IASC Priority: Protection in Humanitarian Crises

9 December 2013

Problem Statement

Humanitarian crises are too often caused and characterized by violations of international human rights law, and, in situations of armed conflict, international humanitarian law as well. As demonstrated by the November 2012 report of the Secretary-General’s Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka, there are numerous systemic weaknesses in current humanitarian practice in effectively engaging with relevant duty-bearers and stakeholders to ensure protection in accordance with international human rights and international humanitarian law. The OHCHR/UNHCR joint background paper on the protection of human rights in humanitarian crises (8 May 2013) provides further thoughts on this while also highlighting the role of actors beyond the UN. It proposes recommendations that resonate with the UN’s “Rights Up Front” Plan of Action: both documents emphasize the fundamental importance of protection as a key strategic consideration that must systematically and adequately inform humanitarian policy, analyses, planning and decision-making in humanitarian response, as well as engagement with States and inter-governmental bodies, including with a view to preventing and responding to violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law. On the basis of the two documents, the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) proposed a series of actions to systematically strengthen policy and practice on protection in humanitarian crises. The IASC supports these actions.

Value added of IASC: The IASC will work to ensure the centrality of protection in humanitarian action through the formulation and adoption of system-wide policies and other measures that strengthen the humanitarian community’s ability to bring about protection outcomes in practice, both within and beyond the UN.

Key Objectives

The selection of protection in humanitarian crises as a priority will help the IASC to promote:

- A clear vision of protection in humanitarian policy and practice.
- An approach in humanitarian crises by UN, NGO and other partners that ensures human rights protection and equitable services and assistance for all persons affected by crises.
- Strategic and operational interaction on protection between humanitarian actors and other relevant stakeholders.
- Enhanced collective advocacy on protection, including by IASC Principals.

Tasks for the Next Two Years

The IASC will seek to systematically ensure that protection informs humanitarian policy and practice, including but not limited to the following:

- Reaffirm the centrality of protection in humanitarian response and ensure effective coordination and operational response in regards to protection through Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams, Protection Clusters and other relevant actors. The IASC Principals will urgently adopt a statement on protection in humanitarian crises, reaffirming the critical importance of protection and articulating expectations for the roles of different actors and their collaboration in this regard.
- Consult with the GPC on the commissioning and implementation of a whole-of-system review of protection in humanitarian crises that aims to strengthen the roles of Protection Clusters and protection actors, and their strategic and operational interaction with Humanitarian Coordinators and other actors. The review will take into account existing IASC policy documents, tools and reference guides as well as relevant elements of the “Rights Up Front” Plan of Action.
- In consultation with the GPC and building on the initial IASC Principals statement on protection and the findings of the ‘whole-of-system’ review, develop and implement an appropriate and comprehensive policy framework on protection, including with a view to preventing and responding to violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law.
d. Ensure that IASC task teams and subsidiary bodies are aware of relevant elements of the UN Plan of Action and take the necessary steps, with the support of the GPC, to implement those elements that relate to them.

The GPC will make its expertise on protection available to IASC WG to achieve these tasks and will ensure that members of IASC are fully abreast of relevant developments.

WG Sponsor: Daniel Endres, UNHCR
GPC Coordinator: Louise Aubin, UNHCR