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The Evaluation of the Humanitarian Assistance Provided to Syrian Refugees within the Scope of Sphere Project: The Case of Turkey

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Abstract

The right to receive humanitarian assistance is one of the guiding principles to be utilized by all of the citizens of the world. Special organizations have been created for this purpose and they are responsible for providing humanitarian assistance. All countries, which are members of the international community, have agreed about mutual responsibility for the provision of humanitarian assistance to the fullest extent possible where it is needed. In this context numerous organisations such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, as well as numerous non-governmental organizations came together in 1997 and the Sphere Project was launched. In Sphere key areas about humanitarian aid were identified for applying minimum standards. Between 2000 and 2002 approximately twenty NGOs from all over the world and their connected constitutions launched the pilot applications of SPHERE Project. Today over 400 national and international organizations from more than 80 countries are striving to implement the Sphere Project's standards. The aim of this study is to give an overview about the situation of Syrian refugee camps, which have been opened at different points in Turkey since June 2011, and to point out the most crucial problems while considering the standards stated in the SPHERE.

Keywords: Humanitarian Aid, Sphere Project, Syrian Refugees, Turkey

1. Introduction

When we analyse the world's history, we see that the humanity constantly faced numerous natural and man-made disasters such as floods, earthquakes, epidemics, conflicts, brutality, etc. It is a fact that the victims of these disasters are helpless and in need of urgent assistance. All people deserve to have their basic needs met (such as protection of life and property, safety, provision of shelter, food and water) regardless of their race, nationality and religion. In line with this philosophy, the concept of humanitarian aid has been created by governments and non-governmental organizations. The right to receive humanitarian assistance has been determined as a guiding principle that should be utilized by humanity.

When it comes to analyzing the issue of humanitarian aid, two different concepts have been used. Generally a limited concept of humanitarian assistance provided in the past by states. After that numerous non-governmental and international aid organisations were established. These

organisations took over the function of providing humanitarian assistance, which used to be states' responsibility, and a new concept of globally distributed humanitarian aid was adopted.¹

In spite of the concept of helping people who are in need of assistance has been accepted by the entire world, there are problems such as the inconsistencies in different legal frameworks and the lack of standardization among different states. To eliminate this uncertainty, minimum standards in humanitarian response have been determined by the Humanitarian Charter in the SPHERE Project.

This study consists of two main parts in general. In the first part the reasons of conflicts, the concept of humanitarian aid, as well as the SPHERE Project's main processes and fields of practise will be explained. In the second part the details of civil war in Syria and the difficulties experienced by victims of the conflict will be discussed, later the analysis of the level of compliance of humanitarian aid according to the Sphere standards will be made.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conflicts from past to present and the main reasons of civil wars

When we analyse past and present conflicts and civil wars, it is almost impossible to point out only a reason that have caused or triggered them. Each conflict and civil war is based on and caused by more than one reason. The world is changing so the causes of conflicts and wars are becoming more and more complex, and usually include political and traditional factors, socioeconomic factors, environmental factors, and struggles for resources. Each of these can trigger conflicts and civil wars and provide an environment for their rising.²

Within the scope of political and traditional factors, the weakening of state authority can be considered to be one of the main reasons for the emergence of conflicts. Different groups get isolated in states which can not solve their problems. As a result, the isolated groups rebel against those states in order to protect their rights.³

As a result of the freedom struggle in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, some states started to fight for land and power. Studies have shown that in some cases they have promoted "*us versus them*" ideologies, while excluding and marginalising other groups. The domination of access to state structures and resources by only one leader, group or political party to the exclusion of others exacerbates social divisions. It may provide incentives for excluded leaders to mobilise groups to protest and engage in violent rebellion. In contrast, inclusive elite bargains that seek to address social fragmentation and integrate a broad coalition of key elites can reduce the chances of violent rebellion.⁴

When we speak of the socio-economic factors, a strong sense of collective injustice, due to actual or perceived exclusion based on social or cultural identity, can increase a group's feelings of

¹ Inan, Murat, 2012, Humanitarian Aid and It's European Union Dimension, Dokuz Eylül University Master's Thesis, p.1

² Ohlson, T., 2008, Understanding Causes of War and Peace, European Journal of International Relations, Vol.14, No.1, pp. 133 – 134.

³ Lake, D. A. and Rothchild, D., 1996, 'Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict', International Security, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 41-42

⁴ Van Wyk, J-A., 2007, 'Political Leaders in Africa: Presidents, Patrons or Profiteers?', Occasional Paper Series, vol. 2, no. 1, The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), South Africa, p.12.

alienation from the wider society. This may lead to animosity and resentment. Over time, such tensions can foster group mobilisation and fuel violent conflict. However, it is not only the relatively deprived who may instigate violence, but also the privileged who fear losing power and benefits.⁵

Resource sharing and environmental factors are often leaning on political or social reasons are other factors of the emerging conflict. Inequitable distribution of resources, environmental safety problems, sources exploited by the other groups for their own needs can be listed as the reasons of conflict. However, resource sharing and environmental factors often lead to conflict considered along with other factors instead of considering alone, and this is triggering the conflict.⁶

2.2. The Concept of Humanitarian Aid and Its Legal Bases

Humanitarian aid as a concept is related to the preservation of life and alleviation of human suffering.⁷ In the legislation of the United Nations the concept of humanitarian aid can be defined as "help, in order to reduce the pain, for communities affected by the crisis".⁸

According to another definition, humanitarian aid includes all activities, related with the protection of human health and life, undertaken to ensure the safety of life and property and expressed in humanitarian aid activities.⁹

When we talk about the concept of humanitarian aid in the world, first of all it would be appropriate to examine the different sources of humanitarian aid. It is funded by numerous donors, such as individuals, corporations, governments and other organizations. Implementing humanitarian aid at international level enables us to reach large numbers of people who have been affected by major disasters faster and more effectively. According to various reports by ALNAP¹⁰, around 260.800 people around the world are involved in humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian aid as a concept can find its roots in the history of the late 18th century. Different kinds of aid were generally provided by the states rather than the organizations. For this reason, only a specific part of people, in need of assistance, could get the existing amount of aid. On the other hand, the inability of many people to receive humanitarian aid and assistance was one of the main reasons that set the idea of international humanitarian organizations in action.

⁵ Kanbur, R., 2007, 'Poverty and Conflict: The Inequality Link', International Peace Academy, New York

⁶ Berdal M. and Keen D., 1997, 'Violence and Economic Agendas in Civil Wars: Some Policy Implications', Millennium: Journal of International Studies, London, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 798.

⁷ İnan, M., 2012, İnsani Yardım ve Avrupa Birliği Boyutu, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Yüksek Lisans Tezi, p.8

⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Glossary of Humanitarian Terms in Relation to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, New York, 2004, <http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&DocId=1001328> (07.11.2010), p.13.

⁹ James Darcy ve Charles-Antoine Hofmann, According To Need? Needs Assessment and Decision-Making in the Humanitarian Sector, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 15, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London, 2003, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/239.pdf> (10.11.2010), p.5.

¹⁰ <http://www.alnap.org/> State of the Humanitarian System report, ALNAP, 2010 (The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action)

2.3. Sphere Project in Brief

The idea that there is an urgent need to establish a legal basis about humanitarian aid concept was triggered by a disaster. Approximately 500,000 people lost their lives in the civil war in Rwanda in 1994. In addition to that, hundreds of thousands of people were struggling to survive and were forced to leave their homes because of the lack of safety of life. In order to deal with this catastrophe, a major international humanitarian aid movement took place, but did not manage to reach its goals.

The civil war in Rwanda became a turning point for the development of humanitarian aid in cases of disasters and emergency situations. The confusion and lack of coordination contributed to the high level of deaths and damages. Three years later the Red Cross, Red Crescent and a group of non-governmental organizations created the Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (the SPHERE project).¹¹

2.4. The Scope of SPHERE and Its Application Fields

The Sphere project identifies two basic principles. The first one is to take all possible steps in order to relieve the suffering caused by conflicts and disasters; the second one is to offer assistance to all victims of various catastrophes.¹²

There are basically five main sections of the SPHERE Project. These are listed as; common standards, water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion; food security and nutrition; shelter, settlement and non-food items; and health action.¹³

The duties and responsibilities designated for assistance staff and also the supervision of staff, management, and support of the principles are described within the scope of *common standards*. In *water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion* section hygiene promotion, water supply, excreta disposal, vector control, solid waste management and drainage systems' standards are explained. In *food security and nutrition* section, food safety and nutrition standards are explained. In *shelter, settlement and non-food items* section, standards of shelters, settlements and non-food items are explained. In health action section, the topics of control of communicable and non-communicable diseases and the creation of health systems' infrastructure are explained.

3. Method

Turkey's humanitarian aid operations for Syrian refugees and its compliance with Sphere Project are discussed in this paper. So qualitative point of view and has been used in this study and it is based on case study and literature review. Different sources, such as reports of aid agencies in Turkey, as well as the reports of United Nations aid agencies and non-governmental organizations which are focused on humanitarian assistance have been used. General definitions have been made with the reference of different sources, in the field of international relations, during the research as well.

¹¹ <http://sphereturkiye.org/> 23.10.2013

¹² <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/what-is-sphere/> 28.10.2013

¹³ Özşahin, A., Afete Müdahalede Asgari Standartlar ve İnsani Yardım Sözleşmesi, p.3.

4. Findings

4.1. After the Conflicts in Syria; Refugee Problems and Turkey's Position

Syria is one of the countries that have been affected by the Arab Spring movement, which started on 18 December 2010 in Tunisia, and during this movement thousands of people in Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen and many other countries expressed their demands for democracy, freedom and human rights. The anti-government demonstrations in Syria started on 26 January 2011, and by 15 March 2011 demonstrations have spread nationwide, starting to threaten the government itself. The Syrian army was appointed to suppress the rebellion in April 2011. As a result, Syrian insurgents merged under the name of the Free Syrian Army, choosing the path of armed struggle and launched a conflict.¹⁴

As it always happens during a period of armed struggles and wars, the civilian population was the one to bear most of the severe damage. The Syrian people lost almost everything; they found themselves with ravaged homes, no belongings, and unable to find food and water. In order to save their lives and escape from the conflict, thousands of Syrian people migrated to neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt. As of September 2013, there were 798,885 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 549,575 in Jordan, 513,094 in Turkey, 197,844 in Iraq, 126,107 in Egypt, and total of 2.200.464 Syrian people fled from their country.¹⁵

In 1951, Turkey became a part of the Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and agreed to comply with the applications which were made against refugees. According to this agreement, Turkey is supposed to open its doors to refugees from Europe and send asylum seekers from other regions to a third country, while coordinating the whole process with the United Nations.¹⁶

As a result of the outbreak of civil war in Syria and the great number of people fleeing from the conflict, a refugee problem has taken place in Turkey. Syrian asylum-seekers are not European citizens, and according to the agreements signed by Turkey, they should be sent to a third country with the assistance of UNHCR. However, in line with the “geographical limitation” principle, Syrians who have fled to Turkey are recognized as “guests” and not as “refugees”; the camps where Syrians reside are officially recognised as “guest-camps,” not “refugee camps.” Thus, Syrians in Turkey are not treated like asylum seekers coming from other non-European countries. They cannot register with UNHCR in order to apply for asylum in a third country.

Some Syrians who have arrived in Turkey in May 2011 have stated that UNHCR carried out initial interviews with them in order to start processing their files. However, later, due to a change of some policies by the Turkish state, UNHCR stopped registering Syrians. One of the interpretations of the change of policy by the Turkish government is that it is technically very difficult to process asylum applications for such a huge number of asylum seekers. Another comment commonly made by experts and journalists is that through such a policy, the Turkish government aims to prevent the interference of UNHCR or other international bodies in the Turkish control over the Syrian migrant situation.¹⁷

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, 21.05. 2011, http://www.hrw.org/node/99345/section/5#_ftn34 18.10.2013

¹⁵ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php> 24.10.13

¹⁶ Özden, Ş., Syrian refugees in Turkey, p.5.

¹⁷ Turkey Response Plan, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=51b0a6689&query=turkey> 28.10.2013

Nevertheless, the Turkish state has implemented a “temporary protection regime” for Syrians. The principles of temporary protection include an open border policy, no forcible returns (non-refoulement), registration with the Turkish authorities and support inside the borders of the camps.¹⁸

4.2. Assistance to the People of Syria Provided by Turkey and the Refugee Camps

After more than 250 Syrians crossed into the Hatay region in the end of April 2011, Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu held a meeting and announced that Turkey is ready to allow those Syrians “who are not happy at home” in. After that in June 2011 more than 7,000 Syrians arrived in Turkey. Since then the number of asylum-seekers has been growing, and as of October 24, 2013 their number is 502.743. According to the latest data 200.051 refugees are residing in 21 refugee-camps in 10 refugee centres that have been recently opened on the territory of Turkey, and 302.242 Syrians live outside the camps in various parts of the country. Considering the current situation in Turkey and the number of potentially non-registered refugees, the total number of Syrian asylum-seekers in Turkey are said to be around 660,000.¹⁹

Considering the present complicated circumstances, the economic situation is considered to be relatively good. Many Syrians are localized in different cities and have received a permission by the state to work. They are working as labourers in different restaurants, factories and construction sites across Turkey. In addition to that, Syrian students who used to attend college in their native country are allowed to continue their education in 7 universities in Turkey without passing any examinations in recognition of the human right to education.²⁰

According to the information given by the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD) as of September 26 2013; 14 tent cities, 1 temporary reception centre and 6 container towns have been established on the territory of the country. The locations of these facilities are; Altınözü, Yayladağı and Hatay tent cities; temporary reception centers in Reyhanlı, the city center of Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye-Cevdediye and Adıyaman; Midyat/Mardin; Sarıçam/Adana tent cities; two reception centers in Kilis, four container towns in Hatay/Apaydın, Şanlıurfa/Harran, Malatya/Beydağı and Gaziantep/Nizip²¹

Housing, food, health, security, social activities, education, worship, interpretation, communication, banking and other services are provided by the Turkish Red Crescent. Different institutions and establishments, such as schools, mosques, trade and health centers, police centers, markets, children's playgrounds, cutting-sewing courses, water storage centers, treatment centers, transformers and generators, as well as a press briefing unit and television monitoring units have been located in those areas.

¹⁸ Özden, p.5.

¹⁹ UNHCR Turkey Syrian Refugee Daily Sitrep 24 October 2013

²⁰ Suriye ve Mısır Ülkelerinden Yurdumuzda Bulunan Yükseköğretim Kurumlarına Yatay Geçiş, <http://www.yok.gov.tr/> 28.10.2013

²¹ <https://www.afad.gov.tr/TR/IcerikDetay1.aspx?ID=16&IcerikID=747> 24.10.2013

4.3. Evaluation of Camps According to the SPHERE Project Standards and Assistance Provided by Turkey.

The first part of the SPHERE Project consists of five main sections, which serve as the basis for the universal application of "common" or "essential" standards. Integrative features have been embedded in those standards in order to facilitate the effectiveness of the humanitarian interventions. These standards include human-oriented aid, cooperation and coordination, evaluation, transparency, and adequacy of aid workers.²²

Numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations have masterminded different campaigns and have delivered their donations in order to help Syrian refugees in Turkey. Volunteers and permanent staff from the Red Crescent and other organizations cooperate with each other and coordinate their activities in order to offer human-oriented aid, as well as to promote and publicize their activities through media organs. In this context, the activities of Turkey have been conducted in compliance with the requirements under the "common standards" heading of the SPHERE project.

The second section of the SPHERE Project is dedicated to water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion, and aims to ensure the minimum standards and level of protection which must be achieved. Any kinds of disruptions should be avoided, especially when it comes to hygiene promotion, water supply, excreta disposal, vector control, solid waste management and drainage systems issues. AFAD has examined the situation in the refugee camps in Turkey with the help of the Red Crescent, and hygiene kits have been distributed among all refugees. People in the camps need 11 litres of water per day and this amount can be provided so there is no shortage of water. However, asylum seekers are facing some problems such as inadequate number of public toilets in the tent cities, and the eventual spread of diseases caused by different transmitters.²³

The next section is about the minimum standards in food security and nutrition. In this context, the levels of food safety, nutrition and food aid must comply with all standards. Meals are provided by qualified personnel that have been deployed in the refugee camps in Turkey; in addition to that, grocery services are ensured, and the nutritional needs of the refugees are meeting by providing a variety of established markets for sales. However, because of the growing number of Syrian refugees and there are lack of staff in the camps, food can not be distributed equally to all refugees but three meals a day are normally distributed. Tensions and fights are frequently happenings in the camps for this reason. In order to prevent the turmoil environment around them, the Syrian refugees have offered to get the uncooked food and prepare the meals by themselves. However in order to prevent unsafe conditions in the camps this suggestion has not been accepted.²⁴

The 4th section in the SPHERE Project is about the provision of minimum standards regarding shelter, settlement and non-food items. Considering the adverse weather conditions, it is crucial that tents and shelters need to be not affected by cold, rain, extreme heat, etc. Non-food items such as clothing, bedding, personal hygiene materials and lighting equipment need be distributed and keep in operation.

²² Özşahin, p.3.

²³ Özden, p.6

²⁴ http://www.ydh.com.tr/HD10253_1--yilinda-turkiyedeki-suriyeli-multeci-gercegi.html 25.10.2013

The Syrian refugees in most of the camps have lived in tent cities in Turkey for more than 2 years, and until today there has been no change of this situation, which comes to show that minimum standards in regard to the 4th section of the SPHERE project have not been provided.

During the times of crises the primary objectives of the immediate humanitarian response are the alleviation of human suffering and the protection of human lives, while creating new conditions close to the situation before the disaster took place. For this reason the creation of minimum standards to ensure continuity in health care is one of the most important parts of the SPHERE Project. The control of communicable and non-communicable diseases and the establishment of health infrastructures have been identified as the top priority so the health services should be provided on a regular basis.

As of September 2013, field hospitals and mobile health units have been carried out 5,592 health care services and 6,051 births were realized in refugee camps in Turkey. The deployment of general practitioners instead of specialist doctors and the failure about delivery of all drugs provided by the state act as a barrier in providing minimum standards of Sphere Project.

According to the research conducted in the area measles, diarrhoea, acute respiratory disease and malaria found to be the most four killing major diseases²⁵. Therefore, medical teams have to be deployed in the camps for these diseases and the required treatment needed to be done.

5. Conclusion

The war in Syria and the following critical situation of the innocent victims of the conflict is a fact that can not be ignored. The provision of Humanitarian aid and assistance to the Syrian refugees in Turkey is an issue of major significance. Every human being, refugee or not, deserves to live his or her life with dignity and to have his or her basic need met.

The aim of this study was to examine the humanitarian assistance provided to Syrian refugees in Turkey and the level of its compliance with international standards, as well as to point out and evaluate some of the positive and negative sides of the humanitarian assistance process.

Numerous humanitarian issues related to the assistance of Syrian refugees, such as housing, health, hygiene promotion and nutrition have been examined. Minimum standards of humanitarian assistance have been identified, and the standards that have not been fully complied with have been indicated.

Syrian refugees in Turkey are treated as "guests", and there have been special efforts to ensure the best possible conditions for them considering the current situation. Those include:

- Permanent housing,
- Prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases,
- Reinforcement expert personnel and drug support.

Such universally accepted standards as the SPHERE project are of great importance and must be ensured. Thus, the availability of sufficient resources and the provision of well organized humanitarian assistance on regular bases are crucial factors in the realization of these standards.

²⁵ <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/health-systems-standard-1-health-service-delivery/> 28.10.2013

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