



Geneva Platform for the Work of Goodness A Common Relief Space

Concept Note
February 2017

1. Rationale

Non-interaction and lack of cooperation between charities and humanitarian agencies from different backgrounds and worldviews reinforces mutual suspicion, preventing the common effort that would serve the interests of the beneficiaries of humanitarian work – the vulnerable members of diverse societies. Among the aspects of suspicion is the negative perception of some parties towards faith-based action that is viewed as a vehicle of proselytizing, whether openly or not, or a disregard for fundamental humanitarian principles. There is also the fear that faith-based financing could be used to support violent groups, a suspicion that has led to indiscriminate policies building obstacles on the way of bona fide charitable work, freezing the assets of charities and impeding their work, with negative repercussions on humanitarian action and communities in need as well as on cooperation between charities of different backgrounds.

In his Report for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), the UN Secretary-General called for setting up a “system that moves beyond the comfort of traditional silos, able to work across mandates, sectors and institutional boundaries, and with a greater diversity of partners, towards shared results”¹ for the benefit of people affected by crises. One of the silos that needs to be transcended is related to the divide between faith-based and non-faith-based humanitarian action. Part of the work of the WHS focused on the need to engage in partnership with faith-based NGOs. During the WHS, a Special Session on Religious Engagement acknowledged that “many religious institutions and faith-based NGOs have a unique comparative advantage in humanitarian contexts: they have an established relationship of trust and familiarity with most local communities in which they are embedded. Due to their presence before a crisis they are first responders and key providers of assistance and protection during crises, and they will stay after international organizations leave.”²

The Geneva Platform for the Work of Goodness (GPWG) aims at building on the outcomes of the WHS in order to strengthen cooperation, build partnerships, develop and fund joint projects in the field of humanitarian and charitable action among humanitarian organizations of different backgrounds and worldviews, sharing a common ground of values and the similar goal of serving the needy, to achieve real synergy which would maximize the sum of their efforts and capacities.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the GPWG are to:

- (1) engage cooperation through conflict transformation methodology and diapraxis;
- (2) develop, launch, follow up and support joint initiatives;
- (3) share experience gained by the platform in order to promote further cooperation;

- (4) liaise with international humanitarian agencies;
- (5) contribute to international humanitarian events;
- (6) map NGOs interested in cooperation and partnership;
- (7) build the capacity of humanitarian actors regarding cooperation and partnership.

3. Approach and methodology

The GPWG is principle-based and practice-oriented.

The work of the GPWG is governed by the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, adopted globally. The GPWG members and partners adhere to the core humanitarian principles and commit to their application in the field, and endorse at least one of the available charters and codes of conduct, such as the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief³, the Charter of the Work of Goodness⁴, and the Charter for Faith-based Humanitarian Action⁵.

The GPWG is envisaged as a “Common Relief Space” for humanitarian organisations and charities from different backgrounds and worldviews, for inter-knowledge and common practice.

The most effective way to allay the mutual fears and suspicion that exist and to overcome the lack of cooperation is to build confidence through joint action in the field (diapaxis). In fact, the various experiences in the past couple of decades showed that talking and agreeing on abstract principles, alone, does not create trust nor lead to cooperation.

The entry point to cooperation is through conflict transformation methodology – joint analysis, conflict sensitivity, setting red lines. This has the advantage to replace abstract principles with concrete red lines.

2

4. Organisation and funding

The GPWG has the legal form of an Association under Swiss civil law.

The Secretariat of the GPWG is hosted by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva and have the following functions:

- (1) bringing in the specific methodology for effective cooperation;
- (2) organizing meetings, including drafting the agenda;
- (3) consulting members and compiling feedback on issues requiring input in-between meetings;
- (4) maintaining a centralized database of contacts;
- (5) drafting background and discussion documents, and elaborating project proposals;
- (6) developing and managing an online platform for the GPWG;
- (7) organizing trainings and workshops;
- (8) supporting GPWG members in turning ideas for initiatives into project proposals;
- (9) managing GPWG finances and ensuring regular reporting to donors;
- (10) fulfilling the administrative requirements towards the Swiss authorities.

Members and partners of the GPWG uphold the core humanitarian principles and engage in diapaxis.

Institutional members of the GPWG are humanitarian organisations and charities, faith- and non-faith-based, and (inter)governmental donor agencies, who identify with the aim and methodology of the platform and who commit to co-fund the GPWG proportionally to their budget.

Individual members of the GPWG are academics and practitioners in the field of humanitarian and charitable action.

Partners of the GPWG are humanitarian organisations and charities, faith- and non-faith-based, who wish to benefit from the GPWG's methodology and experience and share their own experience.

Members of the GPWG meet at least once per year. Ad hoc additional meetings can occur if necessary to coordinate positions and take decisions on initiatives and questions addressed to the GPWG. The agenda for the meetings is decided in advance in coordination with all members. The agenda and related meeting documents are drafted and circulated in advance by the secretariat, along with summary reports of decisions taken during the meetings. These are sent to all members for approval and amendments if necessary. Virtual meetings can be organized by the secretariat upon needs and request.

Decisions are taken during the meeting, by common agreement by all GPWG members. This includes anything that is in line with the GPWG's objectives and to be implemented in the name of the Platform, or any other initiative that will be supported by the GPWG but implemented by others. It also includes specific decisions on new members, or deciding on changes in the Platform's working modalities.

The core funding of the GPWG is guaranteed by contributions of its members. It is possible for the GPWG to accept unconditioned financial support from other sources.

5. Budget

The Secretariat of the GPWG will function during the first three years with a chief of secretariat, a project officer and an administrative officer.

The annual budget of the GPWG, including running costs, human resources of the Secretariat, regular meetings and funding of joint projects, is estimated at CHF 700'000. The members of the GPWG commit to ensure the budget for three years before setting up the Secretariat.

References

¹ One humanity: shared responsibility. Report of the Secretary General for the World Humanitarian Summit. 2 February 2016. Link: <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view>

² Special session religious engagement. Relates to core responsibility #3 Leave no one behind.

Link: <http://worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/default/files/keydocuments/SS11%20Religious%20Engagement.pdf>

³ The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, consists of ten principles, developed and agreed upon by eight of the world's largest disaster response agencies in the summer of 1994. Link: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/>

⁴ The Charter of the Work of Goodness consists of seven principal and twenty-one subsidiary principles for the work of goodness. They were presented by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva at the Second Congress of the Gulf Charities, held in Doha in 21-22 February 2006. The Charter of the Work of Goodness is endorsed by the World Association of Humanitarian Organisations.

Link: <http://cordoue.ch/human-security/humanitarian-work/itemlist/category/136-islamic-charter-of-the-work-of-goodness>

⁵ The Charter for Faith-based Humanitarian Action was among the initiatives launched in May 2016, by the Sovereign Order of Malta, during the special session of the WHS on religious engagement, and signed by faith-based organisations and religious leaders, representing world religions and various geographical regions.

Link: <https://www.orderofmalta.int/charter-for-faith-based-humanitarian-action-order-of-malta-whs-2016/>