is acting independently in the delivery of aid, without being attached to any political, economic or military structuring. The principles of neutrality and independence are also important standards to prevent political proximity with any conflicting actors if the humanitarian crisis is in a war zone.

Although there is a general acceptance on humanitarian principles, it should be noted that the debate on humanitarian aid's neutrality still continues. The main reason for this is that this principle contains several aspects in its essence.

It is generally easy to be impartial to give aid after a natural disaster such as flood, earthquake, or drought. The real debate arises in the delivery of humanitarian aid due to war or crisis caused by a political problem. For example, can certain aid, provided to civilian victims of war or people who have been deliberately starved by a blockade be carried out in an "impartial" manner? Moreover, if these aids have come to serve some political and strategic agendas of the perpetrator of the crisis, instead of those ending the crisis, how humane will neutrality be? In other words, would it still be humanitarian for aid organizations to carry aid in an "impartial" manner, while one side is constantly trying to produce a humanitarian crisis?

The answers to these and similar questions feed the discussions on the concept of neutrality in humanitarian aid. Therefore, there is a serious difference between those who see humanitarian aid as "bringing food and medicine to people in need" in a narrow sense and those who defend that "the conditions that cause deprivation should be eliminated". Humanitarian aid according to the understanding that is increasingly accepted today stands out as all kinds of support to offer people a dignified life, in which they have all their rights; in other words, humanitarian aid is not only about carrying food to the victims but also struggling to eliminate the man-made conditions that make those people go hungry.

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Humanitarian diplomacy has started to come into play in addition to humanitarian aid in environments where civilian lives and property losses are sometimes experienced by political or economic means. Humanitarian crises that cannot be solved by classical diplomacy methods are tried to be solved through humanitarian diplomacy by way of defense, negotiation, communication, measures and agreements. In this respect, as in humanitarian aid, civilian actors have started to take a role in humanitarian diplomacy against victimization. In the future, basic humanitarian needs as well as aid system with no activism,

emphasis on justice, questioning political structures and directing identity, would not be able to sustain its existence alone. Considering that there is enough food, energy, water and basic life substances in the world, then the main problem is not that they are not transported to the environments of conflict and tension, but the problem is about not interfering with the systems that sustain the conflicts.

It should not be forgotten that basically, like other concepts, neutrality has become widespread due to the influence of Western and North American origin political ideologies. Of course, although the existence of universal basic principles benefits humanity in many areas, it is certain that every civilization has its own values. In the globalizing world, it is important for institutions to act jointly in the international system, but the fact that great powers base their economic, political and intellectual investments on easy action and easy control in this system should not be ignored. Therefore, every principle currently applied is not 100% pragmatic and open to discussion. Likewise, making the concept of neutrality a global formula is not always a correct and pragmatic choice. For example, when delivering aid to victims of war and conflict, instead of focusing on the underlying causes of the conflict, transforming the standards set in humanitarian interventions into forms that should be strictly implemented may not help solve the conflicts and crises fairly.

In today's world, a lot of money, time and diplomatic network are required to intervene in crises and conflicts impartially. Only some aid organizations that can hold these resources, so this situation poses a risk of global monopolization in humanitarian aid. First of all, delivering help only to those in need without making a political choice in a place of conflict requires being in a close relationship with all parties in conflict. This is a method that makes it easier to reach many more people in many more regions. However, it is not always easy to reach the needy in the regions controlled by the conflicting parties. For example, many problems are encountered, such as forcing aid to be delivered not to people in need but to the authorities of the conflicting parties or for bribery. In this case, the aid cannot be delivered to the right target, and the groups harming civilians are supported indirectly. The cost of most aid activities increases for this reason, and armed groups are then supported unwillingly.

For example, it is known that after the Rwanda massacre, most of the aid delivered to the victims by Western organizations fell into the hands of the perpetrators in the Hutu ranks. On the other hand, the principle of neutrality was followed here, but since the organizations that went to the region for aid did not pursue a strong policy against the rebels who need to be politically boycotted, those who committed the massacre had access to food and financial means to feed their supporters through these aid organizations. In order not to allow such situations to occur, aid organizations should take into account the political output of aid; otherwise, misuse of aids is unavoidable. In addition, inspection mechanisms closest to humanitarian standards in this field should be established as soon as possible.

Perhaps the issue of delivering aid through local groups should be a priority. However, at this point, the issue of who to work with comes up. Is it possible for a local organization to be completely free from political outcomes? Also, local institutions that will provide solutions and intermediaries regarding their internal problems have their own policies and stand in favor of the conflicting parties. In this case, the obligation to cooperate with neutral institutions can be difficult for the rapid and timely resolution of humanitarian crises. Is it possible to expect a Syrian or Yemeni charity to remain neutral when someone from their community is being bombed or killed? It will be an important step for aid organizations to develop a dialogue with local parties in order to ensure fair and legal conditions and to stand against the persecuting party when necessary.

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It can be said that humanitarian aid is a political act at some point. Even if the principle of neutrality is acted upon, the result of the aid may result in some political outcomes. Of course, not every institution is expected to solve problems by making diplomatic breakthroughs. The role of humanitarian aid should not only be to heal the damage caused by conflicts, but also to minimize the likelihood of a humanitarian crisis.

Post-war renewal of infrastructure, rehabilitation and recovery of people, ending dependency on aid, providing the necessary funds to open up jobs and many other needs make intervention of international humanitarian aid inevitable. However, there is no guarantee that the aid receiving countries or

communities will use these aids properly. Moreover, even if the aids were used correctly, it is not always possible to reach the targeted result. In this context, the most important responsibility of these institutions is to create the conditions for the fair, humanitarian and legal distribution of humanitarian aid. For this, being a party may be an important first step. This is especially important if this place is a geography under military occupation of foreign powers.

For example, for the people of Gaza, who are under Israeli blockade, mere food parcels or building materials do not contribute to the solution of the problem there, but staying neutral is indirectly beneficial for the occupiers. The most appropriate humanitarian aid to Gaza is undoubtedly to send humanitarian supplies, but also to work to lifting the blockade. In short, even the reality of Gaza alone is enough to question the influence of the apolitical humanity of Western aid organizations. From this point of view, it is obvious that development assistance is not sustainable without eliminating obstructive political reasons.

In a human-made crisis, it is necessary to act with the principle of neutrality in order to make humanitarian agreements with all parties and to save the injured and prisoners. In this sense, such interventions of organizations dealing with humanitarian aid other than food show that these institutions can be both political and humanitarian. Having a political view is not just an individual characteristic; institutional structures can also develop political attitudes in line with their goals. It seems that the time has come for these attitudes in humanitarian aid institutions to be considered reasonable within the framework of certain norms. Because choosing both neutrality and being political for the sake of saving more people's lives can create a strong commitment ground for carrying civil movements to a more humane dimension.

The most vital point here is that the mentioned change in approach should be evaluated as an effort to reach more people, not as discrimination due to ideological or political opinions. Humanitarian organizations should act with the aim of inviting the parties to adhere to the law and justice rather than transforming into a political character in conflict environments that victimize civilians.