

EU-Switzerland co-chairs

High-Level Meeting 9 February 2021 via WebEx Co-chairs' summary

The GHD co-chairs, European Union/DG ECHO and Switzerland, hosted the **fifth High-Level Meeting (HLM) under their co-chairmanship**. The meeting, held in virtual format on 9 February 2021, was dedicated to the theme **“The humanitarian-development-peace nexus in times of COVID-19: exploring new challenges, future trends and donors’ role”**. The HLM was held in the framework of the **GHD priority on key challenges to principled humanitarian action**, taking into account the impact of COVID-19, as well as building upon previous GHD meetings on the UN Development System (UNDS) reform priority theme with a field focus. The meeting was co-chaired by **Paraskevi Michou**, Director-General, European Commission’s Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), and **Ambassador Manuel Bessler**, Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid.

Keynote speakers were **Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (OCHA)** and **Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**. They attended in their capacity as **co-chairs of the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration (JSC)**.

DG Paraskevi Michou recalled that the collective response to the immediate and longer-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis is a litmus test for the reformed United Nations (acting “as one”), especially in view to step up the operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and enhance resilience at country level, including through joint programming and better synergies between financing streams. This should take into account our respective mandates, comparative advantages, the independence of humanitarian leadership, respect for humanitarian principles and shared conflict analysis. She referred to the latest UN General Assembly Resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of the UN Development System, which includes reinforced language on the triple nexus. She expressed donors’ attention to ensuring that UN Resident Coordinators, especially those who also serve as Humanitarian Coordinators, are well equipped to support local Governments. She presented the recent joint ‘triple nexus letter’ (ECHO, INTPA, EEAS) as a symbol of the EU’s commitment.

Ambassador Manuel Bessler thanked members for once again reconvening in a virtual format, and highlighted the previous work conducted under the topic of UNDS reform in the GHD, notably last year’s HLM in July with the participation of ASG Piper. Focusing on the Nexus also emphasizes that the pandemic has shown us once again that holistic approaches are needed to address crises and shocks, especially when a situation such as the pandemic comes on top of existing dire circumstances, as has been the case last year in many humanitarian contexts. He also mentioned that this raises the question of how we can collectively deliver with even greater anticipation, responsiveness and effectiveness.

USG/ERC Mark Lowcock mentioned the additional 100 million people having fallen into poverty due to COVID-19 and the “lamentable” support to poor countries so far. He declared that IFIs should provide more generous conditions, notably when it comes to debt relief. USG/ERC Lowcock promoted the UN joined-up approach to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance, though currently overwhelmed by the COVID-19 needs. He reminded his urgent ask to address three main causes of fragility: (1) conflicts (worsened by today’s geopolitics), (2) climate change, (3) health crisis (beyond pandemics).

Administrator Achim Steiner explained that since 2015, a lot of progress has been done by the UN and partners at institutional level (OECD DAC recommendations, UN JSC, UNDS reform, peace component etc.). Yet, rather than focusing on established mechanisms, he advised to further invest in addressing the root causes of needs, including the economic collapse and negative impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods. To do so, he called on donors to encourage context-specific responses. He also underlined the importance for the UN to better synchronise as a system, including regarding crisis financing and the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to least developed countries. He notably underscored the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) as concrete avenues for donors to address needs comprehensively and maximise their impact.

Their remarks were complemented by **two field presentations (Chad, Sudan)**, jointly prepared by the UN (Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator in Chad, UNDP and UNHCR Representatives in Sudan), **DG ECHO** (Head of Office in Chad) and **Switzerland** (SDC Head of Office in Sudan). In both countries – affected by multifaceted conflicts – the presentations highlighted the increased socio-economic vulnerability and additional strain on the health system posed by COVID-19, associated with access impediments, restrictions of movements, weak governance and political instability. The presentations from the field also emphasized challenges in the implementation of the HDP Nexus and the need to build and maintain an appropriate architecture of international assistance, coordination and leadership in place in order to create a nexus-conducive environment.

Among the opportunities identified, the speakers recommended to build on interlinkages between humanitarian-development-peace actors in view to better protect the humanitarian space, ensure do-no-harm, and address challenges linked to violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). They reaffirmed the central coordinating role of the UN and concerted donor advocacy for the implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus at country-level.

In the ensuing **exchange of views, GHD members** commanded the efforts of the World Bank to address the development needs of refugees in protracted situations and their host communities through the IDA19 Window for Host Communities and Refugees (IDA19 WHR) and the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF), CERF / PBF contributions, and flexible and predictable funding as a basis for developing a true nexus approach.

Another segment of the HLM addressed **‘Early Warning / Early Action’**. **Brian Lander, WFP Deputy Director of Emergencies, presented the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Early Warning Early Action Report (EWEAR) group**. Looking at **EW/EA risks for 2021 in a strategic manner**, he touched upon **specific risks in Ethiopia** (Tigray, intercommunal clashes, tensions at Sudan border) and **Somalia** (terrorist attacks, instability linked to upcoming elections, security vacuum due to foreign troop’s withdrawal). More specifically, he **called on donors to step up their humanitarian diplomacy efforts** (cf. respect for humanitarian principles, access and accountability, safeguards related to counter-terrorism measures) **in order to avoid or mitigate mounting risks of further deterioration**. Brian Lander also highlighted that the EW/EA analysis has improved and that the benefits of funding directed at the contexts with the highest risks have materialized for some agencies. In this regard he mentioned the importance of quality, agile and adaptable funding.

In their **interventions, GHD members** referred to anticipatory and forecast-based action, strengthening resilience to shocks through IFIs’ resources, links with the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), as well as the upcoming European Commission’s Communication on EU humanitarian aid. GHD members also linked this session with the triple Nexus and the importance to match existing needs with appropriate funding.

Finally, the co-chairs updated members on **future GHD plans until the end of their co-chairmanship by summer 2021, when they will hand over the GHD co-chairmanship to Belgium and Finland**.