



***Equipped to meet tomorrow's humanitarian challenges?
Conference marking the 20th anniversary of the Code of Conduct***

Geneva, 5th December 2014, 09:00–17:15, The Auditorium, IFRC

Organised by the **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and the **Norwegian Refugee Council**

**Panel 1 - Principled humanitarian action in emergencies:
Operational dilemmas and innovative solutions**

Intervention of Abbas Aroua, Director of the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva

Ladies and Gentlemen good morning.

I am so pleased to be here with this honourable audience, this family of the humanitarian action, with our neighbours. Our offices are 200 m from this place.

Many thanks to the organisers for this great opportunity to meet and to talk about the CoC.

We have been following the evolution of the CoC for more than a decade when we started to be interested by issues related to humanitarian action. Since 2002 we have noticed the huge negative impact of the post-9/11 “war on terror” on the humanitarian field.

Let me clarify that the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva is not involved in humanitarian action. But we do have a programme called “Humanitarian Mediation” or HUMED. Our focus is on conflict transformation in the humanitarian field.

This programme was motivated by three observations:

- 1) The humanitarian action is directly impacted by violent conflict, and humanitarian actors must be aware of the specific challenges in conflict areas;
- 2) Many of the humanitarian actors we know expressed their wish to become peace actors and asked for training in conflict transformation;

3) There is a lack of effective cooperation between humanitarian agencies coming from different cultural backgrounds. They often work side by side but fail to engage in a joint work in order to get more than the sum of their efforts, a real synergy.

I will focus on this third point, and on the Arab and Muslim world. We have no expertise on other cultural contexts (African, Indian, Chinese, etc.), but the challenges there, might be similar.

Before that, I would like to say a word on the applicability of humanitarian principles. In order to apply these principles in the daily activity, they must transform into natural reflexes. For that to happen, collective and personal ownership is a prerequisite. The principles have to vibrate in the inner space of the humanitarian actor with his or her values and beliefs. They must be derived from his or her own worldview.

I have gone through the last version of the list of signatories of the CoC. A couple of figures attracted my attention:

The NGOs that work on the Muslim world represent 10% (54/546).

The NGOs that are based the Muslim world represent 5% (28/546).

The NGOs that are based in the Arab world represent 1% (6/546).

The NGOs that are based in the Gulf region represent 0.4% (2/546).

Two NGOs in a region where billions of dollars are spent in international humanitarian action.

How to explain these figures, which do not reflect the weight of the humanitarian action in the Muslim world?

I asked this question to many actors involved in faith-based charities in that region.

The answers were the following. They might be disturbing for some of us but I have to be frank with my friends.

1) The CoC is the work of 4-5 Western Christian faith-based agencies.

2) The process that led to the CoC was not inclusive. We were not associated, although we were actors in the field.

3) When we suffered the post-9/11 repressive policies, most, if not all, Western agencies failed to follow one of the main principles of humanitarian action, i.e. solidarity.

4) Many Western humanitarian agencies see us as organizations supporting terrorism, if not terrorist organizations.

My reaction to these answers was this:

If you are not comfortable with a CoC produced by others, fine. Then do it yourself. Establish your own CoC or Charter. Let people know what your values, principles, methodologies are. Explain your conception of what you call “the work of goodness” (*al-amal al-khayri*).

From 2005, we started working on a project of an Islamic Charter, jointly with several “Work of Goodness Organisations” (WGOs). This Charter was finalised three years later, and in 2010, it was presented and welcomed in a conference of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Doha.

The Charter is a working document consisting of 21 humanitarian principles grouped in seven chapters. Any WGO can use it as it is or take what they wish and reformulate.

This Charter and its introduction are published in Arabic in “*The work of goodness: A comprehensive approach to human security*” and in English in Chapter 6 of “*The Quest for Peace in the Islamic Tradition*” (both publications are available online at: cordoue.ch).

Now that this theoretical work is done, we can envisage the setting of safe mediation spaces for Islamic and Western charities to meet and know each other, to dialogue, to discover that they have a significant common ground of shared values, and possibly, to seek joint action in the field (diapaxis), which is the best way to allay fears and build confidence.

I will end my intervention by conveying the greetings of the president of the World Association of Humanitarian Organisations, a gathering of over 200 NGOs in the Muslim World, who wishes us a successful conference and underlines, in his letter, the fact that time is now for international cooperation in the humanitarian field for the good of humanity.

Thank you for your attention.