

Human Diplomacy - Leadership and New Actors

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Esteemed delegates, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues.

It is a privilege to be speaking to you today and be part of this year's DIHAD.

We come together at a critical juncture to reflect and share experiences to help navigate the complexities of humanitarian diplomacy in an ever evolving and complex world.

It is important to be reminded that Humanitarian diplomacy is not merely a facet of international relations—it is a lifeline.

Its effectiveness directly impacts lives.

Failure in our diplomatic endeavours translates into real loss of lives, unbearable trauma and prolonged suffering of innocent civilians.

The stakes truly could not be higher.

We witness this every day with the loss of innocent lives in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, DRC, Yemen, and many other countries.

As we've heard from distinguished speakers over the past few days, this is a tall order and is an extremely difficult task.

The landscape of our operations is transforming rapidly, with increased geopolitical multipolarity, the rise of new actors such as regional powers and non-state entities, and fragmented conflicts.

Sanctions, counterterrorism measures, and geopolitical shifts create significant barriers, complicating the ability to protect, access and deliver essential humanitarian aid.

These are compounded by the challenges with traditional mechanisms like the Security Council, which has often struggled by political divisions.

These conditions demand a more nimble and robust approach to diplomacy, one that adeptly navigates the intricate dynamics of global politics and local realities.

The Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) play pivotal roles in this regard.

Allow me to share a few examples:

- in Sudan, communication channels have been established between the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs/ Emergency Relief Coordinator and Syrian authorities, allowing for high-level strategic dialogue, which were important to negotiate cross-border assistance following Türkiye and Syria earthquakes.
- In Ukraine, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, OCHA coordinated the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which facilitated the safe export of millions of tons of grain, stabilizing global food prices during a critical time.

The negotiations leading to the signing of the **Black Sea Initiative** by the Russian Federation, Türkiye and Ukraine on 22 July 2022 demonstrated the ability of humanitarian diplomacy to deliver positive humanitarian outcomes at the global level whilst leveraging commercial incentives.

The Black Sea Initiative and the parallel memorandum of understanding on the facilitation of food and fertiliser exports from the Russian Federation contributed to a sustained stabilization of markets and an easing of prices.

Over a 12-month period, the Black Sea Initiative enabled the safe transportation of close to 33 million metric tons of foodstuffs aboard more than 1,000 outbound ships, including 725,000 metric tons of wheat procured by the World Food Programme in support of humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

A multi-disciplinary UN team in the Initiative's Joint Coordination Centre supported the Initiative's implementation through continuous dialogue with the parties, joint inspections of inbound and outbound vessels and authorization of movements.

The Initiative was not renewed after its third term, which expired on 17 July 2023, but efforts are ongoing with the parties to resume it.

- In Sudan, the humanitarian negotiations that took place during the Jeddah Talks in November 2023 secured key humanitarian commitments by the two warring parties, that were signed and made public by the UN, and co-convenors (US, KSA and IGAD), and included specific commitments to permit access, ease bureaucratic impediments, and partake in a Humanitarian Forum to address ongoing humanitarian access issues. Adherence to these commitments by the parties has been limited however, highlighting the importance of continued dialogue and maintaining pressure on the parties to meet their commitments.

It is important to highlight that humanitarian diplomacy is a long-term endeavour and positive results are not always tangible/quantifiable. There is value in being able to have a dialogue, even if results on the ground are not immediately apparent.

There is no blueprint for success, however, for humanitarian diplomacy to work in an increasingly challenging environment, the right conditions must be in place and we must be agile and prepared to take opportunities as they arise. These include:

- Better understanding the geopolitical landscape, actors and be able to identify any opportunities for negotiations and agreements.
- Developing networks of relevant relationships and contacts that can be mobilized in support of potential engagements, dialogue, or negotiations.
- Avoiding competition and leveraging each other's relationships and comparative advantage and put these relationships at the disposal of shared humanitarian goals.
- Align interests, establish alliances of circumstance and look for further opportunities to collaborate on humanitarian objectives.
- Ensure respect of humanitarian principles at all times. And as we have heard other speakers say: be humble and respectful.

Substantial space remains for the international community to broaden humanitarian diplomacy efforts and find new forms of leverage that can have a positive effect on decision-makers and humanitarian objectives.

Past experiences demonstrate the enormous benefits when the humanitarian community, Member States and other stakeholders align and commit to advancing humanitarian diplomacy.

relentless in our pursuits, and unwavering in our dedication to humanity.

In closing, our collective endeavour in humanitarian diplomacy is a moral imperative. Each decision we make, each alliance we forge, and each policy we influence can mean the difference between life and death.

Let us be bold in our advocacy,

Thank you.