

# Humanitarian action



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Humanitarian Action In the national, international and global scenes, the right to life is undisputable. In other words, each and every person has the right to freedom from cruelty, degrading or inhuman treatment or punishment, and to a descent standard of living. The right to life encompasses the right to take steps directed towards the preservation of life in case it is at risk and the corresponding duty on other people to take similar steps (The Sphere Project, 2004).

The impartial provision of humanitarian aid to assist civilian populations during conflicts, disasters and other life threatening events by obliging states and other parties is well featured in international humanitarian law. Among the most fundamental requirements for preserving the dignity and lives of those affected by conflict or calamity include water, food, shelter, sanitation, nutrition and health care according to The Sphere Project (2004). This paper is aimed at discussing some of these most important requirements with respect to the preservation of people's lives and dignity.

#### Water Sanitation and Hygiene

According to international humanitarian law, the right to water entails the right to sufficient, acceptable, safe, affordable and physically accessible water for both domestic and personal use. In terms of quantity, an adequate amount of water is that amount needed to reduce the threat of water-related diseases, prevent death that could arise out of dehydration, and to cater for cooking, consumption, and domestic and personal hygiene requirements. The provision of humanitarian support in form of water sanitation and hygiene is important as it is attached to the value of water which is inextricably related to other human right rights such as the right to food, health and housing. This means that sanitation and water are key

determinants for survival in the first stages, and indeed all stages, of a disaster. In most cases, vulnerable groups are susceptible to death from disease and illness which are closely related to poor sanitation, inadequate water supplies, and inadequate sanitation (The Sphere Project, 2004).

Water and sanitation programmes are mainly aimed at reducing the exposure to disease vectors and transmission of faeco-oral ailments through the provision of safe drinking water, promotion of good hygiene as well as the reduction of risks that are related to poor hygienic conditions. Closely related to water is sanitation which involves vector control, excreta disposal, drainage and waste disposal. Meeting the need for safe and adequate water and sanitation goes hand in hand with teaching those affected about sanitation and their active involvement in solving related to water and sanitation.

#### Food Security, Nutrition and Food Aid

It is common knowledge that humans cannot survive without food. The right to adequate food according to humanitarian law includes the availability of food in sufficient quantity and its accessibility (The Sphere Project, 2004). In a disaster, maintenance of adequate nutrition and access to food are critical determinants of the population's survival. In fact, food security determines a lot about people's nutrition and health both in the short and long term and must therefore receive great attention by humanitarian aid providers.

Given that malnutrition may be such a grave public health problem and possibly could be a leading cause of death indirectly or directly, the importance of humanitarian food and nutrition aid in disasters cannot be over emphasized. In the event that food aid is needed by a community, response taken should be such as to meet short-term needs while aiming at

restoring food security in the long-term needs (The Sphere Project, 2004).

### Conclusion

While all forms of humanitarian aid are important for people's survival, the most basic needs that should be met in case of a disaster or conflict are physiological needs; those related to food, shelter, water and clothing. Once these needs have been met, others may closely follow, in my view, although if possible provisions should be provided concurrently.

### Works Cited

The Sphere Project (2004) Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, The Sphere Project.