

10 March 2025

## The Humanitarian Reset

Dear IASC Principals,

This is a defining moment for the humanitarian community. As I set out in my statement following our meeting in February, we face a profound crisis of legitimacy, morale, and funding.

You asked me to be ambitious (and where necessary to take unpopular decisions) to reform how we work. I am conscious that we are doing this at a time when the people we serve are already reeling from the impact of cuts, and many partners are making tough organizational decisions. And when our principles are under sustained attack.

A tough message: we need to regroup. That is not easy. We believe passionately in what we do, with good reason. But we cannot continue to do it all. As we are experiencing, this means stopping work that we have invested in, and that we know matters. With resources slashed, our defining mission must be saving lives.

And we must renew. Reimagine how we work. Fight back, not for systems or institutions, but for the people we serve. Build fresh arguments and allies, locally and globally. Find new sources of funding.

We must both regroup and renew at the same time. I propose we do so on the foundation of three strategic priorities: the best possible crisis response with the resources we have; urgent work to reform and reimagine how we work; and shift power to our humanitarian leaders in country, and the people we serve. We need much lighter, more nimble coordination.

To support this work, I am taking the following actions.

1. As we reprioritize, we must put people facing crises first, and provide as much funding as possible to local and national actors. As agreed, I am asking HCs to prioritize local and national partners for funding from pooled funds. We should shift towards cash-transfer programming where possible, in line with Grand Bargain Commitments, and accelerate joint inter-agency community feedback to improve our accountability. OCHA will lead a swift assessment on how country-based pooled funds and the emergency fund (CERF) can be strategically aligned with the humanitarian reset – helping deliver the best possible crisis response in this difficult funding environment, while enabling the responsible transition out of areas of work that we can no longer sustain.
2. As agreed, I have asked Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) to consult urgently with Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and share revised strategies by 14 March on how they will prioritize urgent life-saving actions and reduce and simplify their coordination structures to suit their context, supported by OCHA expertise, with the authority to select country team members on the basis of operational relevance. HCs should ensure alignment with recovery plans and processes. Please encourage your country representatives to be accountable for working in this spirit.

3. I am asking the Emergency Directors' Group (EDG) to use this analysis to set out a clear prioritisation plan by 21 March for saving as many lives as we can with the resources we have. OCHA is mapping where we could focus on intersectoral severity 4/5 (ie greatest need). I will update the IASC on the process, including where the greatest risks are. We will adjust our humanitarian footprint and coordination accordingly, reducing the number of response plans and HCs, in line with the life-cycle of operations.
4. Meanwhile, I am asking Deputies to prepare advice for us by the end of March on the second strand - reform and reimagination, drawing on lessons from previous evaluations. I am asking the Deputies for advice on integrating on-going reform initiatives (JIAF 2.0, HPC reform, flagship, IDP solutions, etc.).
5. OCHA will ramp up the inter-agency advocacy and communications team to draw together our best communicators across the sector to demonstrate the value of what we do; make the case to sceptical audiences; show how we are changing; expand the humanitarian coalition; push proactive messaging and counter disinformation. The attack will be that we are a wasteful, divided, bureaucracy. We will need to be - and demonstrate that we are - efficient, united, independent, and saving lives.
6. We agreed to move boldly to reduce inefficiency, duplication, and bureaucracy. My thanks again to Jan Egeland and Joyce Msuya for their swift and comprehensive recommendations. As I said in response, I do not want their ideas to sit on the shelf, become a talking point in place of meaningful action, or trigger extra layers of process. I set out the immediate priorities in December: liberate humanitarians to do humanitarian work; strengthen humanitarian leadership by empowering our HCs; build a more agile crisis response by defining more clearly triggers for IASC system-wide and OCHA corporate emergencies and accelerating recruitment processes during crises; be firm in switching off unnecessary activity so that HQ and country colleagues are freed up for crisis response; streamline the IASC; and drive genuine innovation. I have asked Denise Brown, former HC in Ukraine and Central African Republic - and with many thanks to WFP - to lead a three-month mission to support this work.
7. Much of the change we need is about the way we work. We agreed to be ruthless in eliminating turf wars, and challenging our organizations to work genuinely together. Each organization should focus on what it does uniquely well. We agreed to give up power and to act collectively where possible, to share information and data. In line with the efficiency report, we will aim to move more staff from capital to sub-national locations where needs are, significantly change the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, address HQ fragmentation, and significantly cut back high-level meetings and events.
8. I propose that we pool resources to collectively finance common services and operational enablers such as humanitarian air bridges, needs assessment, data gathering and analysis, Rapid Response Mechanisms, and safety and security.
9. We will simplify and streamline clusters. Humanitarian coordination is vital, but we must modernize our systems, and fast. During this period of change, IASC partners must uphold their existing accountabilities and responsibilities as cluster leads agencies. The cluster coordinator role is essential to ensure discussions regarding prioritization of humanitarian action represent the totality

of cluster memberships – the majority of which are national NGOs and are not dominated by the interests of any single entity. I propose we review further measures to simplify the system at our next meeting, to which I will bring further proposals. I am asking the co-chairs of the OPAG (Ted Chaiban from UNICEF and Gabriella Wajjman from Save the Children) to lead this work, working with cluster lead agencies in advance of our meeting in June. I will also seek views from you on wider OCHA reform.

10. I have appointed Justin Brady to lead a three-month mission as Head of the IASC secretariat to make the IASC more focused and effective. Ad-hoc Principals meetings will be strategically convened to address emerging crises, particularly those with regional implications, and cross-cutting themes. For ad hoc meetings, we will seek an agreement with each of you of a deputized representative, when necessary. Meetings will be focused on problem solving not problem observation. Online options will be the default. Many of you have suggested we merge or stand down groups, including the Deputies and EDGs. That may come. For now, my judgement is that we need both over the next quarter, but there should be much sharper demarcation, meetings only when necessary and with the focus on priorities set by Principals. We'll review at our next meeting. Meanwhile, for now the OPAG group will only convene on the express request of the Principals.

I am confident that with the immense collective expertise and political will of the IASC we can continue to serve those in greatest need.

Reform will be a journey not a destination, and must be a collective effort. We should be ready to adjust and learn as we go.

Please do not hesitate to be in touch if you have any questions or further proposals. We will circulate a full update on progress in advance of our meeting in June. I am also writing to donors to encourage them to reduce non-essential reporting and duplication, turn pledges into contributions, and be flexible on reprogramming requests.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Fletcher  
Chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee  
UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and  
Emergency Relief Coordinator

**IASC Principals**