UN Conference on Humanitarian Assistance for Crisis Collaboration

Background Brief: CENEX 2013

Organizations participating:

World Health Organization (WHO)
International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
Doctors Without Borders (MSF)

RECENT HISTORY

Since the end of the Cold War, the role of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has expanded dramatically. While successful NGOs of the previous era were narrowly tailored on specific issues such as advocating the rights of prisoners and condemning the use of torture, present-day organizations help to supplement state resources, providing much needed capacity for responding to natural disasters and medical emergencies. Such incidents have commonly resulted in massive movements of people, with state governments often lacking effective capacity to deal with refugee flows while maintaining security commitments.

The UN has called for a special conference with concern about an unfolding crisis. The invited groups are split along two lines: refugee assistance and medical expertise. The UNHCR, the IOM, and the IRC will be collaborating specifically on refugee assistance and coordination, while the IFRC, MSF, and the WHO will be addressing medical concerns. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has appointed a Special Representative to preside over the summit, to assist in forging an agreed framework for a response to the crisis. Combined efforts of the IGOs and NGOs involved has already provided housing and services to 1.1 million refugees and IDPs in the region. Significant funds and resources have already been allocated to deal with pre-existing conditions in the region, and the outbreak of a crisis nearby could result in a diversion of allocated funds and services, with possible political implications on stability in the region.

Focused objectives for each group:
- What is our current capacity
- What is the need
- What is the cost
- How do we get access
World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization (often referred to as the WHO) is the public health arm and epidemiological information service for the United Nations. With its creation in 1948, it focused on combatting malaria, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases, while trying to improve maternal and child health around the globe. Its efforts around the globe also helped to eliminate smallpox, which it then declared eradicated in 1980. It identifies its six main goals as helping to provide leadership and shape the agendas for health partnerships and research, setting norms, articulating ethical policies, providing technical support and capacity, while also monitoring health situations and trends around the globe.

The WHO has access to national medical laboratories around the world, and has a regular working relationship with MSF and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), maintaining their own independent monitoring systems. Governments around the world often consult with the WHO regarding concerns of possible contagion outbreaks, and how to respond effectively. However, WHO recommendations often run into friction from state security concerns. They help to produce vaccines in preparation for various possible epidemics, including various strains of influenza, in collaboration with the CDC with 60% being physically produced in India.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is an international humanitarian movement with over 97 million members. It proclaims to provide assistance without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. The movement is made up three components: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The ICRC takes the lead of operation in areas where there is an international or internal armed conflict. The IFRC is the world’s largest humanitarian organization and leads on emergency responses of an international nature not involving armed conflict. The National chapters help to address concerns specific to their designated country.

The IFRC has maintained a significant presence in Georgia through its national chapter the Georgian Red Cross Society, who has taken the lead in coordinating humanitarian for the region with IFRC partners in Turkey, Germany, and the United States. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has operated directly in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions since 1992, linking directly with the IFRC office in Moscow. While the UN is proclaimed to have an internationally approved mandate, the IFRC/ICRC is viewed more favorably by residents of the region, and allowed freedom of movement between Russia and all Georgian areas.

The ICRC is in charge of efforts to provide relief to various parts of Syria, as the reigning Syrian Islamic Front (SIF) continues to struggle to assert control over the entirety of internationally recognized Syrian territory. The ICRC maintains a presence in Damascus and Deir ez Zor, with the IFRC & Turkish Red Crescent Society operating 13 refugee camps along the border. While numbers have decreased since the height of violence in 2012, the number of refugees from Syria stands around 10,000, many of which are Kurds fleeing SIF oppression.
The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people.

The UNHCR has a strong on-the-ground presence in Georgia, assisting with pre-existing concerns related to refugees, stateless persons, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region because of tensions between ethnic groups and nationals from Russia, Georgia, and the enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. UNHCR is currently operating in respect to a new refugee law adopted in 2011 in Georgia. While UNHCR in Russia and Georgia have close relations, exchange between the two is often limited by political tensions over access to Abkhazia.

The UNHCR also operates throughout Syria helping to alleviate the large number of IDPs and refugees in need of services. In 2001, the UNHCR and the IRC signed an framework agreement for the "Protection Surge Capacity Project" to respond to a sudden mass migration of people due to a crisis, and provide immediate in-the-field components where needed. However, the UNHCR will need to find appropriate funding for any new field response, and will be heavily reliant on state abilities to move supplies quickly.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Established in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. With 149 member states, a further 12 states holding observer status and offices in over 100 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants. IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.

IOM operations in Georgia have been scaled down since 2008, are mostly limited to government and NGO consulting, while continuing to participate in joint-projects to address demining concerns in Abkhazia. The IOM is often called upon by for migration management expertise by organizations like the ICRC and UNHCR. IOM's primary objective in Turkey is to support the Turkish Government's efforts to establish an effective, human rights oriented approach to Turkey's regional migration challenges in order to combat irregular migration and human trafficking in human beings. These challenges call for an integrated approach to migration management that requires coordination of national efforts, cooperation with regional partners, and joint efforts with countries of origin and transit. IOM Turkey operates in areas of emergency refugee assistance, assisted voluntary return and almost every major aspect of migration management.
IOM currently runs multiple refugee camps in Syria but its main operations remain in Turkey, where it manages operations of refugee camps and IDP settlements, with medical services often supplemented by the Turkish Red Crescent Society. Combined with UNHCR, the IOM is currently accommodating over 400,000 Syrian refugees, with 200,000 in Turkey. IOM’s primary funder is the United States.

International Rescue Committee (IRC)

The IRC has a very effective emergency response, utilizing its capacity to respond to crises within 72 hours. The IRC has committed itself to emergency preparedness—giving field teams, local partners and communities the training and resources needed to address immediate needs. The IRC pre-positions equipment and supplies in key transport hubs so that the materials can be dispatched anywhere in the world on short notice, including a kit with a wide range of inventory necessary for the start-up of an emergency program in a remote location.

The IRC also maintains a roster of experienced IRC employees around the world and qualified external personnel who are pre-interviewed and are available on short-notice for emergency deployment. As 2001, the IRC and the UNHCR have signed a framework agreement through the Surge Protection Project to help provide further capacity in crises that experience sudden surges in refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Surge Project was launched in 2001 to create a roster of highly qualified junior-level protection professionals who can be efficiently deployed to UNHCR field offices to meet short to medium-term protection needs in non-emergency settings. Recruited staff are IRC employees but are seconded to UNHCR and report solely to UNHCR staff. They receive the status of “expert on mission” to the United Nations for the duration of their mission.

In western Iraq, the IRC is also working with Syrian refugees at the Domiz and al-Qu'am camps, with a heavy Kurdish demographic and possible links to separatist groups. IRC facilities are currently accommodating over 150,000 predominantly Syrian refugees, with a successful repatriation program that is helping to alleviate tight resources to be allocated for other projects. They also are engaged with in Russia’s northern Caucasus area, accommodating IDPs in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF)

Doctors Without Borders (aka Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF) is an international medical humanitarian organization created by doctors and journalists in France in 1971. The organization operates independently, free of political, military, or religious affiliation. MSF is often one of the first humanitarian organizations to arrive on site at a crisis, providing medical services as needed to fill gaps in existing services and avoid unnecessary replications. The organization receives 90% of its funding from private and non-governmental sources, with total funding numbering roughly $1.1 billion. The organization currently has an in-the-field presence in Georgia, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. While the organization often shares the same views as the IFRC and WHO, it generally has a freer hand to provide medical resources due to its independent funding. MSF currently is funding and helping to run a hospital in Sokhumi, as part of a previously established de-mining effort in the Abkhazia region. MSF maintain independent monitoring systems in Turkey, Georgia, Russia, and limited capacity in Syria.