

FOREWORD

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In the summer of 2011 one of the worst famines on record hit the Horn of Africa. Watching images of women and children fleeing the drought and conflict across the border into neighbouring Kenya to reach the largest and most overcrowded refugee camp in the world, it was hard to imagine that things could get any worse for them. And yet, things did get worse. On the way to the supposed safety and security of the Dadaab camp, and even in its vicinity, women were raped by bandits and gunmen. The plight of Somali women is sadly familiar to anyone with experience in large-scale emergencies. Apart from overcoming hunger and disease, shouldering the added burden of caring for children and the elderly, and coping with the loss of family members, property, and livelihoods, women and girls in humanitarian emergencies often face a range of gender-related human rights abuses, including sexual violence.

Pre-existing political, social, and economic structures and conditions determine who lives, who dies, and how populations recover from natural disasters and armed conflict. Two-thirds of mortalities in the 2006 Asian tsunami were female. In some places, women or girls lacked crucial coping mechanisms, mainly because they were never taught to swim or climb trees, like boys, or because dress codes and cultural norms about male consent hampered their mobility. Natural disasters and their subsequent impact, on average, kill more women than men and kill women at a younger age than men — more so in stronger disasters. In camps for people displaced by conflict or disasters, girls may be the last to be fed and the first to go hungry in the face of food shortages, suffer from lack of adequate sanitary conditions and supplies, especially during menstruation and lactation, and from the absence of reproductive and maternal health care. During violent conflicts and natural disasters, the percentage of female-headed households — which are associated with poverty — skyrockets. Early marriage of girls in exchange for dowries and bride price becomes an acceptable survival mechanism.

Humanitarian actors have recognised that women and men, girls and boys have gender and age-specific vulnerabilities and needs. They have adapted approaches to channel food aid to women, distributed rolling water containers and fuel-efficient stoves to minimise workloads and insecurity for women, or built

safer latrines for women in camps, together with many other crucial interventions. These are interventions that need to be financed and implemented in a much more systematic way.

The gender-specific security threats women and girls face during humanitarian emergencies also means that their immediate and long-term survival is intimately linked to protection from harm. At UN Women, however, we believe that beyond gender-sensitive relief provision and gender-responsive protection, women's empowerment is an often neglected element of humanitarian response, which is key to its effectiveness. The miseries endured by women in humanitarian situations are inextricably connected to gender inequality. Resolving these problems in the immediate and longer term will require a greater commitment to engaging women fully in managing humanitarian response in everything from camp management, relief aid distribution and protection to disaster preparedness and risk mitigation.

For this reason, at UN Women we are delighted that this year's Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) is shedding light on these essential issues, and calling on humanitarian actors and donor governments to live up to their commitments to ensure humanitarian actions are adapted to address the specific and different needs of women, girls, men and boys.

As the findings from this year's Humanitarian Response Index confirm, far too many people still wrongly assume that the specific threats faced by women should be addressed once broader security issues are solved; that their voices should be heard once peace is consolidated; that their needs will be considered once the emergency situation has stabilised; that, for women and girls, addressing gender equality in humanitarian response is not an urgent, life-or-death matter and can be treated as a secondary priority.

The opposite is true. Without investing in gender equality before, during and after crises, women will not be able to build a protective environment for their communities. Without security and coverage of basic needs, women and girls will not engage in field-based farming or market activity, so crucial for early recovery and basic food security. Girls will not enroll in schools. Women will not engage in public life or contribute

to inclusive decision-making. Without access to livelihoods and resources, such as the departed or deceased spouse's land or property, women are pushed into low-reward, high-risk work like survival sex, slowing down community recovery and deepening the immiseration and resentment of their children.

While women and girls are disproportionately affected during crises, they are not just victims. Historically, the role of women in anticipating crises, preventing conflict, and their awareness of threats to themselves, their families and their communities has been seen throughout the world. Their resilience to crisis and contributions to conflict resolution, peace building, disaster preparedness and contingency planning have been demonstrated time and time again.

Donors in particular have an important role to play in transforming political commitments to gender equality into an agenda for action for the humanitarian sector, working with their partners to ensure that aid efforts do not discriminate against women and girls, men and boys, and that gender equality is fully integrated into all aspects of programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The effectiveness of humanitarian responses aimed at saving lives and preventing and alleviating suffering will be partial at best until they do.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has issued a challenge to the UN and the international community to make the empowerment of women and the funding of such efforts a top priority. The creation of UN Women represents an important new component of the UN's institutional provisions and actions related to humanitarian response, peace, security and development. In all of these areas, UN Women is mandated to support coherence, coordination and accountability for meeting international commitments on women's rights. The General Assembly and UN Women's strategic plan have recognised the critical importance of placing the issues of gender equality and women's rights at the centre of humanitarian efforts.

UN Women is here to act on behalf of women everywhere. UN Women is here to promote action on the widespread recognition that the empowerment of women is not an afterthought

in humanitarian operations, peacekeeping or post-conflict recovery efforts and rehabilitation. The aim of UN Women's engagement in humanitarian action is to ensure consistency and sustainability in addressing gender equality concerns across the humanitarian-development continuum as well as to improve awareness and commitment, enhance capacity and strengthen partnerships with national entities, civil society, regional institutions and the international humanitarian system.

Still, UN Women's research shows that less than five percent of money in Multi-Donor Trust Funds for post-conflict countries, for example, is dedicated to supporting women's empowerment or advancing gender equality. This makes it even more urgent that we fully support and implement any mechanisms that help hold donors and partners accountable to their commitments to gender equality or protecting women and girls. UN entities need to meet or surpass the Secretary-General's call for the dedication of a minimum of 15 percent of their budgets to gender equality and women's empowerment in post-conflict peace-building. This minimum threshold is not currently applied to the humanitarian arena.

To do so, an analysis is first needed of how much financing is currently targeting women's needs, empowerment and protection. Consistent application of a measuring tool is needed to conduct this analysis and indeed the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has developed the valuable Gender Marker that is currently required for use in projects in the Consolidated Appeals Process and is being applied in a number of Pooled Funds. However, as the HRI's analysis of humanitarian funding shows, in many crises, gender is still largely absent in the design of many projects, and in donor funding allocations. In line with the HRI's conclusion, we believe that the IASC's Gender Marker should also be used consistently and professionally to support more effective monitoring of humanitarian action from a gender perspective. It must also be supported with other measures to hold humanitarian actors at all levels and in all sectors accountable for their responsibilities to assess and respond to gender-specific needs.

Over the past few months a number of 'Open Days on Women and Peace' have been conducted around the world, in which representatives of women's organisations have met with the

leadership of the United Nations in countries with UN missions. These meetings have become an annual practice, introduced last year as part of the tenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Not surprisingly, many of the recommendations from women's civil society groups are related to humanitarian response, such as the women and girls' need for information regarding protection and resources in crises and disasters, the importance of respecting privacy at relief camps, and the need to include trained women in the distribution of food and non-food items in camps and decision-making positions in camp or local disaster management or preparedness committees to ensure gender balance and voice in these structures. The message of these women resonates with that of millions of women and girls affected by emergencies all over the world.

My organisation, UN Women, is in its early days. It will not be a supplier of humanitarian relief services. Its role is to support coordination and accountability efforts and humanitarian providers to make determined and consistent responses to women's needs in humanitarian emergencies. As part of our plans, UN Women plans to develop the capacity for assessment and coordination of gender-specific needs in humanitarian responses. We will help concentrate the collective synergies, skills and resources of our partners to meet women's immediate survival and safety needs and to build women's empowerment for the longer-term resilience of communities and sustainability of humanitarian action.

As humanitarian disasters become more frequent and more devastating, failure to put women's safety and empowerment at the centre of responses will undermine the effectiveness of relief efforts. In this regard, the HRI 2011 provides valuable analysis and recommendations on how we can collectively move forward. I hope the findings can help us all to better understand the challenges faced by women in humanitarian crises, and find lasting means to build the capacity and resilience of women to face and recover from situations of disasters and conflicts.

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