

SEUL LE DISCOURS PRONONCE FAIT FOI

Speech delivered by Mrs Paulette Lenert, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Action at the event ***“Restoring dignity, sustaining hope: how much can a humanitarian organisation do?” Two years into the Rohingya refugee crisis.***

12 November 2019

Dear Mrs Khan,
Dear Mr Depoorter,
Dear Mr Elvinger,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

I am honoured to take the floor today in order to join crucial efforts in maintaining awareness on the Rohingya refugee crisis. My thanks go to the host and organizer of this event - Banque de Luxembourg and Friendship NGO - for this timely initiative.

In June this year, during my visit to Cox’s Bazar, I had the opportunity to personally witness the extent of the Rohingya refugee crisis and the local and international humanitarian response it generated.

The short video clip we just watched shows two sides of the crisis.

Firstly, it shows that two years into this humanitarian response, the situation in Cox’s Bazar has gradually begun to stabilize. Basic assistance has been provided, living conditions in the camps have improved and disaster risk mitigation measures have been largely implemented. It also shows the remarkable resilience of human beings.

In this respect, I am extremely grateful to UN agencies and NGOs who play a vital part in this multi-faceted response, thanks also to humanitarian funding provided by the Luxembourg government.

Secondly however, and this brings me to the theme of today’s evening, despite this obvious progress, what the clip also shows is that the Rohingya remain in an extremely precarious situation. The root causes of their forced displacement have not been addressed and their future remains uncertain. Rohingya refugees have access to basic services, such as food and health care, but they are still highly vulnerable, living in challenging circumstances, exposed to the monsoon elements and dependent on aid. Moreover, uncertainty about their future weighs heavily. In my conversation with Rohingya community leaders, I was heartened to be repeatedly questioned on their future and as to when they could return “home”. Questions to which I was – sadly - unable to provide meaningful answers.

So, to pick up tonight's theme: what or how much can humanitarians do?

When reflecting on the refugee crises in the 1990s, notably in the Balkans and in Rwanda, a former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Mrs Sadako Ogato famously stated “ *There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems*” because, as we all know, in many emergencies humanitarian relief in itself is not enough when crises originate in political factors. While I share the basic wisdom of this analysis, and while humanitarian action in itself cannot be in itself the solution to many crises, **I am nonetheless deeply convinced that humanitarian action can make a difference.**

In most of today's crises, humanitarian action is a fundamental component of an overall multilateral response and an enabler as well as a fundamental pre-condition for subsequent solutions.

I therefore am proud to say that the Luxembourg Government takes its commitment to global humanitarian responsibility seriously by funding multilateral impartial humanitarian action and by strengthening, wherever possible, local actors.

Luxembourg's humanitarian strategy is founded on the principle of a needs-based approach. It is our strong conviction that humanitarian assistance should reach all people affected by crisis - regardless of their political, religious and ethnic affiliation or their geographic location.

A sad fact of today's humanitarian crisis, especially those resulting from man-made as opposed to natural disaster, is their length and **protracted nature**. According to UN research, humanitarian crises involving forced displacement of populations fleeing conflict, persecution or famine, tend to last on average 17 years.

It is clear that in the light of those challenges a sole focus on “live-saving action” and measures “to alleviate immediate suffering” – the traditional tenets of humanitarian aid - is not enough.

When looking at today's protracted crisis – be it the Rohingya refugee crisis, crises in the Great Lake's region or around Lake Chad or the Syria context, there are fortunately a few take-aways and I am encouraged to see that the humanitarian eco-system has been able in the past 5 years to incorporate those sad “lessons learned”.

I wish to highlight three of them in particular.

Firstly, providing basic needs such as food, shelter, hygiene and medical assistance remain of course crucial at the onset of an emergency but there is an important realisation that the **needs of affected persons go beyond the purely physical needs**. People's needs are also of a spiritual nature and a fundamental part of humanity and maintaining people's dignity is to involve them as much as possible and give them a voice. In the same vein, there is a growing awareness when it comes to invisible traumas such as mental health issues and post-traumatic stress. Strengthened protection also means incorporating strong “prevention of gender-based violence (GBV)” measures.

As a donor, these measures are very important for Luxembourg and will continue to receive due attention in our humanitarian strategy. All in all, I believe that the humanitarian eco-system now has better understanding when it comes to the necessity of providing a more rounded response, anchored in humanity, tailored to individual needs and respecting individual dignity.

Secondly, host countries of large refugee populations – which oftentimes themselves are struggling with poverty and under-development – bear the brunt of the economic burdensharing. It is therefore of utmost importance to **include economically vulnerable groups in local host communities** in Africa and Asia in the response provided by humanitarian organisations.

Thirdly, the international community is moving forward in identifying more lasting and sustainable frameworks, through multi-stake holder partnerships involving governments and development actors such as the World Bank. Provided that humanitarian principles are preserved, the so-called **“humanitarian-development nexus”** approach can provide answers to some of the challenges we are facing, easing the transition from short-term to more long-term solutions. Moreover, humanitarian **innovation** and advances in **digital and data solutions** can also help us identify new solutions or help scaling up.

All these efforts are substantial and ongoing. It is the responsibility of the international community not to spare any effort in finding a lasting (political) solution to the Rohingya crisis. We have to ensure that the coming generation does not inherit this crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I outlined earlier, in today’s protracted crises, humanitarian assistance goes well beyond measures to alleviate the most immediate suffering.

In the Rohingya crisis as well as for other humanitarian crisis, Luxembourg will maintain a significant level of support and will continue to support humanitarian efforts.

In doing so, I would like to recall the most fundamental of the humanitarian principles – humanity – and the fact that any humanitarian response needs to put people at the centre.

I thank you for your attention.