

# Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team Guiding Principles for Humanitarian Operations in Tigray, and border areas of Afar and Amhara regions

26 November 2020

## 1. Introduction

Acknowledging the normal and inherent responsibility of the State to protect and meet the needs of persons within its territory or under its control,

Acknowledging that the host Government has a special responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations, and other relevant agreements with individual United Nations organizations, for the security and protection of United Nations personnel, other individuals covered by the United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS), and the property of UNSMS organizations,

Reaffirming the commitment of humanitarian organizations to conduct their operations in Ethiopia in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and operational independence<sup>1</sup>,

This document aims to guide humanitarian action in Ethiopia to effectively deliver humanitarian assistance during and after hostilities in line with the humanitarian principles noted below.

## 2. Guiding principles

### 2.1 Humanitarian Principles

**Impartiality and Humanity:** To save lives alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity (in line with the principle of Humanity) and to ensure that assistance goes to those who are most in need wherever they may be and without discrimination (in line with the principle of Impartiality), humanitarian organizations must be able to:

- Conduct transparent, timely, and independent assessments of the needs of affected persons, ensuring that they are identified without discrimination on the basis of status, ethnicity, political opinion, gender, nationality, race, or religion. As part of this commitment, all parties to the conflict must recognize the importance of telecommunications as a means to facilitate the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance and for populations in need to be able to communicate for the purposes of maintaining and restoring family links. Without telecommunications humanitarian operations cannot effectively and safely operate and support people in need and all parties must commit not to restrict telecommunications
- Apply the joint guidelines on identification of needs agreed to by the Government of Ethiopia and the UN, followed by independent verification of beneficiary lists by the UN or delegated authorized partners, and establish Protection Help Desks at every registration and distribution and other methodologies to ensure that assistance is provided solely based on needs.

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1. <sup>1</sup> For the UN coordinated assistance, these principles are derived from UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (10 December 1991) and 58/114 (17 December 2003). There are also part of codes of conduct and organizational mission statements guiding humanitarian organizations.

- Refugees must be accorded access to services (including health care, legal assistance etc.) as per Proclamation Number 1110/2019 of the Government of Ethiopia.

These guidelines will also support humanitarian organizations to adopt a people-centred, protection-focused, evidence-based approach to identification of needs in a transparent, accountable, and coherent manner and regardless of which authority controls a given territory where civilians in need are located. All humanitarian organizations, including the Government, UN and NGOs involved in bringing assistance in affected areas will be accountable to meet these standards.

Identification of persons in need will adhere to the following fundamental principles:

- Needs-based approach: Assistance and protection will be provided to the most in need and vulnerable first (based on precisely stipulated criteria) through an independent verification process;
- Non-discrimination: Identification will be done among conflict-affected populations (whether displaced or otherwise) including refugees, returning refugees, IDPs, affected and host communities, returning IDPs, and relocated or locally integrated IDPs, without any prejudice or discrimination based on status, ethnicity, political views, religion, gender, sexual orientation etc.;
- A coordinated approach between humanitarian organizations, and GoE;
- Accountability to affected populations: Meaningful and inclusive participation of, and information provision to, affected communities will be ensured throughout the identification of needs process;
- Transparency: Humanitarian organizations will act in a transparent manner with all parties and are accountable to those they assist.
- Participation: identification will consistently seek to ensure the participation of affected communities, in the process from the outset to the end. The methodology and level of participation will be context-based. Humanitarian organizations will employ household interviews, focus-group discussions and /or meetings to identify needs and vulnerabilities.

**Neutrality and Independence:** Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented (in line with the principle of Independence) and must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature (in line with the principle of Neutrality).

Humanitarian actors will ensure that their actions do not demonstrate taking part in any side of the conflict and solely focus on providing humanitarian supplies and services based on need. The protection of rights under International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law and International Refugee Law does not contravene the principle of neutrality. Actors will also ensure that none of their support is provided contingent upon beneficiaries providing any indication of political, religious or ideological perspective. Actors will also ensure not to state any bias in political, religious, or ideological nature in all their service delivery.

Humanitarian actors will refrain from commenting or give credence to statements (such as online social media posts) which aim to undermine the neutrality of humanitarian organizations. All parties must recognize that specious statements, articles etc. endanger the lives of humanitarian personnel and the communities they serve.

In order to avert the risk of instrumentalization of aid and ensure operational independence of humanitarian action, government will ensure immediate and unconditional access to humanitarian actors, including access across conflict lines in territories not under its immediate control.

All parties should be mindful of maintaining a distinction between humanitarian actors and armed groups including military, security organs, police authorities and any other armed groups, in the course of humanitarian activities so as not to compromise the real or perceived neutrality and independence of humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian convoys will not use armed escort unless the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) decides to use an armed escort as a 'last resort' and this is substantiated through the process of a formal security risk assessment as provided within the UN Security Management System.

## 2.2. Other principles and approaches

**Dignity:** People in need shall be respected as right holders and equal partners in action in all activities and support the maintenance of their dignity as human beings in all communications.

Humanitarian partners should increase their effort to include the affected population as equal partners in needs identification, program design, monitoring and evaluation. Affected people must be put at the center of humanitarian action through continuous and meaningful participation in humanitarian action. Humanitarian actors must do everything possible to ensure community participation to the level that is possible in the operational context, as well as enabling feedback and complaints mechanisms where possible.

**PSEA:** Active efforts to prevent, report and combat sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) must be taken by all humanitarian actors, ensuring their staff are aware of and respect obligations to prevent SEA.

**Do no harm:** Humanitarian organisations must strive to 'do no harm' when being present and providing assistance, ensuring that interventions do not negatively impact those it seeks to assist and that they are conflict-sensitive. This means, examining risks to populations that are provided with assistance to ensure that they are not made targets, or experiences increased protection risk by receiving assistance and services.

## 3. Operationalization of the guiding principles

For UN humanitarian organizations and their partners to carry out humanitarian protection and assistance activities, the following operating conditions are critical:

- Ethiopian authorities and where applicable other parties to the conflict should facilitate the timely safe unimpeded and sustained access of humanitarian organizations to all populations in need in order to assess needs, deliver assistance, protect rights and monitor humanitarian activities.
- Basic services and the movement of essential supplies such as, among the others, medicines, vaccines, food, nutrition supplies, shelter, WASH, and protection items, should be restored and maintained. The authorities should facilitate and provide legal documentation of all affected populations to enable them to access essential services. As an example, in previous incidents, displaced people were unable to benefit from health services in their localities because the respective kebeles did not issue them registration documents.
- In case of security screening by Ethiopian Security forces the UN and ICRC should be engaged in order to verify civilian status of the population undergoing such checks, as well as in order to ensure protection services such as psychosocial support, family tracing, case management/medical referrals etc.
- Assurance and commitment for national and international humanitarian staff to be respected and protected from any form of harassment, intimidation or arbitrary detention.

In the course of their activities humanitarian organizations will:

- Engage with all parties and relevant actors in areas where humanitarian operations are needed in order to seek and carry out rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access and deliver assistance, protection and provide services to people in need

- Ensure that there are clear common advocacy messages to communicate to all parties to respect and promote humanitarian principles and uphold international law;
- Engage in coordination mechanisms with the government, UN agencies, local authorities, CSO's etc. to establish and maintain principled humanitarian operations and effective coordination
- Provide relevant information on planned humanitarian activities to the government, local authorities and where applicable to other parties;
- Share with local and international community transparent and relevant information on the situation, affected populations, identified humanitarian needs, and planned humanitarian activities, for purposes of advocacy and resources mobilization.

Humanitarian organizations will not accept any party's requests to:

- Provide armed escorts for humanitarian vehicles or personnel, except as a last resort and agreed by the Humanitarian Country Team as per existing guidelines<sup>2</sup> and in line with the Country-Specific Guidelines applicable to Ethiopia<sup>3</sup> and when agreed in advance in accordance with a specific security risk assessment and within clearly defined parameters;
- Provide assistance for the benefit of active members of armed forces or armed groups;
- Occupy, provide security for or manage humanitarian assets - including warehouses, vehicles, commodities communications equipment and offices);
- Enter humanitarian facilities or vehicles with weapons;
- Share personal details of UN and partners humanitarian staff;
- Take control of/direct the use of telecommunication materials and humanitarian goods or services for political or military aims.

**END**

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<sup>2</sup> IASC non-binding guideline on the use of armed escorts for Humanitarian convoys, IASC, 27 February, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination guidance, Ethiopia, approved by the HCT on 13 March 2019.