



WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT GLOBAL CONSULTATION
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“Not just a wallet”

I feel quite bound to be up here because I was actually tasked with representing the voice of the diaspora, a group that in the consultations leading up to the Summit and beyond, we always felt that our voice was not being heard. I hope to start with an anecdote and end with a proposal, and I hope that by that time I get to the end you will see that this is not about confrontation or about competition, but it is about cooperation, collaboration, inclusion. Things that are needed in a partnership, and hopefully you will see why the diasporas needs to be included in a partnership going forward when we are talking about humanitarian needs.

Let me start with an anecdote, it relates to my own country, but every time I mention Sierra Leone or the work of the Sierra Leonean diaspora I want you to imagine that I'm talking about any diaspora and any diaspora intervention. When Ebola struck in Sierra Leone last year the high commissioner of Sierra Leone in the United Kingdom called a meeting of the Sierra Leonean diaspora because it was the one thing that united everybody. People were dying across the country and this was a disease that had no head or tribe or political affiliation, and so we had 250 people that came together, which is quite unusual for what was initially just a focus meeting, but there was purpose behind that. We wanted to be able to be at the forefront of putting the case to the British public mainly, to tell them to raise awareness about Ebola, and the effects it was having, but also there was a need for us to say and ensure that diaspora could be part of joining with the government of Sierra Leone and the high commission, the British government, British health sector, and DFID, Médecins sans Frontières, and others in tackling Ebola.

Now as often happens the diasporas are very well placed. We keep hearing about first responders. The diasporas are in a unique position because our long relationship with our home country doesn't depend on crisis, it's already there, and so even before anybody has had a need for an assessment meeting we are already receiving text messages from our relatives saying the next door neighbor has died, that sort of thing, and we are doing things to act straight away. We are already knowledgeable actors.

In Sierra Leone for example when people had to be quarantined, we've gone through a war, 10 years' war, we knew about food security. That war ended in 2001 and the same situation and the same policies we used to actually get food to people that were quarantined we used again. We are also in a better position to enable collaboration with the humanitarian response system. Diasporas are in a unique position, we are a bridge, we have a foot in both camps, so when people were ready to go to Sierra Leone, doctors and nurses from all over the world, we made sure they didn't go blind. Imagine going into a country where you go, you are sent to a village where nobody speak the language, you don't understand the culture of that place, so the diasporas were engaged in cultural sensitization of people who were going. We made sure that we are also involved in volunteer's recruitment, not just within

our own community but within the wider British society. We also had a presence on the diaspora Ebola task force.

Now the reason why I mention these previous points is actually because too often diasporas are seen as some kind of a wallet that just send and it's all about remittances. Well, yes we do that, but those remittances can also be a bridge between humanitarian response, action and development. Our unique position makes us a link and often contributing factor of the "3 R": Resilience, Restructuring and Regrowth. In the consultation paper we submitted to this process we actually called for the creation of a network platform of diaspora organisations that can assist in times of crisis. Yes, we cannot ignore the fact that remittances are an aspect of diaspora response which is both essential and substantial. Diaspora organisations welcome the opportunity to work with the humanitarian sector to locate ways to be effective co-funding partners as well as to be included in being service providers, team members and advisors within humanitarian response initiatives.

There have been a number of points raised over these fantastically informative days. If I can only mention a few: the diasporas are already effectively connecting the humanitarian sector with local actors. We can assist in providing cultural knowledge, language and trust, a vital component when providing humanitarian assistance. We can also participate in identifying sustainable methods for people to move from a position of resilience to improved sustained livelihoods. I would say fundamentally diasporas are already part of humanitarian response so why don't we work together to make diasporas a formal part of the response process? Our response - the diaspora response - is driven by a connection, a sense of responsibility and a personal need; the fact these actions can be termed humanitarian response is something both diaspora and the humanitarian sector need to recognize and work together accordingly as partners in order to maximize the impact.

Of course we hear people talking about cost-effectiveness. Well, due to the often self-funding nature of Diaspora work our initiatives are cost effective, innovative, locally influenced and come into effect quickly to provide direct assistance to affected communities. I will give another brief anecdote. When Ebola broke out for a lot of people in Sierra Leone they go around on taxis that are actually motorbikes. The news that was being put out there is that there should not be bodily contacts. When you get on motorbikes you need to hug the rider. Nobody knew how to come up with a solution except for a Sierra Leonean diaspora organisation which bought thousands of raincoats to give to the riders of these motorbikes, so they could wear them and the passengers could get on board.

So to go back to mutual relationship: capacity building must be built and resources should be allocated to enable the diaspora, because there is a kind of language and ways of working within the humanitarian sector, so let's build capacity so we can understand to fully contribute. It will also enable capacity to be built within humanitarian actors, so they can understand how to work with diasporas, and how to identify the right partners and how our contributions can be combined to ensure that no one is left behind. I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to come here today and for the way that the world is responding to this and in building new partnerships. A lot of the time here we hear people beating themselves up about what the humanitarian sector should be doing. Stop doing it, you are

doing a lot, it's good, there is a lot that can be improved upon. Finally a proposal, as we move forward on the Road to Istanbul. It would be useful to have a space, a formal space, within the WHS for us to collectively focus on and identify the contributions and possibilities that the Diasporas can bring to humanitarian response in all areas. I end by saying that: do not see the diasporas as a competing model, we are and can be partners. There is no need for us to take different roads to get to the same destination.



https://youtu.be/_rACnLyfIY?t=23m3s