



Conference Report

Setting an Example:

Turkey's Humanitarian Role

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This is a report of a closed session titled 'Setting an Example: Turkey's Humanitarian Role', held as part of the TRT World Forum 2017. Being an off the record session, it allowed speakers and participants to freely use the information received. However, neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers, nor that of any other participant, was to be revealed. The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of participants and speakers present at the TRT World Forum 2017, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.

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Summary

This session mainly discussed Turkey's current position as a leading humanitarian actor in the international arena. Turkey, as a rising power, has been playing a crucial role in the humanitarian field in the last 15 years, presenting new strategies for humanitarian activism around the world. In 2017 the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report ranked Turkey as the world's second largest humanitarian donor after the U.S. and the world's most generous nation compared to its gross national income. As such, this session discussed how Turkey has reached this position and the potential challenges it faces. The main point made in the discussion was that although Turkey has shouldered a significant part of the financial burden in relation to the refugee crisis, the international community, particularly the EU, has not been involved in burden sharing. One of the main speakers listed the Turkish humanitarian aid in numbers. According to the figures, Turkey has spent 25 to 30 billion USD for Syrian refugees so far, while the EU pledged to pay Turkey 3.4 billion USD as part of the refugee deal reached in 2016. The aid would be used for projects that would increase the quality of life of the refugees living in Turkey. Yet, there has been little to no progress on provisions in the agreement since money under the deal has been delivered at a slow pace, and only partially. Therefore, the EU has

abstained from complying with the refugee deal and Western countries are no different towards most of the humanitarian crises around the world. As mentioned by another speaker who had experience in the field, this attitude can be seen in the latest Myanmar tragedy. Disregarded by many developed countries, Turkey was first to extend its helping hand to the region and its people, once again highlighting the country's prominence in humanitarian aid.

The analysis of the Turkish model demonstrated several distinct features of Turkey's aid campaigns. Firstly, Turkey's approach is a human-centred one and its actions are not based on any calculation of political interest but the stability of the region and wellbeing of the people. Hence, Turkey's priority is the survival of the people facing humanitarian crises. Secondly, Turkey's understanding of humanitarian diplomacy places human beings at the centre of diplomacy, regardless of their nationality, religion or ethnicity. Thirdly, the Turkish model provides a comprehensive and inclusive framework within which both state and non-state agencies like NGOs, charities, businesses and civil society organisations take an active part in an organised manner. Finally, the success of the Turkish model comes from the fact that it does not impose politics on people and does not interfere in countries' decision-making processes, rather focuses on supporting people's lives.

Introduction

Turkey's efforts in international humanitarian aid have long been applauded by actors operating in the field of aid. In the closed session, 'Setting an Example: Turkey's Humanitarian Role'; diplomats, human rights activists, representatives from the state and civil-society aid organisations came together with participants from international aid networks and NGOs to discuss the distinctiveness of Turkey's model. Participants made presentations on regions where

Turkey has been traditionally active and where it has recently improved its aid operation. It was put forward that Turkey has not been discriminating between the suffering of people on the basis of their race, ethnicity and gender. Later, the relations between Turkey's state and civil society humanitarian aid organisations were juxtaposed for comparison with other states' models. In the closing remarks, how the current Turkish model could be improved was discussed in detail.

Human Centred Approach

Most of the world's crises now are so intricate that unilateral solutions prove inefficient in addressing them. From weapons of mass destruction to environmental problems, poverty to inequality in distribution of wealth and international terrorism to refugee crises; the world's problems require global and multilateral solutions. For this, the concept of humanitarian diplomacy is essential. Humanitarian diplomacy is the use of diplomatic tools to influence decision makers to ensure adherence to fundamental principles. In other words, it aims at preventing occasions which require humanitarian aid rather than intervening after the eruption of the crisis to tend the wounds. Turkey is considered a world leader in its human centred approach and humanitarian diplomacy. Its diplomatic effort to convince international actors for establishment of protected zones for refugees in Syria is an example of this.

Moreover, as one participant held, Turkey's human centred approach differs significantly from other aid campaigns on the ground that it does not seek improving economic or political interests through the aid efforts. Therefore, it is not a calculated action but an initiative that concerns only with the relief of the humanitarian sufferings. In this regard, Turkish model does not interfere into countries' domestic decision-making processes and only focuses on supporting people's lives. Additionally, Turkey's aid concerns do not only cover its immediate neighbours or ethnic and religious hinterland. To this day, Turkey has conducted aid operations in over 160 countries without a consideration of race, religion or gender. Thanks to its increasing capacity and tools, the country

has been able to carry out humanitarian diplomacy. And these activities, has turned Turkey into one of the leading actors of the global humanitarian system. Especially, its role of being the number one patron of the Syrian refugees and thereby, being the host of the largest number of refugees have made Turkey a moral authority in humanitarian issues.

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Humanitarian Crises and Turkey

Turkey has traditionally been a country putting a lot of effort in humanitarian aid activities and helping regions/peoples in crisis. Its assistance is provided on the basis of reaching people who suffer from humanitarian catastrophes like natural disasters, war, conflict and poverty regardless of ethnic, cultural, national or religious differences. Turkey's humanitarian activities have intensified in the last decades giving a leading role in the humanitarian field in the world. Moreover, its efforts have expanded across countries and diversified in terms of types of activities. In this sense, a recent report ranked Turkey as the world's second largest humanitarian donor after the U.S. and the world's most generous nation compared to its gross national income after spending around \$6 billion on humanitarian aid in 2016.

Humanitarian aspects of the war in Syria constitute the central component of Turkey's assistance as Turkey bears the brunt of the burden in the refugee crisis and hosts more than 3 million Syrian refugees. Both within Turkey and Syria, many Turkish aid agencies including state and civil society organisations, conduct diversified humanitarian operations to relieve the sufferings of Syrian people. In this line, Turkey was the first country to enter city of Aleppo, Syria to assist the evacuation of people after days-long siege in 2016. But its activities are not limited to Syria. Africa comes as another area where the aid efforts of Turkey have gained remarkable strength. For instance, the number of TIKA (Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency) offices operating across the African continent has reached to 21 starting from the scratch in 15 years. In this line, Turkey has increased the number of diplomatic representation offices in African countries from 12 Turkish embassies in 2009 to 39 as of 2017. The diplomatic presence contributes to the coordination of the aid assistance programs in the countries. Turkey's recent humanitarian activities cover various countries and regions that have different nationality, ethnic and religious features. For instance, Turkey conducted aid operations after the devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Chile in 2010 and in Japan in 2011. Moreover, Turkey sent humanitarian agencies to help people suffering from typhoon and floods in Philippines in 2013 and Balkan countries. Turkey has also taken part in relief efforts in many conflict-

ridden areas such as Iraq, Yemen and Libya in order to diminish the negative effects of the clashes. And, very recently, Turkey sent urgently needed supplies to people in Mexico after the country was hit by a demolishing earthquake.

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State and Civil Society Partnership in Humanitarian Aid

For a long time, Turkey has enjoyed a normative power thanks to its activity in international humanitarian aid and efficiency of its methods. The country conducts numerous aid operations through its bilateral relations with the developing world as well as taking part in the efforts of international organisations. In addition to the state initiatives in aid, there is a vibrant civil society working in general aid and single-task aid issues. Turkey's position as the most generous state is no surprise when history and culture of humanitarian aid is taken into consideration. It is true that the sector was dormant after the world wars but it has been revived after 1980s. Especially after the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, where both the state and civil society provided help to war-stricken regions, there has been an increasing activity in terms of amount of help and coordination. Yet, the sad memories of Marmara Earthquake have led to a spirit of humanitarian aid which brought the sector to its current state. As to institutionalisation of efforts, changes in the Law of Associations in 2004 is a significant milestone which boosted the number of aid organisations, their numbers of personnel and operation capacity.

It is possible to confidently claim that state aid agencies and civil-society aid actors in Turkey have been collaborating more each passing year. The relations are mature in contrast to many other countries yet, there is always room for improvement. For their international operations carried out in hard political environments, the state has been a source of support for civil-society aid actors. The ministry of foreign affairs of Turkey has been covering them with diplomatic support where needed. Furthermore, more experienced state organisations such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) share their field experiences with civil society organisations and serve as facilitators where needed.

Many participants raised concern over the fact that although the humanitarian aid is alive and booming in Turkey, what is urgent is a mechanism to increase the level of cooperation between civil society organisations

operating in the humanitarian sector. In order to coordinate and pool the efforts of several humanitarian aid organisations, which mostly work independently and prevent the loss of professional experience over time, a framework organisation for humanitarian aid organisations would be helpful. Such an organisation would be beneficial in terms of reducing fix costs of conducting international aid operations and sharing the know-how of more experienced aid institutions with newcomers to the field. Furthermore, such a framework organisation would ensure the stability of the operations and development of coherent strategies on the ground while allowing faster action in dire circumstances. Additionally, it would lead to the advancement of some of the issues related to improvement of aid operations such as domestic and international lobbying and education of the necessary personnel in the sector.

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Global Perspectives of Humanitarian Aid

Lack of cooperation and collaboration among world countries for settling humanitarian issues is a significant challenge. Shortage of burden-sharing mechanisms cause some countries to shoulder the most burden on their own while others remain indifferent on the side-line. Most international actors' lack of effort in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria, for instance, aggravate the situation further for the people who actually experience sufferings on the ground as well as the negative implications and immeasurable consequences on the regional countries. For instance; Turkey, as being one of the countries putting enormous effort to tackle this humanitarian crisis, has spent more than thirty billion dollars for the Syrian refugees. However, the EU has acted slowly to share the burden of the refugee crisis. In this sense, the EU has failed to fully comply with the EU and Turkey refugee deal of 2016, which required the EU to send 3.4 billion dollars to Turkey for the use of refugees. The EU has not entirely kept its promise so far. One of the participants of the session claimed that while the EU represents itself as the moral authority over humanitarian issues and human rights, the union shows reluctance and indifference to most tragic issues, as in the case of refugee crisis. Additionally, the EU's attitude towards refugees in the member countries and overall policies regarding the refugee problem reveals ineffectiveness and aloofness of their approaches. Dreadful camp conditions, treatment of refugees in detention centres and lack of concern for missing refugee children are some of the imperfect implementations of the EU's refugee policy. In another instance; in Myanmar, the international community preferred to remain silent and kept a blind eye to the persecution of Rohingya people for a long while. This is one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes and mass migrations in the continent. Turkish state agencies and civil society organisations were the first to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya people.

Another significant issue related to the world's humanitarian approach is the problem of high costs emerging out of logistic and operational spending

during aid efforts. Extreme flight prices, exorbitant staff expenses and other logistics-related costs constitute the better part of the budget allocated for the humanitarian assistance. Such inefficiency decreases the effective use of the budget while causing money collected for the people in need to be wasted. As one of the participant maintained, the level of operational costs of UN reaches to 60 percent of the total collected grant. In this sense, Turkey stands as a good example of how a good humanitarian assistance operation can be handled with low expenditures. By avoiding from holding luxury and fancy fund drive and aid campaigns and by minimising the costs of stuff and transportation through partnering with the local organisations, Turkey manages to keep logistic costs of aid operations at around 5 percent of the budget. This means that other countries or agencies can adopt more efficient methods in order to enhance their capacity. Turkish approach, with its distinguishing features, has attracted other world countries and as one of the participant held, Colombia sent a high delegation to Turkey to observe the Turkish model over how to manage high number of refugees.

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Future of Humanitarian Aid

Turkey with its vast experience in humanitarian assistance, has been a staunch supporter of the international efforts to overcome the difficulties in the operation of aid institutions. One relatively recent example of this is the World Humanitarian Summit, which was hosted by Turkey in May 2016. In the summit, strategies for surmounting the problems facing the international aid system were discussed by the leading figures in the field of humanitarian aid under the leadership of the UN.

As a result of the discussion in the session, it was a united issue that in order to fix the inherent problems of the humanitarian aid and make them more efficient in the future, the first measure should be the education of the next generation of humanitarian aid. Lack of personnel who have the necessary education and experience in operations, logistics, and communication, constitutes a threat to the future of the sector. Steps should be taken to develop professional human resources in these areas. Another area that requires immediate attention is the development of legal frameworks to increase aid organisations' capacity and freedom of movement. In parallel to the increased capacity, there is a dire need of increased oversight of donation, a more transparent system which can be scrutinised from end to end and mechanisms of accountability to be able to hold relevant officials responsible in cases of misconduct.

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Conclusion

The session provided better insights into how a more efficient and functioning humanitarian aid model can be achieved, and which aspects of the current Turkish model can be improved and transformed into other countries and areas. In this regard, the participants agreed that a Turkish approach to the humanitarian assistance differs essentially from other methods by putting greater emphasis on the human-centred approach. By accelerating the humanitarian diplomacy in cases of conflicts and wars, Turkey pioneers the aid efforts in many humanitarian crises. Moreover, the

coordination and collaboration between civil society and state agencies should be further improved and strengthened in order to act faster, reduce fix costs and share the experience of others. Additionally, cooperation between countries should be increased since some countries are incommensurably inundated by the costs and burdens of the humanitarian crises. Particularly, wealthier countries should be more actively concerned and engaged in humanitarian crises outside their territories.

