

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
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Strengthened Humanitarian Dialogue and New Partnerships

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I. Building Partnerships to address humanitarian challenges

In a context of war against terror, the Baghdad bombing and the blurring of the lines between civil and military operations, humanitarian actors, charities and Governments in the Middle East share the same perception challenge. Key issues are access, the preservation of the humanitarian space, respect for established humanitarian principles as well as transparency, accountability and professionalism.

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In this context, it is therefore important for the United Nations to strengthen partnerships with Muslim countries and charities. Establishing partnerships should aim at strengthening dialogue and cooperation, and should be based on respect, equality and common understanding of principles guiding humanitarian action. Better reporting and acknowledgement of the relief work carried out by Islamic charities and Government is needed while Governments in the region should be seen as donors and long-term stakeholders in international humanitarian efforts. More needs to be done to redress the widely held negative opinion of the UN by promoting its humanitarian face and working at the community level with scholars to help communities better appreciate UN humanitarian activities.

In order to enhance the dialogue and partnerships through a smooth process, a three tracks approach is proposed:

1. To enhance the dialogue with Governments in the Middle East region: the United Nations should engage in a dialogue on humanitarian issues and activities as equal partners;
2. To support and recognise the humanitarian work of Islamic humanitarian NGOs: the United Nations and partners will try to assist Islamic relief organisations address misperceptions about their work and to build their capacity and operational partnerships;
3. And to work with Muslim scholars and clergy on humanitarian values and principles as part of the greater dialogue among people with different cultures and religions.

In the broader context of protecting humanitarian space, the following issues should be addressed as part of this initiative: nature and typology of humanitarian assistance provided by Islamic NGOs and assistance provided by Islamic states, how to better acknowledge the important humanitarian contribution of Islamic states and NGOs, the impact of the global war on terror on the ability of NGOs in Islamic countries to function (including issues of legislation), shared and differing ideological/theological bases for humanitarian action and issues of accountability, and capacity building.

The partners with the United Nations for this initiative will be IASC partners, donors, international and Islamic humanitarian NGOs, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Universities, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

II. Partnerships with Islamic NGOs

Islamic NGOs have been highlighting their difficulties that include relations with local authorities, lack of partnership with the west, lack of funding, and the need to upgrade their capacities. A process should be developed to bring Islamic NGOs to clarify and articulate their humanitarian principles, and integrate universal codes of conduct such as the IFRC code of conduct. The various challenges faced by Islamic relief organizations are linked: because of misperception, Islamic NGOs have difficulties to obtain funding after 9/11, building partnerships and therefore capacity.

III. Examples to Address Current Challenges

On the perception issue, initiative such as a conference proposed by Islamic Relief in Cairo could a conference in Cairo that could address such issues as well as the obstacles to the functioning of NGOs in the Muslim world and reaffirm that Islamic charities are recognised by the UN as partners. To build and strengthen the mutual trust with Governments, a donor reference group should be created with interested donors and Arab states.

On the partnership issue, encourage the involvement of Islamic relief NGOs in existing consortia such as ICVA or the formation of consortiums or networks of these NGOs with links to existing NGO umbrella bodies or to the UN.

On the funding issue, encourage Resident Coordinators in the field to include more Islamic NGOs in the CHAP/CAP and/or in Flash Appeals or support Islamic NGOs to establish a monitoring mechanism.

On the capacity building issue, the Cairo Conference could encourage the adoption of a code of conduct. Twining and training should be encouraged.

Proposed actions by the IASC WG members:

- Agree to work together on this initiative at the policy and operational levels
- Agree to create a steering committee or consultative group for this initiative
- Evaluate the possibility of creating a donor group with Middle East Governments to discuss issues such as perception and funding
- Agree to participate in a conference with Islamic Relief that would contribute to develop a charter for best practices on humanitarian assistance
- Propose opportunities for Islamic NGOs to get involved in specific partnerships, such as in Darfur or in trainings

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