

# **HRH Princess Haya Highlights Importance of Women in Humanitarian Crises**

## **DIHAD 2014, Dubai, United Arab Emirates**

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are honoured that so many women shaping the future of humanitarian aid are with us today: Commissioner Georgieva, representing the European Union, which is now the biggest donor globally; my friend Ertharin Cousin, head of the World Food Programme, who leads the world's largest aid agency; and Sheikha Lubna, who is so ably guiding the rapid growth of foreign aid by the UAE.

Welcome to DIHAD 2014 and, for those of you visiting, welcome to Dubai.

We are deeply proud of the expansion of UAE foreign aid first begun by His Highness Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan. On a per capita basis, Emirati citizens are among the most generous in the world.

We want that aid to be targeted and responsive. This is why His Highness Sheikh Mohammed began DIHAD eleven years ago to provide a forum that brings together aid providers, government officials, and the private sector to interact and improve the way we all deliver assistance.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed is a practical man.

This is why he also created the International Humanitarian City here in Dubai -- now the largest logistics center for aid in the world -- and Dubai Cares, with its strong focus on education. Results matter to him. As he puts it, "Our heritage is to give through deeds, not words; through projects, not rhetoric."

Our theme for 2014 is women in humanitarian aid. All of us here know well that in any crisis, it is women and children who suffer first and most. You need not look any farther than Homs or Aleppo in Syria, or the civil strife in Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan to see painful examples. Women and children are also most often the victims of chronic hunger and poverty; poor health care; and inadequate education,

violence and exploitation. But until relatively recently, women have not had enough to say in shaping policies to address these problems.

I was in a discussion recently about the most important thing women could do to build humanitarian aid. One of the participants smilingly commented, "That's simple -- convince men."

The reality is that the political world is still male dominated. So when frustration creeps in, it is tempting for some advocates to fall into male bashing. Fundraising campaigns for aid to women and children so often adopt this tone as a multitude of NGOs and UN agencies compete for donor funding. It is an unoriginal, ineffective, and counter-productive strategy that ultimately isolates women.

We must reach out to women as they are -- parts of families and communities with values and traditions -- and not isolate them. Look what happens to aid projects when they are seen, fairly or not, as a way to impose the social ideology of outside donors -- they fail. When aid is seen as a threat, food does not get delivered, vaccines are destroyed, and aid workers are killed.

The good news is that there are men who need no convincing about supporting and investing in women. In the UAE, we are so very proud that Their Highnesses Sheikh Khalifa and Sheikh Mohammed have been champions for the education, health and empowerment of women.

A few statistics about the UAE really drive home that point. In 1972, there were only 19,000 girls enrolled in school here. Today we have 90 percent female literacy. According to a 2010 Price Waterhouse Coopers report, "the UAE is registering the highest rate of females in higher education in the world" -- 77 percent.

The global economic argument to support a greater focus on women and children in development aid could not be stronger. We are losing far too much human potential as a result of political neglect.

Let's start with the Middle East and North Africa, our own region. In the MENA region, more than 100 pregnant women and 2500 children under age 5 die every day. That's 39,000 women and 923,000 children a year. Why?

Because health care and food systems have failed them.

MENA is only a small part of the overall picture. The burden in the developing world of failed health care and malnutrition is staggering. Iodine deficiency affects 780 million people; some 20 million children are born mentally impaired by it. Vitamin A deficiency damages the health of 140 million pre-school children.

Anemia affects roughly 2 billion people globally and hampers the mental development of about half the children in developing countries. According to the

World Health Organization, just eradicating iron deficiency among women and children could boost economic productivity in some developing countries by as much as 20 percent.

Healthy women and children make for healthy economies and markets. Nowhere is the connection between women and economic development more striking than in the area of food. Women nourish -- it is in our nature, our very souls. Everyone recognizes that women are central to nutrition within the family, but aid policymakers have long neglected women as food producers. Eight out of 10 farmers in Africa and six out of 10 in Asia are women. But how many aid projects really focus on training, credit, and technical assistance for these small women farmers?

Up until the last few years, the answer was very few.

Fortunately, the picture is brightening as major donors, especially the Gates Foundation, are pioneering efforts to reach out to women farmers. This change is long overdue. As a UN Messenger of Peace, I was asked by the Secretary General to focus on the Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing poverty and hunger. We have seen rapid progress on cutting poverty. But we are progressing far too slowly on hunger, and one reason for that is the aid community's inability to reach women more effectively.

Make no mistake, the origins and persistence of hunger in poor communities can be incredibly complex. But putting the tools to end hunger into the hands of poor women can bring success. Last week I was in Liberia where I visited aid projects of WFP, UNICEF and FAO.

Afterwards I had the honour of meeting President Sirleaf -- Africa's first woman president. She is an inspiring figure and has shown how a country once embroiled in hatred and conflict can be brought back to its feet. We talked about how Liberian women are working to end malnutrition -- both as farmers and as caregivers in the family. They are building grain reserves for the lean season and rehabilitating rice paddies to boost production. In one project, mothers are given powders that fortify foods with essential vitamins and minerals to give to their children. It is a simple intervention, but it has great potential to overcome the chronic malnutrition that harms up to half the children in Liberia's countryside.

Liberia is among the poorest countries in the world, but it has a message for us all. By involving women in its battle with malnutrition it has cut the rate of child deaths under 5 faster than any other country in Africa. The message is simple: Women can be the solution.

Thank you.