

GP Policy Paper

Aurora Dialogues Berlin 2018

Humanity in a Fragile World

Partnering for Change

A Summary of the Results

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Aurora Dialogues Berlin 2018

On 11th – 12th December 2018, the Aurora Dialogues took place in Berlin for the second year in succession. With the title “Humanity in a Fragile World – Partnering for Change”, the conference gathered more than 150 international humanitarians, Aurora Prize laureates, decision makers and leaders from politics, businesses, NGOs, civil society, philanthropy and science to discuss how civil society can be strengthened in the light of aggravating conflicts and a return to nationalistic, unilateral policy patterns. Among the speakers were Marguerite Barankitse, Christof Bosch, Geert Cappelaere, Wolfgang Ischinger, Michael Keating, Sunitha Krishnan, Anja Langenbucher, Christopher Lockyear, Cem Özdemir, Jeffrey Sachs and Düzen Tekkal. The two-day conference was moderated by the prominent former BBC presenter Nik Gowing and Dorothee Nolte, Editor of the German regional daily Der Tagesspiegel. The agenda can be reviewed [here](#). The conference took place at the premises of the Robert Bosch Foundation and was hosted by the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative, the Global Perspectives Initiative (GPI), the Federal Foreign Office and the Robert Bosch Foundation with support of the Roland Berger Foundation, UNICEF and Ernst & Young.

The [Aurora Dialogues](#) are part of the [Aurora Humanitarian Initiative \(AHI\)](#) founded by Vartan Gregorian, Noubar Afeyan and Ruben Vardanyan. The Dialogues are a platform for sharing ideas, experiences and impulses on global challenges such as flight, migration and pressing humanitarian issues and are taking place several times a year in varying locations worldwide. In 2018 the catholic missionary and Aurora Prize Laureate Dr Tom Catena was appointed as the organisation’s Chair.

For further information, please visit www.auroraprizem.com.

Global Perspectives Initiative

The Global Perspectives Initiative supports the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to make the world a fairer and safer place by 2030. GPI brings together stakeholders from politics, business, media, and society, discusses approaches to sustainable global development and motivates people to act.

As a non-profit and neutral platform, the initiative gives rise to new ideas, raises awareness about the opportunities and challenges around the concept of a global society and thereby shapes the public discourse in Germany. GPI was co-organising the Aurora Dialogues 2017 and 2018 in Berlin.

For further information, please visit globalperspectives.org and our social media channels. Picture and video footage on the Aurora Dialogues can be reviewed [here](#).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A world in turmoil

Humanitarianism is under global pressure. The UNHCR's global trend report reveals that due to conflict, violence and other forms of persecution in 2018, forced displacement was at a record high of 68.5 million. In her opening speech at the Paris Peace Forum on 11th November 2018, the German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel noted that the number of violent conflicts in the world has increased to 222. More than a billion children are affected and represent 52 per cent of the total number of refugees. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating worldwide. The wars in Syria, Yemen and the devastating situation in Myanmar are examples of a world in disbalance where peace is not self-evident and humanitarian support is at risk of becoming overstretched. This tragedy is exacerbated by accelerating nationalistic and isolationistic trends at the global scale.

Humanity is under pressure. The number of violent conflicts rises.

Peace is not self-evident, humanitarianism is at risk to become overstretched.

The multilateral system is weakened and human rights are globally depreciated

Institutions like the International Court, the Security Council or NATO experience a crisis of trust and public credibility. Their purpose and assertiveness are being questioned. As the influence and power of multilateral institutions is shrinking, international law is increasingly undermined. According to Wolfgang Ischinger, Head of the Munich Security Conference, international law is protecting dictators and allows the cruel treatment of citizens. Ischinger urged to reinterpret international law as law that protects human beings.

The influence of multilateral institutions is weakened.

International law is undermined and fails to prosecute criminals.

Human rights are violated.

In the light of weak institutions lacking accountability, Tom Catena, Chair of Aurora, notes that human rights increasingly take a backseat in national interests. "We should all remember that the sanctity of human life should take presence over everything including business and trade." The prioritisation of national interests over human rights are evident in all parts of the world – also in Europe. Sunita Krishnan, Co-Founder of Prajwala, argued that human rights and human dignity is a construct of convenience and added: "The biggest crisis we face are not the signs of the evils, but the wilful silence of the good."

Regaining accountability and fighting impunity was therefore considered a top priority. Impunity does not stop people from committing human rights violations neither in the present nor in the future. Ischinger demanded to put an end to the delegitimation of the International Court and to focus on existing instruments to exert control. Germany's membership in the UN's Security Council 2019/2020 should focus on the human-rights-security-nexus. Tania von Uslar-Gleichen, Commissioner for Human Rights, International Development and Social Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented that the Security Council deals with classical crises and not with human rights. Yet, the trust in the Council's set up and structure is low and currently not able to deliver the required solutions.

Fighting impunity should be a priority.

Establishing a human-rights-security nexus in the Security Council.

The West is guilty by looking away

The EU's and Germany's restraint in actively engaging in humanitarian conflicts was subject of frequent criticism. Wolfgang Ischinger reminded that in seven years, the EU has not been able to develop a clear approach for Syria. Instead it handed over the peace process to Russia and the US – despite standing on the so-called moral high ground. Frequently, political decisions contradict the humanitarian engagement Europeans are so proud of. Ruben Vardanyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative (AHI) argues that the biggest problem in the world would be indifference. "If you can do something and you don't, you are also guilty," Ischinger concluded. Cem Özdemir remarked critically: "Unfortunately, we are very good with lip services in favour of liberal democracies. But when it comes to concrete measures, we don't take the necessary steps in order to demonstrate we are prepared to defend our liberal democracies."

The restraint of the West to react to crises fuels loss in trust and credibility.

Volker Westerbarkley, Head of the German section of Médecins Sans Frontières, criticises not only the lack of European stability and leadership, but also the depreciation of humanitarian support and of people in need. "At the moment, we feel that people who have historically been supportive of humanitarian acts, that, when it comes to their doorstep, they are actually actively turning against it." Michael Werz, Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress, added that many in the EU have broken with the humanitarian and democratic consensus that have defined European politics for a long time. Society and politics need to instil the notion that international law and humanitarian aid matter out of the self-interest to maintain the fabric of our society.

Europe's weary humanity leads to the obstruction and depreciation of humanitarian work.

Global mistrust causes a downward spiral

Europe's indifference and the signs of further disintegration create not only a downward spiral of distrust, it also further fuels the defiance of international humanitarian law. Wolfgang Ischinger noted that worldwide nations lack mutual trust. Yet, trust would be the currency of diplomacy and a precondition for agreements and cooperation. Its absence would enhance the risk of misunderstanding, miscalculation, and accidental escalation.

The global leadership crisis increases mutual mistrust.

The ongoing leadership crisis would additionally compromise Europe's ability to act, said Michael Keating, Executive Director of the European Institute of Peace. He alluded Europe to use its capabilities, economic weight, and political credentials to play a constructive role in many crises. European leaders are increasingly concerned with domestic issues. Still, the solutions to these problems cannot be found inwards or in isolation. The increase of nationalistic and populist tendencies would paralyse the continent and threaten it to lose global relevance and political clout.

Europe's instability leads to its further global marginalisation.

Solutions require genuine responsibility and joint efforts

Europe has an international role to fulfil, as have many other influential states. International players must work towards rebuilding bridges of mutual trust, re-strengthen international law and ensure its rigorous application. Additionally, Europe needs to make hard and possibly uncomfortable decisions.

Governments must recognise responsibility and bring it to action.

A qualified majoritarian voting in foreign policy in Europe is considered a precondition to act with one voice when it comes to adopting a clear position in conflicts. One could not neglect the interests of 500 Mio. Europeans, Wolfgang Ischinger stated. He added that after the EU elections, the German government could initiate negotiations with other European member states to refute the assumptions that Germany would use the EU to push forward its national interests.

The EU must take common decisions in foreign policy.

It is apparent that the great humanitarian challenges cannot be solved through government actions alone. Instead, it requires broad cooperation and joint forces. The work of civil society organisations (CSOs) has become indispensable. Their role, local influence and impact should be increased further.

The impact of civil society organisations

Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, stated that the remits of civil society organisations would in particular lie in closing the gap between needs and means. The enormous challenges could not be addressed by public bodies alone, he argued. Ursula Müller, Assistant Secretary-General at the UN, added that civil society organisations would always be closer to the people affected. Therefore, strengthening partnerships between politics, non-profit-organisations (NGOs) and other players as well as investing in local capacities should be top priorities.

During the Aurora Dialogues, representatives from international CSOs shared their personal stories. Among them were Sunita Krishnan, Co-Founder of Prajwala, Düzen Tekkal, Chair of Háwar, Katrine Camilleri, Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, and Saran Kaba Jones, Founder of FACE Africa. Their stories underlined the importance of local heroes and disclosed the impact CSOs can have on communities. Nevertheless, panellists frequently urged governments to take on their responsibilities.

CSOs often fill the void governments leave.

Civil Society functions in various roles

CSOs have increased immensely in number and are highly heterogenic in their structures. According to the Yearbook of International Organizations, in 2018 the number of NGOs has risen to 65,000. Discussions revealed the broad spectrum of the roles and functions civil society can fulfil. They differ according to their mission and mandate and to the situation on the ground. Core functions range from serving as a political check and balance, to providing expert knowledge, interim services and resources and, being a voice of the vulnerable. CSOs can reveal corruption and empower local communities to track and monitor governmental expenditures as outlined in the [GP Policy Paper](#). Panellists also praised their innovative and normative powers as well as their level of credibility. Currently, CSOs are adapting to performing as watchdogs, reminding governments in many parts of the world to act on behalf of their people and to uphold international laws and regulations. Michael Werz acclaimed their positive influence on post-conflict dialogue processes as a result of being deeply rooted in communities and being simultaneously less constrained by national borders and interests.

Civil society is not a monolithic group. Its roles differ broadly.

Civil society organisations have unrivalled advantages.

Partnering for change enhances the influence of CSOs

The discussions revealed that international collaboration is indispensable. In order to address humanitarian challenges more effectively, panellists proposed the creation of a “Union of NGOs” – a platform that would cluster CSOs, social influencers, the business and private sector and other stakeholders. Anja Langenbucher mentioned the design and structure of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a similar construct. It serves as a good example on how various stakeholders could come together. However, prior to involving other stakeholders, international consensus, also at the governmental level has to be achieved in order to create legitimacy. Christof Bosch stressed that we have the virtual space and other means of communication to implement such a platform.

Reducing the deficits of CSOs helps to scale up impact

The heterogeneity of CSOs is not only a strength, but also a weakness. The levels of professionalism, accountability and transparency vary considerably and need to be balanced out and improved. Many organisations do not work result-driven and hence lack impact-measuring tools. According to Werz, this becomes more and more important in order to quantify successes, to facilitate impact and to develop strong arguments towards future donors.

Panellists and the audience proposed various ideas on enhancing the impact of civil society by making its work more scalable. Ideas evolved around disconnecting funding from conditions, unleashing the power of the people concerned and following shared principles when collaborating with the private sector. Furthermore, reasons for distrust between CSOs and governments should be examined closely and reduced. As part of future measuring efforts, big data analysis tools and automation processes can be involved in their work. Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, added that improving the quality of assistance, being more accountable to the people serving or providing guarantees that assistance is sustainable may be important.

Civil society organisations have contributed tremendously to overcoming humanitarian crises and helping the most vulnerable. They lead their fights often at the risk of their own lives. In the light of increasing complexity and speed of developments, joint forces on the basis of shared values and goals may help to meet upcoming challenges. At the same time, there are enormous development potentials. Dealing with shortcomings, organisational, structural or technical deficits may open new opportunities and improve their work. The positive impact of civil society organisations, however, never relieves governments from their own responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Humanitarianism is under attack and faces growing international pressure. As the number of violent conflicts rises, humanitarian issues become more complex. This can be ascribed to emerging nationalism and the resulting crisis of multilateralism; but also, to an overarching global leadership crisis that finds its roots in the lack of mutual trust. Consequently, multilateral institutions of law enforcement and accountability are not functioning properly. Yet, they remain essential in responding to global issues and evolving threats.

Building international ties for cooperation is crucial to address complex challenges.

A “Union of NGOs” as a collaborative platform to address humanitarian challenges.

CSOs must professionalise further to achieve greater impact.

There are various scaling up options to consider.

Governments are not relieved from their own responsibilities.

With multilateralism being on the wane, governments withdraw from their responsibilities to end humanitarian catastrophes. As an inevitable result, international law is undermined leading to a rise of human rights violations. Many crimes remain unprosecuted and fuel a culture of impunity. Europe fails to use its capabilities and power to play a decisive role in responding to those conflicts. This leadership crisis finds further expression in Europe's weary humanity which in the past has depreciated humanitarian work. In connection with an indifferent attitude and a perceived culture of "looking away," a downwards spiral is created. The messages, conveyed by western states among others, have a devastating effect and may lead to further atrocities.

The complexity of these remits calls civil society organisations to act. Their strengths of heterogeneity, flexibility and proximity are linked to a wide array of roles and functions that CSOs may fulfil. It became clear that solutions must involve CSOs, politics and the private sector. This may not only balance out governmental shortcomings, it may also improve the work of CSOs and therefore increase their long-term impact. Further ways to professionalise their work can involve digitalisation and means of data processing to work more result-driven and to achieve more measurable outcomes.

The influence of civil society and its heterogeneity, however, does not relieve states and governments from their own responsibility to enter political decision-making processes and to act. Europe and Germany can make a difference here. Governments must acknowledge their responsibilities, embrace complexity, and commit to an international humanitarian law that protects citizens, and not dictators.

The full review of the conference with further details, figures and quotes from members of civil society, politics and businesses can be reviewed in the addendum to follow.

FOREWORD ON DAY 1

The opening of the Aurora Dialogues, an evening event, entailed messages of optimism but also critical reflections on the state of humanity in the world. Protagonists attempted to capture the status quo of humanitarianism: they addressed the role of Europe in a world of growing crises, the deficits of international humanitarian law and the unequal power distribution. They also reminded us how important it is to give those a voice who have the potential to ignite change and to motivate others to act. This is what the Aurora Dialogues are about: to support people “from the field” to do the incredible work they are doing, to tell their stories and bring them together with those involved in decision making processes. Conversations indicated the importance of distinguishing between the political (frequently theoretical) perception and the true, often gritty and unpleasant reality. Bringing all actors together and to enhance understanding for difficulties on the ground is key for developing joint and sustainable solutions.

Aurora Dialogues Evening: About gloom, courage and matters of conscience

Joachim Rogall, president and CEO of Robert Bosch Foundation and host of the Aurora Dialogues 2018, opened the evening by expressing his gratitude to the organisations’ efforts to discuss the world’s most severe crises. “This is exactly what the Berlin office of the Robert Bosch Foundation was designed for – to be a platform, a place for discussion between civil society, businesses and the public sphere to make the world a better place,” Joachim Rogall stated.

Ruben Vardanyan, Co-Founder of the Aurora Humanitarian Initiative (AHI), underlined his belief that making a difference in today’s world would first and foremost involve personal networks of trust and ways of collaboration on the basis of shared values.

Jeffrey Sachs from the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN) addressed the audience with a video message of hope and concern. “My concern is how we are so off-course to achieve the goals we set in the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement.” Sachs stressed the crucial role of NGOs in holding governments to account for actions supporting the common good. “We have achievable goals,” he said. “The 17 sustainable development goals can be achieved by directive investments of just a few per cent of the world output. But our governments, often in the hands of corrupt individuals or corporate lobbies giving special privileges to the wealthiest people and companies in the world, are not doing their job!”

“The NGOs in the world are a crucial force to defend decency and to honour the moral Charta of the UN’s universal declaration of human rights.”
Jeffrey Sachs

The panel with Tom Catena (Aurora Chair, catholic missionary and medical doctor in the Nuba mountains), Cem Özdemir (former Co-Chair Green Party), Wolfgang Huber (Former Head of Evangelical Church), Düzen Tekkal (Journalist and Chairwomen of the NGO Háwar) and Tania von Uslar-Gleichen (Commissioner for Human Rights, International Development and Social Affairs at Ministry of Foreign Affairs) controversially discussed the global state of human rights and explored a world that is severely under pressure. "Allow me not to start with the gloom," Tania von Uslar-Gleichen commenced iterating the recent achievements and celebrations around 70 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration and the acknowledgements of the human rights activists Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege who were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Nonetheless, "human rights around the globe are under stress and need constant fighting," she added.

Germany's election as a non-permanent member of the UN's Security Council for the 2019 – 20 term starting from April onwards will impose major responsibilities for peace and security. Against this backdrop and in the light of humanitarianism in crisis, Germany should focus on the human-rights-security-nexus, as per definition the Security Council would deal with classical crises and not human rights as such, von Uslar-Gleichen concluded. Germany should try to make sure that human rights are mainstreamed into the UN's Security Council's work.

The battles of threatened minorities are reflections of the global society

Panellist Düzen Tekkal met Nobel Peace Prize winner Nadia Murad for the first time in 2014 in northern Iraq shortly after she fled IS. Tekkal initially travelled to Iraq as a war correspondence and to report about the on-going genocide of her people – the Yazidis. Murad was one of the first survivors to report on cruelties and the sexual abuse that had been used against Yazidi women. A war crime of incredible magnitude as her award-winning documentary Háwar, the Kurdish word for genocide, shows. It portrays the situation following IS' attack on the Iraq's Yazidi community in August 2014. According to estimates, 5,000 people were killed, hundreds of thousands displaced and 3,000 girls and women forced into sexual slavery. The story of the Yazidis, one of the oldest religious communities in the world at the threat of extinction, shook the panel. Yet according to Tekkal, not enough people are seriously paying attention, to the "forgotten people of an unforgettable story" as [BBC News](#) recalls in September 2018.

"The current terrorist attacks in Europe show what we, the minorities, have long known: terror, religious extremists and the enemies of our free society must be combated worldwide. If we wait until terrorists strike, then we have all waited too long," said Düzen Tekkal and added: "As the founder of the NGO [Hawar Help](#), born out of the ashes of the Yazidi genocide, and as a Yazidi woman activist born and raised in Germany, I see daily how our values of freedom, equality and justice are continually threatened. Nevertheless, I choose to base my work on hope." She added that the Yazidi genocide was recognised thanks to the braveness of the Yazidi women who broke the silence.

"Human rights around the globe are under stress and need constant fighting."
Tania von Uslar-Gleichen

"When Nadia Murad won the Nobel Peace Prize, it was a very big moment for all Yazidi women and women all over the world."
Düzen Tekkal

"If we wait until terrorists strike, then we have all waited for too long."
Düzen Tekkal

Humanitarian crises:

Concrete measures must substitute lip services in Europe

“This is all happening because we allow it to happen. So, we can be the people to stop it,” said Cem Özdemir answering Nik Gowing’s question whether global crisis can be ended. Özdemir emphasised that liberal democracies should start talking a language that illiberal regimes would understand. This would include to cease all arms supplies to those countries threatening liberal democracies and violating human rights. It would be our decision to determine how things develop in the future. “Unfortunately, we are very good with lip services in favour of liberal democracies. But when it comes to concrete measures, we don’t take the necessary steps in order to demonstrate that we are prepared to defend our liberal democracies.” Nik Gowing indicated that even for the media, it has become more and more difficult to report human rights violations because journalists themselves are under threat.

“Liberal democracies should start talking a language that illiberal regimes understand.”
Cem Özdemir

Wolfgang Huber underscored the co-existence of two realities: “The reality of those who stand for human rights is also a part of the reality.” As agreed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 70 years ago, the primary responsibility of governments of liberal democracies lie in protecting the lives of human beings. The dignity of human beings begins with physical life and integrity. “The protection of human life does not start with discussions about military interventions – it starts a lot earlier,” said Huber adding that “we should not only speak about compliance rules for industries, but also about compliance rules for governments.”

“The protection of human life does not start with discussions about military interventions.”
Wolfgang Huber

On moral ambiguity and the prevalence of national interests

Tom Catena notes that human rights frequently take a backseat in national interests referring to the situation in Sudan, which is an important transit country for refugees. From there, people from Eritrea and Somalia try to enter Libya to proceed across the Mediterranean to Europe. To reduce migration, the EU is cooperating with Sudan’s president Omar al-Bashir. Since 2015, more than 200 million Euros have reportedly been given to Sudan for migration management. The autocrat regime led by al-Bashir however attacks migrants to stop them on their way to Europe. Catena stated that since Omar al-Bashir is helping to control migration flows in Sudan, his reputation has changed from being a war criminal to being everybody’s pal. “We should all remember that the sanctity of human life should take presence in everything – in business, trade and everything else. If you don’t value life, if you look at it that the life of an American or an European is worth more than the life of someone in the Nuba mountains, you have a big problem.” He sees the role of society and religion in stressing that there is nothing more sacred than human life.

The panel discussed whether genocides like they have happened to the Yazidis or the Rohingya could have been prevented and how human rights can be upheld by the international community. Cem Özdemir criticised the dividing positions in the UN’s Security Council. “In particular China and Russia would most likely have blocked any humanitarian interventions in Myanmar given their individual and nationally-driven interests. This proves why we need a European foreign defence policy. One country alone cannot make an impact.

Europe needs a common European foreign defense policy.

To avoid by-passing of liberal democracies, they need to speak out jointly. We need a common European position on those cases.” Özdemir clarified: “If we as Europe can achieve that a European Foreign Affairs Minister is worth more than a national Foreign Affairs Minister, that would make a true difference.” Düzen Tekkal added that “we have to fight for democratic values and stand up for them. At one point, we have to decide what’s more important – geo-political interests or human rights.”

Fighting impunity must be at the centre of our focus

Injustice and impunity encourages offenders to commit further crimes. Violence in many parts of Syria for example, has largely been ignored by the international community. “Impunity has a reverse effect and does not stop people from acting in a violent way,” von Uslar-Gleichen said. The international community has targeted this problem, she added referring to the UN’s impartial accountability mechanism, known as IIM or Triple IM. It is a first step towards ensuring justice for the victims of war crimes. The mechanism will gather evidence to prepare case studies for the court that will decide over these cases. “Something is happening. It is certainly not enough. If we do it after the incidents, it is always too little,” von Uslar-Gleichen remarks.

“Every decision has consequences – be it one towards an intervention or a non-intervention in humanitarian crises or committed genocides,” Cem Özdemir added. Ruben Vardanyan elaborated: “The biggest problem in the world is indifference. The opposite of love is not hate. It’s indifference.” Wolfgang Huber remarked that religious bodies and communities have the responsibility to communicate human rights violations. “We would have the technical means to do so,” Huber said. The institutionalised means of communications are not sufficient to disclose violations in advance and a comprehensive early warning system of the civil society should be developed.

Roland Schatz, Senior Advisor to the United Nations’ Director General in Geneva picked up on Huber’s statement and commented on the limited powers of the Security Council: “We at the UN know that the Security Council is not the solution. The base of the council is wrong and not working.” Schatz urged to build a parallel institution to the Security Council in which religious leaders and communities have their stake and can act as intermediates. Von Uslar-Gleichen agreed that one of the key challenges of Germany’s role in the Security Council will be to generate sufficient backing for action and to avoid ‘placebos’.

Sunita Krishnan argued that human rights and human dignity is a construct of convenience. “When nations have their self-interest, it suits them to see it. If it does not suit them, they don’t. The biggest crisis we face are not the signs of the evils, but the wilful silence of the good. Humanity is non-negotiable and that’s a construct that each of us needs to have.”

Wolfgang Huber quoted Immanuel Kant for whom the world society in 1795 had long become reality: one world and one human race. In Kant’s treatise ‘To Eternal Peace’ he wrote: “It has come so far among all people on earth that the violation of law committed in one place on earth is felt in all other places.”

“If we as Europe can achieve that a European Foreign Affairs Minister is worth more than a national Foreign Affairs Minister - that would make a true difference.”
Cem Özdemir

International impartial accountability mechanisms must be extended to tighten net on war criminals.

“The biggest problem in the world is indifference. The opposite of love is not hate. It’s indifference.”
Ruben Vardanyan

The implementation forces of the Security Council are limited.

“The biggest crisis we face is the wilful silence of the good.”
Sunita Krishnan

A remarkable sentence written down in 1795 which is just as true today. Huber added that indifference would produce the wilful silence we are experiencing today. It is the biggest cause for conflict, he said.

FOREWORD ON DAY 2

The second conference day framed the geopolitical and politico-security related considerations in the context of the increasing need for humanitarian action. Conflict dimensions were considered as well as an outlook on ways to counter them. This included showcasing the significance of civil society in fostering humanitarian engagement and to fill the void of public action due to lacking political will, insufficient access, skills or knowledge. Moreover, the conversations touched on experiences dealing with the collaboration between political bodies, NGOs and other parts of civil society. This can bring about change and enhance, accelerate and scale up impact.

Humanity starts with dialogue at its core

“Fear may be a good trigger for action, but it’s not a good moderator,” Christof Bosch started in his welcoming speech criticising the dystopic picture often drawn in an attempt to describe the world’s status quo. Fear would not make people to act from their heart, Bosch added. Hope instead, could function as an engine and motivator. But, it carries the risk of blind hope – lacking dialogue. Even Socrates, the creator of the philosophical method of a structured dialogue, knew that dialogue can take protagonists to the core of the matter. Therefore, dialogue is crucial. Hope combined with dialogue posed a perfect tool. “Our chance here is to practice dialogue,” Christof Bosch said. Dialogue would live from curiosity and genuine interest – analogous to a common kids’ sandbox where togetherness and problem-solving lives from verbal exchange, listening, giving and taking. Christof Bosch reminded the audience to acknowledge the most fundamental assumptions prior to any problem-solving.

“Dialogue is crucial. Hope combined with dialogue poses the perfect match.”

Christof Bosch

Ingrid Hamm urged NGOs to redefine “humanity” in the broader sense – away from the understanding of mere giving towards an approach that is integral, inclusive and collaborative. Compared to civil society actors, foundations would neither be particularly brave, nor are they commonly known as risk-takers. Partnering with like-minded on the ground, cross-border and cross-disciplinary could have an incredible impact considering civil society’s influence alone. Merging these powers would raise the bar for both, CSOs and governments. Ursula Müller, Assistant Secretary-General at the UN, addressed the magnitude of challenges the global community is facing today. “Displacement is on the rise, respect for international law is on the decline. Trust within and in-between countries is eroding. The solutions to our problems cannot be found inwards or in isolation,” she said in a video statement. “In my travels to countries affected by conflict and natural disasters, I’m always deeply inspired and impressed by the work of national and local NGOs. They are at the forefront of response and closest to the people affected,” she added and concluded: “Moving forward, strengthening these partnerships and investing in local capacities should be our top priority.”

NGOs must enhance crisis preparedness, increase their risk affinity and partner with like-minded CSOs on the ground.

“More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together.”

Kofi Annan, 1999

The world is experiencing a loss of mutual trust

Wolfgang Ischinger, Head of the Munich Security Conference, held an inspiring keynote entitled: “World on the edge of the abyss.” However, he chose a different tonality to start: “I’m not going to bore you with a long analysis on how terrible things are. I will try to focus more on the things we can do.” Ischinger delivered a brief analysis on the shift of the German mindset. “When Germany became reunited in 1990, every German political leader, irrespective of their political orientation, said: ‘We Germans should be grateful as we are blessed with the reunification. Now, we are a happy country because we are merely surrounded by friends.’” This statement, Ischinger, noted, had a devastating effect on the German mindset as it stopped the country from looking beyond its neighbouring friends and the upcoming issues. “If we had looked east, we would have understood that some of our eastern and south-eastern neighbours had dramatic security concerns. There is war going on,” he expounded, adding: “We stopped ourselves for a long time from understanding that our friends faced significant risks, conflicts and war.”

A shift in the German mindset stopped us from perceiving the security concerns of our neighbours.

According to Ischinger, the signs of disintegration can be categorised into two ways. First: Today’s severe international crises are based on a comprehensive loss of mutual trust. “My friends, trust is the currency of diplomacy. If there is no trust, there is no agreement. If there is no agreement, there’s no cooperation.” The absence of trust would enhance the risk of misunderstanding, miscalculation, and accidental escalation, Ischinger notes. According to Ischinger, one area that clearly shows the consequences of the erosion of trust are the developments in arms control. “Even at the height of the Cold War, there were multiple arms control negotiations going on. Are you aware that there is nothing like this happening at this very moment in this area? Instead, we are building more arms,” Ischinger commented.

“My friends, trust is the currency of diplomacy. If there is no trust, there is no agreement. If there is no agreement, there’s no cooperation.”
Wolfgang Ischinger

International law is systematically violated

Secondly, Ischinger mentions the depreciation of international law and norms of behaviour. “We in the EU and Germany have provided a catastrophic picture of the inability to deal with the worst humanitarian crisis, namely in Syria.” Ischinger criticised the approach of the German parliament which reportedly decided not to get involved in 2011 in order to avoid a “political firestorm” – a decision that contradicts the humanitarian engagement Europeans would commonly be so proud of.

“We looked away. And you know what? Still, you can become guilty. If you can do something and you don’t – you are also guilty.”
Wolfgang Ischinger

Ischinger demanded to ignite the threatened use of force in the national security debate again. “I’m not an advocate of military intervention because most of them went terribly wrong in history. But sometimes, if you want to create peace, you need to, at least to some degree, exert pressure. This includes threatening use of force.” Ischinger claimed that, German politics would frequently be hiding behind the (anticipated) lack of support from the Security Council and abstain from interfering in harsh conflicts as a consequence. “Ladies and gentlemen, I think this is a declaration of moral bankruptcy of our political leaders. We interpret international law as a law protecting dictators and allowing cruel punishment of your own population.” Ischinger urged to reinterpret international law as law protecting human beings, not dictators. International law should be transformed into a law focusing on human security law and protecting its citizens worldwide.

“We interpret international law as a law protecting dictators and allowing cruel punishment of our own population.”
Wolfgang Ischinger

Europe needs a qualified majoritarian voting in foreign policy

As a further point, Ischinger criticised the fact that the EU in seven years was unable to adopt a clear position on Syria. Instead the peace process was handed over to Russia and the US – despite “standing on the so-called moral high ground.” Ischinger questioned why we in Europe were not willing enough to ignite a comprehensive peace process and did not understand that “standing on the side lines” would not be sufficient. Ischinger urged politicians to represent the interests of 500 Mio. Europeans better and to ensure that the EU is seen “as a critical actor and [is] not totally ignored.”

“We need to take decisive steps towards a qualified majoritarian voting in foreign policy,” he pledged, countering the concerns of some member states regarding national sovereignty. He quoted the former prime minister of Belgium, Paul-Henri Charles Spaak, who said: “There are two categories of EU member states: those who know they are small. And those who haven’t fully understood that yet.” A majoritarian voting and an understanding that single European states could not influence international politics the way they do together is the precondition for the EU to act with one voice, Ischinger concluded.

The European leadership crisis compromises its ability to act

In the following discussion Michael Keating, Executive Director of the European Institute of Peace, highlighted that the differences within Europe are compromising its ability to use its values, its economic weight, and its political credentials to play a constructive role in many crises. EU senior officials would be caught between a rock and a hard place – namely the reality on the ground in places like Syria and Europe’s policies which are undermining its ability to act in a coherent way to resolve and engage in conflict and mediation. Franz Fischler, President of the European Forum Alpbach, argued that a lack of trust among national leaders in Europe has first and foremost to do with the lost ability of having and leading dialogues. “What we see in Europa are information campaigns. We have to learn what real dialogue means and that it is based on mutual trust and common goals.”

Wolfgang Ischinger notes that one of the greatest challenges is creating the required capacity to enable joint approaches and ideas in Europe. But most of the time, European countries would be pre-occupied with their own domestic issues as it can be observed in Germany, France or Britain. Though international leaders are aware of the situations’ severity, “we are not in a position where our leaders have the liberty and capacity to think beyond the goals the EU initially set – as being an exporter of stability and provider of security,” Ischinger stated and alluded to the situation in Yemen where Europe waived intervention. “We know from the past that a conflict can be stopped as it develops in the first phase. The longer it lasts, the more radical it becomes on all sides. Once a conflict continues, what happens is it becomes structurally very difficult to stop,” Michael Keating stated. “The political economy starts forming in which certain actors have an interest in the continuation of violence and insecurity. And often, the response to these situations is an overmilitarised one. It is not looking at security from the perspective of people but from those of external actors – with a very distorting effect.”

The EU has to choose the front seat, not the back seat, when it comes to decisions around political intervention in crisis regions.

Ending the leadership crisis in Europe to act with one voice remains a top priority.

Europe lost its ability to use dialogues as the basis for mutual trust and common goals.

Europe lacks the capacity for joint action given the pre-occupation with domestic issues.

Human security does not mean to over-militarise. It means providing local governance, accountability and justice.

Keating added that speaking to the affected people on site showed that security would not mean having military personnel carrying a Kalashnikov and telling inhabitants what to do. “We have to make sure that the political focus on security is not overmilitarised. Instead it should include human security, basic local governance, accountability and justice.”

A “Union of NGOs” to approach humanitarian crises

Franz Fischler advocated for a new approach involving ties between politics, the business sector and civil society as part of a reform of the democratic system in order to approach international crises. Anja Langenbucher reminds the audience that it is also worthwhile broadening the concept of humanitarian crises and to look at forgotten miseries that continue to have destabilising effects. “These on-going daily tragedies like the death of children create the fertile ground for future conflicts.” She urged to stop looking away but making these issues part of a sustainable concept that includes new networks, private platforms and foreign policy tools. “Public Private-Partnerships such as Gavi have provided 700 million children with vaccines saving the lives of 10 million children since 2000. It has created resilience and stability, access to health systems etc.”

Approaching daily issues and tragedies is a way to stop the creation of fertile ground for future conflicts.

Anja Langenbucher argues that the design and structure of the SDGs could serve as a sample for this union of NGOs. They equally needed international consensus at the governmental level in order to create legitimacy prior to involving civil society. The SDGs therefore serve as a good example on how the various stakeholders can come together. A broad global consent would pose the basis for a global implementation, however. Christof Bosch stressed the potential he sees in the proposed platform. “We have the virtual space and other means of communication and transparency,” he said adding that the SDGs may serve as a basis offering credibility and orientation to implement such platforms.

A new international platform still requires broad governmental consensus to work.

Ruben Vardanyan added that a network of stakeholders should include not only big cooperations or business influencers, but also young, technology-driven and innovative people to engage in this discussion. Multi-stakeholder approaches would make a crucial difference. Vardanyan highlighted that technology allows for a great level of transparency which should be used to disclose cash flows to criminal actors and into regions where genocides are taking place.

A multi-stakeholder approach has to involve young, innovative people and disruptive technologies for greater transparency.

Wolfgang Ischinger added that the power of civil society and business coalitions has been multiplied in the age of the internet. “If you have the right message and a good messenger, you can get people to do enormous things that transcend the power of an average European country.” It would remain important, however, to avoid the ‘CNN effect’ and get people involved at an early stage – something that according to Ischinger has become much easier in the digital age.

The power of the people has been multiplied by digital and online means.

Case study: Stopping a famine in Somalia through a multiple national effort

Michael Keating reported about an extraordinary positive example of a national multi-stakeholder approach applied in Somalia to stop the famine in 2017. The initiative connected humanitarians, the private sector including around 600 – 700 retailers spread throughout the country, politics, faith leaders and more. “You have to use the energy of society which tends to express itself through entrepreneurship,” he said adding that making money and avoiding chaos in the country were crucial drivers for private sector involvement. Keating added: “Humanitarian crises are often the result of failed politics, of failure to address disputes and to engage everybody: civil society, the private sector, women, young people and more to create partnerships.” In Somalia, Keating witnessed multiple efforts to prevent the famine from happening. “This additionally convinced several international institutional and private donors to provide one billion Dollars over the course of several months. This is an important lesson to be learnt,” he concluded.

“Humanitarian crises are often the result of failed politics, of failure to address disputes, and to engage everybody to create partnerships.”
Michael Keating

The lack of an international alliance creates the ground for atrocities

Maung Zarni, a Burmese academic and a Buddhist-influenced humanist, shared that in the case of the Rohingya crisis, genocide and related human rights violations have long been known in the UN as well as in the private sector that has been investing in Burma in the last 25 years. “The words ‘Crimes against humanity’ have popped up in every single UN report since 1993. So, neither the international community, nor the private sector or governments have an excuse of ‘we didn’t know’.” Genocide, however, Maung continued, would not be a profitable business or a geo-political advancement which led to the lack of intervention by any of the parties. He added that according to him, too much focus is put upon single actors and institutions. He is convinced that the genocide could have been prevented: “The Burmese military leaders have done several ‘test runs’. No genocide in history has ever been committed by a single state actor. They all act in coalition. They have been given a blank check, they tested the water and realised there was no political will to stop what they were about to do!”

The limits of a multi-stakeholder approach: without a strong international political will, no network will be able to prevent humanitarian crises.

The former German Minister of Justice and member of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (ICC) Herta Däubler-Gmelin, remarked: “What we can see is that the meaning and the power of the International Court is systematically weakened. I feel that civil society and businesses could do a lot in working against that.” She advocated for a renewed, positive narrative on and a re-assertion of the power of the International Court. “Civil society, businesses and media have to raise their voices – but currently, they don’t do it over fears in having to deal with dictators.” Ischinger emphasised the importance of stopping the delegitimisation of the International Court and focus on applying what is already in place. Stressing his personal reluctance on the use of military force, he added: “I think that allowing the continuing existence of dictators is the worst possible procedure in terms of preventing the next generation of terrorists. By not stopping it through legal, political and diplomatic means, we are creating the threats to our societies as we speak.”

The power of the International Court must be re-asserted and its positive narrative put at the centre.

Volker Westerbarkey, Head of the German section of Médecins Sans Frontières, underlined the statement that international law is backing dictators and hindering humanitarians from helping people in need. Despite the power and impact of civil society, he urged to “not let governments off the hook” and compels them to take on their responsibility.

Voices from the audience on changing UN regulations in order to improve international law and its effectiveness were instantly refuted by Michael Keating: “I think we should not fiddle with international law. If you try and reform it in today’s toxic political environment, you will end up with something worse.” Additionally, Keating called out for a differentiated view on security policy: “One of the things that we don’t do consistently enough is looking at the economics and politics of security forces. We often treat it as some technical issue about ability – we don’t look at acceptability, accountability and affordability. Every country needs to be able to afford its own security rather than being dependent on external actors as this makes them vulnerable.”

Regarding the role of media, Michael Keating underlined his concern that conventional media would be feeding the egos of politicians by using media channels as their positioning platforms. “We are giving oxygen to those demonising migrants and interpreting security in various ways and by doing so grandstanding and feeding negative narratives.” Franz Fischler argued that the influence of the traditional media is overridden by social media. He adds that opponents of liberal democracies seem to have better online approaches than those in favour of it.

Europe must end its own marginalisation

The panel finally discussed potential ways for Europe to take on responsibility. Ingrid Hamm argued that rising populism and nationalistic tendencies in Europe are a result of neglecting parts of societies in times of globalisation and urged to focus on this issue in order to avoid Europe’s influence from being further undermined. Europe must continue embracing complexity. There are no easy solutions to problems. Volker Westerbarkey added that Europe has to “move internally and make sure it stands to international humanitarian law and at the same time [it has to become] more active internationally” to avoid losing its credibility and marginalising itself further.

Wolfgang Ischinger pointed to the perception of the EU as being nothing but an instrument of German power. “The idea of Germany being the dominant power is dangerous and poisoning the essence of the European Union,” he said. He added that he would be delighted if the German Foreign Minister as well as the German Chancellor would push for a qualified majority voting in Europe. “I hope that the German government will formally start a process on that voting following the EU elections. That would eliminate the suspicions that Germany would use the EU as a power enabler.” Ischinger closed with a quote of Thomas Mann, who has stated back in 1953: “We shall not strive for a German Europe, but a European Germany.”

Changing UN-regulations is the wrong approach and could aggravate the situation.

Traditional media has a share in uplifting opponents of liberal democracies.

Europe must learn to embrace complexity.

The German government must change the perception of the EU as being Germany’s power enabler.

Civil society closes the void between needs and means

The second panel session looked at the potential, the impact and successes of civil society. In a video message, Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, emphasised the role of partner organisations in addressing humanitarian needs around the world. “Today, over 250 million people are in humanitarian crises as a result of conflict,” he said, mentioning Syria, South-Sudan, Burma, Iraq as only a few. Humanitarian assistance would not only be about saving lives but also about giving people hope and prospects for their future. These challenges could not be addressed by public bodies alone.

Civil society has enormous potential to leverage its strengths and to find creative solutions on the ground. Its remit would lie in particular in closing the gap between needs and means, argues Stylianides and praises humanitarian workers as modern-day heroes. “Every day, they risk their lives to help the most vulnerable.” Earlier in 2018, the European Commission announced an increase of its humanitarian budget by 30 per cent for 2021 – 2027 in response to the growing challenges that gain speed and complexity.

Michael Werz, Senior Fellow at the Centre for American Progress, and Jessica Espey, Senior Advisor at the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) scrutinised the role and impact of civil society organisations (CSO). They summarised their findings and conclusions in an in-depth [policy paper](#). In his presentation, Werz iterated the strong humanitarian and ethical argument one can make about the role of the civil society. “We are living in a new world. There is a tremendous onslaught on the rule of law in international engagement and an attack on the common good. This is where civil society organisations need to step forward and play a potentially new role in reminding governments to uphold international norms and to define the common good in a way that is applicable.” As a consequence, this role might touch on normative and political remits. Werz acclaimed the various advantages and positive attributes of CSOs such as their unparalleled performance in post-conflict dialogues as a result of being deeply rooted in communities. Apart from that, they are less constrained by national borders and interests. In cases of abdicated state responsibility, they are becoming increasingly important.

The paper further shows that over the past two decades, civil society organisations have significantly evolved and increased heterogeneity. Technology, geopolitical developments, climate challenges and related humanitarian crises accelerated the creation of millions of CSOs around the globe. The Yearbook of International Organizations stated that the number of NGOs has reportedly increased from 6,000 in 1990 to more than 50,000 in 2006. In 2018, the number has allegedly risen to 65,000 with CSOs experiencing a boom in countries where most beneficiaries of aid are located. In India alone, a 2008 study suggests an estimated presence of 3.3 million NGOs.

Michael Werz touched on the most important findings of the paper such as the range of common functions through which civil society supports governments and citizens.

The global challenges ahead require the support of public bodies, civil society and the private sector.

Civil society plays a crucial role in reminding governments to uphold international norms and to define the common good.

CSOs have increased immensely and are highly heterogenic in structure.

The paper outlined five crucial roles for civil society: (1) Their function as a check and balance upon governments and private institutions. Often governments alone are not in the position to advocate for change. A void, CSOs are able to fill as agents of accountability. (2) Their role as experts supports evidence-based policy and planning. Through the collection and evaluation of data, specialist knowledge is created and made available. (3) Their role as an interim service provider when governments are unable or unwilling to act. (4) Their communicative role as a voice of local communities and vulnerable populations. (5) Their role as resource providers to support development endeavours – including emergencies.

The World Economic Forum identified further ten functions that CSOs fulfil. Transparency International brings in a disturbing figure of 1.26 trillion US-Dollar per annum, developing countries reportedly lose through corruption, bribery, theft and tax evasion. The role and function of CSOs would be to shine a spotlight on those instances and to empower local communities to track and monitor governmental expenditures. Werz mentioned for example an awareness campaign run in Nigeria by the civic start-up BudgIT. It disclosed unnecessary budget items and fake governmental projects like an alleged 41 million Naira (approx. 113.5k USD) investment for the funding of a (non-existent) youth centre in Kebbi State.

Their heterogeneity can also be a weakness for CSOs. The levels of professionalism, accountability and transparency vary considerably. Challenges in regulating CSOs make it furthermore difficult to critically evaluate their impact. However, a quantitative approach that looks at the scale of resources they have mobilised, the data they have compiled and the financial effects of their accountability sharpens the picture of their genuine contribution. These figures remain important in discussions and ideas around the scaling up of their work. Michael Werz added: “Our challenges intensify with climate change, natural disasters, isolation, nationalism and others. As the role of CSOs increases, it becomes more and more important to map their activities and quantify the successes. This is an important tool and creates strong arguments vis à vis donors, funders, traditional diplomats and people in the national security environment.”

Humanitarian impact – learning from best practice

The following panel set the stage for impressive personal stories from people leading CSOs around the globe. Moderator Dorothee Nolte immersed into the work on the ground and the drivers for people to engage in causes that eventually resulted in the creation of their own NGOs.

“It is possible to bring about power in the face of pain”

Sunitha Krishnan is the Co-Founder of Prajwala, a pioneering anti-trafficking organisation working on sex trafficking and sex crime. “I was 15 when I was gang-raped by eight men.” She does not remember the rape as such, she stated, but the isolation and marginalisation that she faced within her family and community. Suddenly, she was an outcast, somebody of loose character no one should befriend with. “This was the most transformative moment,” Krishnan said. “Because I realised how the world victimises victims by attitudes and perceptions.”

Core functions of CSOs: political check and balance, experts, interim service provider, resource provider and voice of the vulnerable.

Civil society organisations may serve as watchdogs to fight and disclose corruption to local and international communities.

With the increasing importance of CSOs worldwide, mapping their activities and quantifying their successes becomes more important.

Sex trafficking does not only destroy body, mind and soul. It destroys generation after generation.

This led to her decision to dedicate her own life to end sexual exploitation of women and children. During her work, she realised that sex trafficking is even far more damaging to people. “Not only does it destroy body, mind and soul, but also generation after generation. Her label is the label of her child.” The youngest child she rescued was three years old. “To actually know there are men in this world who pay 10,000 Rupees or 200 Euros just to have sex with a three-year old child is the world that I’m dealing with on a day to day basis. In this space, I’m trying to create hope, a sense of recovery.” In the last 25 years, Kishnan has freed around 20,000 women and children from prostitution and sex slavery. She wanted to demonstrate that it is possible to bring about change in the face of pain. What has started as a grassroots movement has today become one of the most powerful advocacy groups for survivors to be heard by the government.

“We restore hope, dignity and possibility in a world of extreme darkness”

Saran Kaba Jones is the CEO and Founder of FACE Africa. The organisation was created from the ashes of the Liberian Civil War. The conflict forced Jones and her own family to flee the devastation when she was 8 years old. FACE Africa started as a project of providing education to children and was later extended to bringing clean drinking water to some of the most remote areas in Sub-Saharan Africa to address the close link between education and access to clean water and sanitation. Moreover, water-borne diseases were the largest cause of death of children under the age of five. FACE Africa began operating in Liberia and to date has completed 50 community projects directly benefiting 25,000+ people in rural Liberia. “Most of us are driven by the need to restore hope, dignity and possibility in a world of extreme darkness.”

FACE Africa uncovered and closed the link between education and access to clean water.

“I wanted to advocate for people who are largely invisible”

Katrine Camilleri is a Maltese lawyer and Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Malta. “Getting involved in JRS in 1998 for me represented using my skills and profession to fight for something which for me seemed a lot more worthwhile than what I was spending all of my time on.” JRS helps refugees, forcibly displaced people and asylum seekers. “I wanted to advocate for people who are largely invisible and mostly seen as objects of charity rather than people with rights and with dignity.” In the past 20 years, she extended her work to collaborate with information services in Malta as well as to psycho-social support. She outlined that protection would be about more than being safe and that people eventually want to be part of a community. Camilleri is also a Roland Berger Human Dignity Awardee 2014/2015.

Human protection does not stop with feeling safe. People want to be part of a community.

“We are holding ourselves accountable for saying the tough things”

Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF) International is known for its indispensable work in providing life-saving medical relief. The organisation grew rapidly and operates today with more than 40,000 people in 70 countries. Christopher Lockyear, Secretary General shared the organisation’s history and argued that putting people at the core of MSF’s is not always easy given the organisational and structural as well as institutional challenges.

In Europe, there is a lack of stability and an attitude that criminalises the humanitarian act and people seeking assistance.

“We managed to keep our patients at the centre of our decision making. Additionally, holding ourselves accountable for saying the tough things is also key.”

Lockyear, moreover, draws attention to an prevailing issue: “It’s not just a lack of stability, it’s the criminalisation of the humanitarian act and people who are seeking humanitarian assistance. We were in the situation where we had to suspend search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean because our people’s boat was sanctioned by the Italian government.” He added: “At the moment we feel that people who have historically been supportive of humanitarian acts, when it comes to their doorstep, they are actually actively turning against it.”

Michael Werz commented: “The problem is less about the immigrants trying to cross the Mediterranean. It is rather the many members of the Italian government that have distanced themselves from a humanitarian and democratic consensus that has defined European politics for a long time.” Society and politics ought to instil the notion that international law and humanitarian aid matter out of an enlightened self-interest and to maintain the fabric of our society. Maung Zarni added from the audience: “People with no legal identities are outcasts. They enjoy nothing, absolutely nothing. There is something fundamentally wrong about the world order and the institutional rationales that we have been brainwashed to believe in.”

The driver behind fighting for the good: “When things get tough, the place of strength is inside you. That place is the compassion.”
Maung Zarni

Civil Society is not a monolithic group but broadly diverse in character

The final panel of the Aurora Dialogues 2018 searched for new ideas in times of turmoil. It discussed new forms of collaboration, how to scale up resources, networks and expertise. It touched on due diligence as the basis of effective partnerships and how to adapt to a changing world order at this pace.

Andreas Rickert, CEO and Founder of PHINEO, shed further light on the size and dimension of civil society, the proclaimed third power following the public and private sector. Worldwide there would be more than 10 million non-profit organisations, 600,000 alone in Germany involving 30 million volunteers. He praised its innovative and normative powers, the level of credibility and numerous other strengths. “Yet, the power of civil society is not as strong as it could be,” Rickert stated adding that the high level of fragmentation would lead to unclear structures given the systemic lack of transparency, in particular of small organisations, and the insufficient collaboration with states, the private sector and other civil society organisations. Scaling would be possible through intensified knowledge sharing and transfer, social franchise-systems and expanding operations in general to increase impact. The two latter may profit from private sector experiences. “Organisations have to start thinking from the issue and then do backwards engineering to come up with an intervention. In many cases, organisations start from the budget instead of looking at what is needed most.”

Civil society is highly fragmented and entails enormous innovative and normative powers.

Civil society currently does not live up to its full potential.

Dialogue is crucial. But in many countries, it is not a panacea. 95 per cent of the population needs to wage resistance.

Maung Zarni added his perspective and highlighted the significance of a ‘language of resistance and solidarity’. “Only four per cent of the people worldwide live in places where they don’t need to wage resistance.

So, 95 per cent of the world need to struggle for physical safety, let alone free speech.” He casted some critical light on Europe’s mindset that ‘has become the victim of its own success’. “You have been so spoiled, ideologically and intellectually, to think that things can be dialogued away. There are also limits to dialogue. And that’s why many of us risk our lives.”

The controversial discussion showed the varying perception on the roles of civil society and disclosed that its global diversity is a major character trait. Krishnan stated: “In our country, it’s about the most excluded and their voices. It is survival in itself for millions in the developing countries.” Andreas Rickert added: “One cannot look at it like one single block or voice. Its roles are adapted to the respective region and situation on site.”

Europe needs to reimagine civil society as a disrupter

Goran Buldioski, Co-Director of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, held a critical remark on civil society in the ‘so-called developed world’. “Civil society is frequently seen as being part of a system. A system that is confronted with ‘us’ and ‘them’. It seems to be moving towards being an elite system that gets loaded by an increasing percentage of populism.” He argued that people from the so-called developing countries could often much better advise international decision-makers in developing crisis response mechanisms than people who are not familiar with the local circumstances and challenges can do. He emphasised that it would be the politics of disruption bearing the success. “We are not masters in that because in Europe we’ve been pampered and we have been way too comfortable. We have accepted the system which inevitably is an unjust system. We live in times where we are surprised that even violence in Europe brings bigger dividends than a non-violent action,” he stated referring to the yellow-west protests in December 2018. Europe would have to reimagine civil society as a disrupter – otherwise it would lose relevance and become less effective.

The audience added: “Those who are best organised are on the negative end. Human rights are, including this country, defined as ‘I have a right to hate.’ Those are the ones conquering the cyber space.”

Scaling up the impact of CSOs has many dimensions

Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF’s Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, touched on the various ways of scaling up civil society organisations. “Does it mean to reach more people? Does it mean to intervene earlier, as for many any assistance is coming too late?” He added that improving the quality of assistance, being more accountable to the people serving or providing guarantees that assistance is sustainable might be important.

Distilled ideas and thoughts on scaling up civil society engagement ***Disconnecting funding from conditions***

Geert Cappelaere flagged that funding would become increasingly conditional and is bound to meet other agendas than the needs of people. Instead, it would more and more evolve around meeting political, economic or fiscal agendas. Conditionality brings obstacles and lowers the flexibility to serve the people in need. “For UNICEF alone, this means that only 30 per cent of the funding is flexible funding.”

Civil society is not a monolithic block. Its roles, functions and voices are highly diverse and depend on the respective situation on site.

“Civil society seems to be moving towards being an elite system that gets loaded by an increasing percentage of populism.”

Goran Buldioski

Abandoning conditionality.

Unleashing the power of the affected – the young and entrepreneurs

Cappelaere indicated that one should not forget to involve the people in need and those we perceive as mere 'victims'. They would pose potential partners and multipliers as many of them would inherit entrepreneurial thinking or bring in an enormous degree of dedication and commitment. A further untapped potential would lie in young people. Whereas some of them might be organised in civil society groups, large parts are completely unorganised. "They need to be looked at as agents of change much more than we currently do," Cappelaere explained.

Turning victims
into heroes.

Building on shared values and principles with the private sector

Whenever the private sector is involved in humanitarian assistance, partnerships have to be shared-value partnerships. Starting from the same principles and not being driven by the private sector's own agenda will be vital in order to follow and accomplish genuine goals. Megan Roberts, Deputy Director of Policy Planning at the United Nations Foundation, suggested that the meaning of purpose-driven work among private businesses becomes more and more relevant given the increasing recognition that ethically-driven strategies positively impact revenues. Rising awareness for common values would also be opening the door to different types of partnerships with the UN or other parts of civil society.

Sharing values
and purpose.

Addressing the distrust between CSOs and governments

Kirandeep Kaur proposed that one should be talking about 'strengthening fragile partnerships' rather than 'partnerships in a fragile world'. She said that actors and grassroots activists on the ground often mistrust governments, international organisations and the private sector. It will be important to address the causes of their distrust to initiate sustainable cooperation.

Being transparent
and open.

Tapping into existing multilateral and subnational structures

"We have seen really vocal support for multilateral engagement and for international cooperation coming from quarters you don't always hear from," Megan Roberts analysed. She highlighted new forms of collaboration from a US perspective including subnational governments, mayors, and university cities working together on large-scale issues like climate change and development. "We see a US Conference of Mayors (USCM) calling for full UN-funding. We also see the investor community coming out in strong ways with very specific demands. Tapping into these developments is going to be very important as we look at scaling up."

Using existing
and successful
multilateral
structures.

Involving big data analyses, automation and tech-companies

Katharina Wagner from McKinsey addressed the requirements to collect and analyse big data in order to understand where the impact would be coming from. Additionally, automated processes where manual work used to be in place can play an increasing role in the light of scarce resources of CSOs. Roberts added the potential of tech-driven approaches as a mean to scale up and flagged an initiative announced earlier this year called Famine Action Mechanism (FAM). Developed by the World Bank, the United Nations, the ICRC and other partners, it is considered as the first global mechanism dedicated to supporting upstream interventions in famine prevention, preparedness and early action.

Professionalising
in various
dimensions.

This is done by leveraging the World Bank's analytics and partnering with global tech-firms like Microsoft, Google, Amazon Web Services and tech start-ups. State-of-the-art technologies including artificial intelligence and machine learning will therefore be at the core of the multilateral initiative.

Working result-driven and implement impact-measuring methods

It is important to highlight that a lot of the engagement is currently not about results, because a large share of funding is coming from philanthropic individuals and other donors. There are not enough measuring mechanisms in place to evaluate the impact of these efforts. Even the media would merely focus on reporting on the amount of money granted, Vardanyan said, but not on the potential impact it may have. Another significant issue related to measurement is that the social impact of initiatives comes with a 25-year time gap. Additionally, most of the financial instruments used for funding are lasting fewer years. This would be leading to a big gap, Vardanyan stated.

Focusing on results and impact-measuring.

Creating in-depth understanding of the individual motivation behind giving

Ruben Vardanyan spoke about the results of a yet unpublished study that investigated the reasons for donors to grant money and emphasised that this knowledge would be decisive in order to understand its scaling potential. Some of the key findings were: the emotional reaction and personal affectedness of givers, the sentiment of belonging as being a 'member of the club', the sentiment of feeling guilty' and to 'buying forgiveness', the compulsion to be publicly recognised, the goal to profit from a tax deal, religious reasons or the strategic relevance in the overall framework.

Adopt life-long learning and understand your niche.

Linking charity inseparably to each member of society

Roland Schatz brought in another idea for scaling up resources. He referred to an Indian law which obliges companies to give two per cent of their profits to charity and sustainability. He reminded that some countries in Eastern Europe like Slovakia and Romania have applied similar laws and partially extended it to the civil sector where each person has to donate two per cent of the amount of their tax declaration to a charity organisation. "Imagine this power. And now, all we have to do is connecting the dots," Schatz said.

Unleash the power of many.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The world is in turmoil. Politics not only witnesses a trend towards unilateralism, there is also an increasing lack of trust among national governments. Furthermore, the sovereignty of states takes precedence over people and human rights. Amidst this perceived disintegration, another force has unobtrusively taken over responsibility where political leaders have failed to react: the civil society. In numerous cases it has exceeded the efforts of the world's alleged political rulers. As the heroes of our times, these actors create hope and dignity in times of darkness. They provide help in severe humanitarian crises, they risk their own lives and relentlessly give those a voice who have suffered severe human rights violations.

The Aurora Dialogues 2018 unfolded some of the most prevailing challenges and opportunities related to civil society engagement. It discussed the need to adapt to a changing world and to professionalise themselves further. It also shed initial light on the potential of multifaceted ways of collaboration that includes the private, business and political sector. Civil society can fill a void left by others. And yet, the discussions revealed: there is no black or white, but many shades of grey when it comes to civil society engagement. Civil society is not a monolithic group, but rather entails diverse functions and goals aligned to the specific needs on site.

The way forward for all stakeholders involved will be to accept the new circumstances of humanitarianism under pressure. They must accept the complexity of global issues and that an isolated model of state sovereignty is outdated. It requires an overhaul. At the same time, it is important to remain optimistic and pursue a new, decisive course that includes restoring multilateral approaches as the one and only mean to tackle global challenges and upcoming crises. Civil society has already done important advancements in this area. Its impact, however, does not relieve governments from their own responsibilities. No genocide or armed conflict involving severe human rights violations can be solved by means of civil society alone. The political will has to be increased and decision making aligned to the moral high ground Europe is frequently lifting itself up to. If Europe does not act, it risks being further marginalised and will lose political and economic relevance, credibility, and integrity.

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