

# Humanitarian Relief Operations



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**Peace Operations Training Institute®**  
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*Cover Photo: UN Photo #489713 by Marco Dormino. Valerie Amos (front, in white), Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, is shown through Accra camp, home to thousands of Haitians displaced since the 2010 earthquake. 29 September 2011.*

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# Humanitarian Relief Operations

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## Foreword

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Each disaster or emergency is different, and so is each humanitarian relief operation. Understanding the dynamics of a disaster and all the actors involved is essential to provide adequate assistance to the affected population and government. Over the years, some have criticized the humanitarian community for the conduct of certain humanitarian actions. Practitioners have not always applied the lessons previously learned from humanitarian relief operations. Numerous documents and manuals have recorded best practices leading to a better response when applied. Unfortunately, humanitarian action is not an exact science and will depend on the ability and adaptability of the humanitarian worker to the situation on the ground.

This course does not claim to be complete, as it would be impossible to describe every aspect of humanitarian relief within this setting. It is a general course and is meant to serve as an introduction to humanitarian relief and other related topics. Whenever possible or required, additional reading material is referenced, including books, documents (including annexes), and websites of interest. Students are encouraged to read them in order to expand their knowledge.

Like many other communities, the humanitarian community has its own language, such as the use of acronyms, and dynamic character. Continuous development of new systems and methods within this community are common. Major disasters often lead to the creation of an additional layer of rules and directives making the situation increasingly complex for “outsiders”. This course attempts to simplify these concepts as much as possible by focusing on the most important aspects to demystify this complex environment. At the same time, this course provides much practical information on the different types of disasters and how to interact with some entities and structures often deployed in the field. Whenever possible, humanitarian actors should integrate existing and/or established coordination structures, as only coordinated action can achieve success. Approaching the affected population not as victims but as part of the solution necessitates a fundamental change in the mindset of humanitarian actors, but it is essential to the successful outcome of a relief action. In the end, we will be held accountable for what we did — and what we failed to do. A good understanding of definitions and principles is a first step to integrate into this humanitarian community by respecting each other and the humanitarian principles that should always guide our action.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Mr. Jesper Lund, head of the Field Coordination Support Section and Mr. Josef Reiterer, head of the Civil-Military Coordination Section, both in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — Geneva for their kind support and constructive remarks. Finally, my thanks to Mr. Lars-Peter Nissen, CEO of ACAPS, who allowed me to use their valuable resources, which were essential in the development of some parts of this course.

–Lieutenant Colonel René Wagemans, 2017



View a video introduction of this course at <http://www.peaceopstraining.org/videos/477/introduction-humanitarian-relief-operations/>.

## Method of Study

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*This self-paced course aims to give students flexibility in their approach to learning. The following steps are meant to provide motivation and guidance about some possible strategies and minimum expectations for completing this course successfully:*

- Before you begin studying, first browse through the entire course. Notice the lesson and section titles to get an overall idea of what will be involved as you proceed.
  - The material is meant to be relevant and practical. Instead of memorizing individual details, strive to understand concepts and overall perspectives in regard to the United Nations system.
  - Set personal guidelines and benchmarks regarding how you want to schedule your time.
  - Study the lesson content and the learning objectives. At the beginning of each lesson, orient yourself to the main points. If possible, read the material twice to ensure maximum understanding and retention, and let time elapse between readings.
  - At the end of each lesson, take the End-of-Lesson Quiz. Clarify any missed questions by rereading the appropriate sections, and focus on retaining the correct information.
  - After you complete all of the lessons, prepare for the End-of-Course Examination by taking time to review the main points of each lesson. Then, when ready, log into your online student classroom and take the End-of-Course Examination in one sitting.
- » ***Access your online classroom at***  
***<[www.peaceopstraining.org/users/user\\_login](http://www.peaceopstraining.org/users/user_login)>***  
***from virtually anywhere in the world.***
- Your exam will be scored electronically. If you achieve a passing grade of 75 per cent or higher on the exam, you will be awarded a Certificate of Completion. If you score below 75 per cent, you will be given one opportunity to take a second version of the End-of-Course Examination.
  - A note about language: This course uses English spelling according to the standards of the Oxford English Dictionary (United Kingdom) and the United Nations Editorial Manual.

### **Key Features of Your Online Classroom »**

- Access to all of your courses;
- A secure testing environment in which to complete your training;
- Access to additional training resources, including multimedia course supplements;
- The ability to download your Certificate of Completion for any completed course; and
- Forums where you can discuss relevant topics with the POTI community.

## LESSON

## 1

## Humanitarian Intervention



UN Photo #325919 by Marie Frechon.

This lesson is an introduction to humanitarian intervention, beginning with definitions and a short historical overview.

### In this lesson »

- Section 1.1 What is a Humanitarian Relief Operation?
- Section 1.2 Historical Overview – From Charity to Intervention
- Section 1.3 Different Types of Emergencies and Disasters
- Section 1.4 Humanitarian Principles and Legal Aspects
- Section 1.5 The Changing Operating Environment and its Consequences
- Section 1.6 The “Do No Harm” Principle
- Section 1.7 Cultural Awareness

### Lesson Objectives »

- Distinguish, understand, and compare different terms used to describe humanitarian relief operations.
- Understand and explain different kinds of emergencies.
- Understand and recall different humanitarian principles.
- Describe legal considerations and the operating environment.
- Analyse the operational context and understand potential courses of action for aid delivery.
- Understand the cultural background of the affected population.



Workers of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and Jenkins and Penn Haitian Relief Organization (J/P HRO) remove street rubble in Delmas 32, Port au Prince, following an earthquake in Haiti. 12 August 2010. UN Photo #464701 by Marco Dormino.

## Introduction

It is essential for peace operations personnel to understand the guiding principles of humanitarian intervention, as well as the operating environment, its context, and its cultural background. Students should be aware that some sections are short for two main reasons:

- They will be discussed at length in the following lessons; or
- Their content is too complex to be explained *in extenso*, and students will be directed to read the full document or book outside of this course.



View a video introduction of this lesson at <http://www.peaceopstraining.org/videos/478/lesson-1-humanitarian-intervention/>.



Rwandan children who lost their parents resting at Ndosha camp in Goma. 25 July 1994.  
UN Photo #78969 by John Isaac.

## Section 1.1 What is a Humanitarian Relief Operation?

Due to its complex nature, it is difficult to provide one single definition for a humanitarian relief operation (HRO); however, a review of both military and civilian literature reveals some frequently used terms and compatibilities/commonalities between them.

- » **Disaster Relief:** The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence defines disaster relief as “the organized response to alleviate the results of a catastrophe. The aims are to: save life; relieve suffering; limit damage; restore essential services to a level that enables local authorities to cope; and set the conditions for recovery.”<sup>1</sup>
- » **Disaster Relief Operation (DRO):** The UK Ministry of Defence defines a DRO “as a primary Military Task and contribution to a disaster relief response. It provides specific assistance to an afflicted overseas population. Disaster Relief is a specified Military Task categorized as a Contingent Operation Overseas in Defence Strategic Guidance (DSG).”<sup>2</sup>

### Quote »

“To give away money is an easy matter and in any man’s power. But to decide to whom to give it and how large and when, and for what purpose and how, is neither in every man’s power nor an easy matter.”<sup>1</sup>

–Aristotle

i) National Philanthropic Trust, “Philanthropy Quotes”. Available from: <<https://www.nptrust.org/history-of-giving/philanthropic-quotes/>>.

1) United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, *Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 3-52, Disaster Relief Operations Overseas: the Military Contribution*. Available from: <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/574033/doctrine\\_uk\\_dro\\_jdp\\_3\\_52.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/574033/doctrine_uk_dro_jdp_3_52.pdf)>.  
2) Daragh Murray, *Practitioners’ Guide to Human Rights Law in Armed Conflict*, Dapo Akande, Charles Garraway, Francoise Hampson, Noam Lubell, Elizabeth Wilmshurst, eds. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016).

- » **Emergency Relief** is “the immediate survival assistance to the victims of crisis and violent conflict. Most relief operations are initiated on short notice and have a short implementation period (project objectives are generally completed within a year). The main purpose of emergency relief is to save lives.”<sup>3</sup>
- » **Humanitarian action** “provides life-saving services and facilitates the return to normalcy for people and communities affected by natural and man-made disasters. It also seeks to lessen the destructive impact of disasters and complex emergencies. Humanitarian response is guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, which provide a common framework for organizations involved in humanitarian action.”<sup>4</sup>
- » **Humanitarian action** “comprises assistance, protection and advocacy in response to humanitarian needs resulting from natural hazards, armed conflict or other causes, or emergency response preparedness. It aims to save lives and reduce suffering in the short term, and in such a way as to preserve people’s dignity and open the way to recovery and durable solutions to displacement. Humanitarian action is based on the premise that human suffering should be prevented and alleviated wherever it happens (referred to as the ‘humanitarian imperative’).”<sup>5</sup>
- » **Humanitarian assistance** is generally accepted to mean the aid and action designed to “save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for when such situations occur.”<sup>6</sup>
- » **Humanitarian Assistance** is “[a]id that seeks ... to save lives and alleviate suffering of a crisis-affected population. Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality, as stated in General Assembly Resolution 46/182. In addition, the UN seeks to provide humanitarian assistance with full respect for the sovereignty of States.”<sup>7</sup>

3) ReliefWeb, “Glossary of Humanitarian Terms”, 2008. Available from: <[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/4F99A3C28EC37D0EC12574A4002E89B4-reliefweb\\_aug2008.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/4F99A3C28EC37D0EC12574A4002E89B4-reliefweb_aug2008.pdf)>.

4) InterAction: A United Voice for Global Change, “Humanitarian Action”. Available from: <<https://www.interaction.org/work/humanitarian>>.

5) United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Introduction to Humanitarian Action: A Brief Guide for Resident Coordinators*, October 2015, 8. Available from: <[https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/rc\\_guide\\_31\\_october\\_2015\\_webversion\\_final.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/rc_guide_31_october_2015_webversion_final.pdf)>.

6) Development Initiatives, “Defining humanitarian assistance”. Available from: <<http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/data-guides/defining-humanitarian-aid/>>.

7) ReliefWeb, “Glossary of Humanitarian Terms”.

- » **Humanitarian Intervention** is “a doctrine generally understood to mean coercive action by States involving the use of armed force in another State without the consent of its government, with or without authorization from the UN Security Council, for the purpose of preventing or putting to a halt gross and massive violations of human rights or international humanitarian law. The UN’s operations in Northern Iraq and Somalia, and NATO’s operation in Kosovo have all been termed humanitarian intervention.”<sup>8</sup>
- » **Humanitarian Operations** are conducted to relieve human suffering, especially in circumstances where responsible authorities in the area are unable or unwilling to provide adequate service support to civilian populations.<sup>9</sup>
- » **Emergency Response** is “the immediate and appropriate action to save lives, ensure protection, and restore the well-being of refugees.”<sup>10</sup>

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) offers the following definitions:

- » **Humanitarian Assistance:** “As part of an operation, the use of available military resources to assist or complement the efforts of responsible civil actors in the operational area or specialized civil humanitarian organizations in fulfilling their primary responsibility to alleviate human suffering.”<sup>11</sup>
- » **Humanitarian Operation:** “An operation specifically mounted to alleviate human suffering where responsible civil actors in an area are unable or unwilling to adequately support a population. It may precede, parallel, or complement the activity of specialized civil humanitarian organizations.”<sup>12</sup>

8) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Glossary”, August 2003. Available from: <<https://www.unicef.org/pathtraining/Documents/Session%201%20Introduction%20to%20Humanitarian%20Action/Participant%20Manual/1.6%20Protection%20of%20Civilians%20in%20Armed%20Conflict%20Glossary.doc>>.

9) OCHA, “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Glossary”.

10) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Handbook for Emergencies – Second Edition*, 1999. Available from: <[https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/UNHCR\\_handbook.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/UNHCR_handbook.pdf)>.

11) NATO Standardization Agency, “NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions”, AAP-6, 2008, 2-H-4.

12) NATO Standardization Agency. “NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions”.

These terms and definitions differ, but they also include similar words like humanitarian, relief, assistance, operations, response, intervention, and action. Each of them contains similar themes, like:

- An urgency to act in assisting a stricken population;
- Assistance guided by humanitarian principles; and
- Saving lives (humanitarian imperative).

It appears that an HRO corresponds to these shared words and themes. Military organizations use slightly different and more restrictive definitions for their approaches; however, they all focus on alleviating human suffering. Lessons 3 and 4 of this course will examine these differences in greater detail.

## Section 1.2 Historical Overview – From Charity to Intervention

### Historical Overview

Humanitarian action may be as old as humanity. Its simplest forms began with sharing and providing necessities like food, water, clothing, health care, and shelter to the unfortunate, whether they were family members or belonged to a larger community or group. Human history contains many examples of acts of charitable giving, and many of the world's religions practice some form of charity, from the Christian and Jewish traditions of "tithing" to the Islamic pillar of "zakat".

In the modern era, simple charitable giving developed into the practice of philanthropy. Taken from the Greek words meaning "the love of humanity", philanthropy seeks to care for, nourish, develop, and enhance what it means to be human.<sup>13</sup> It involves those who give (benefactors), how they give (values), and those who receive and benefit from the service or goods provided (beneficiaries).

Modern philanthropic activities date to the eighteenth century where they were seen as new social activities. Many voluntary associations formed to promote these activities, and they became widespread cultural practices for wealthy benefactors. Later, expanding middle classes in many countries adopted philanthropy as a fashionable activity.

Swiss businessman Henry Dunant is considered to be the father of modern humanitarian action and organizations. Dunant was a leading force behind the First Geneva Convention of 1864 and the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In his 1862 book *Un souvenir de Solferino*,<sup>14</sup> Dunant described the atrocities he witnessed at the 1859 Battle of Solferino during the Second Italian War of Independence, including thousands of killed and wounded soldiers. In the book, he developed



*A Sister of Charity distributes UNRRA food in Belgium. 1 January 1946. UN Photo #114340 by UN.*

13) National Philanthropic Trust, "A History of Modern Philanthropy". Available from: <<http://www.historyofgiving.org/1500-1750/1552-charitable-complex-opens-in-jerusalem/>>.

14) Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino*, Geneva, International Committee of the Red Cross, 1939. Available from: <<https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0361.pdf>>.

several ideas for the future of conflict:

- A neutral organization to provide care to wounded soldiers;
- The creation of permanent volunteer relief societies; and
- The adoption of a treaty to protect wounded soldiers and all who endeavour to come to their aid.

Dunant's ideas would form two of the pillars of what would become the ICRC: impartiality in the provision of medical care and the principle of the neutrality of medical action. A Constitutive Conference in October 1863 laid the statutory foundations of the ICRC that would last for more than 60 years. The *Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field*, commonly known as the First Geneva Convention, adopted these ideas in its provisions, and 12 major European powers signed the agreement on 22 August 1864.<sup>15</sup>

The destruction caused by the First World War led to the creation of the League of Nations in 1920. An international organization headquartered in Geneva, the League of Nations meant to provide a forum for resolving international disputes. US President Woodrow Wilson laid out his vision for the League in 1918 in his "Fourteen Points"<sup>16</sup> on the future of Europe after the war. The final point called for the creation of a new kind of international organization dedicated to fostering international cooperation, providing security for its members, and ensuring a lasting peace. These issues were important to Europeans who had suffered through four years of total war that left many countries in ruins. Wilson's Fourteen Points became the basis for the terms of the German surrender, as negotiated in the Treaty of Versailles at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

The League's goals focused primarily on preventing war through collective security and settling disputes between countries through negotiation and diplomacy. It also promoted disarmament and tried to improve global welfare. The League had three principal organs: the Secretariat (headed by the General Secretary and based in Geneva), the Council, and the General Assembly. The League also had numerous agencies and commissions, including:<sup>17</sup>

- » **International Labour Organization (ILO)** – Led by former French Minister of Armament Albert Thomas, the ILO successfully banned the addition of lead to paint and lobbied several countries to adopt the eight-hour workday and 48-hour working week. It also worked to end child labour, improve the position of women in the workplace, and make ship owners liable for accidents involving sailors. In 1946, the ILO became an agency of the United Nations, which succeeded the League of Nations.

15) François Bugnion, "Birth of an idea: the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: from Solferino to the original Geneva Convention (1859–1864)", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 94 No. 888 Winter 2012. Available from: <<https://www.icrc.org/en/international-review/article/birth-idea-founding-international-committee-red-cross-and-international>>.

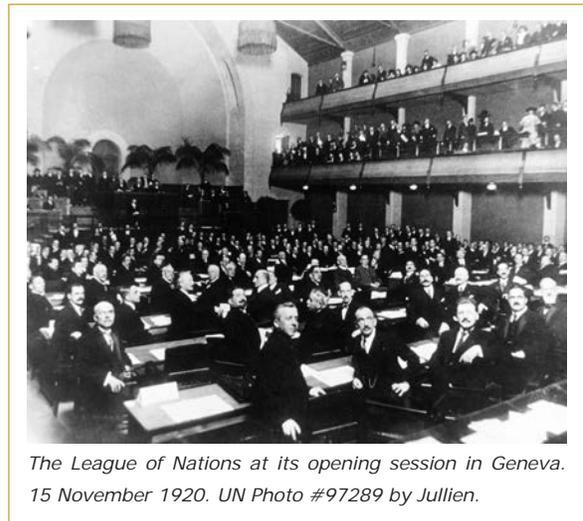
16) United States History, "The Fourteen Points". Available from: <<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1324.html>>.

17) New World Encyclopedia, "League of Nations". Available from: <[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=League\\_of\\_Nations&printable=yes](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=League_of_Nations&printable=yes)>.

- » **High Commission for Refugees** – Led by Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, the Commission oversaw the repatriation and resettlement of 400,000 refugees and former prisoners of war after the First World War, many of whom were stranded in Russia. The Commission also established the so-called “Nansen passport” as a means of identification for stateless peoples. In 1923, the original mandate of the High Commissioner to cover Russian refugees was extended to include Armenian refugees through material assistance, disease prevention, food provision, and legal and political protection. As the refugee problem grew, the Commission’s mandate was expanded to include Assyrians, Chaldean Christians, and Turkish refugees.

The League had 42 members at its founding in 1920, and an additional six members joined by the end of that year. The League reached its highest membership from 1934 to 1935 with 58 members. Despite President Wilson’s support for the League, the United States Senate voted in 1919 to reject the Treaty of Versailles, and with it, membership in the League. The US was not a part of the organization during its operating period from 1920 to 1946. Additionally, 16 of the founding members withdrew from the League during its existence.<sup>18</sup>

While the League of Nations achieved some successes during its period of operation, including addressing refugee crises and improving international labour conditions, it had structural weaknesses that ultimately limited its effectiveness as an international organization. One such weakness was difficulty enforcing its resolutions. The League did not have an armed force of its own but rather depended on the major powers to back up its mandates, which they were often reluctant to do. Similarly, economic sanctions imposed by the League had little impact on targeted countries, as those countries could simply trade with non-members. Despite its goal of solving international conflicts through diplomacy, the League was unable to prevent the Second World War. The League of Nations held its final meeting in Geneva on 18 April 1946.<sup>19</sup>



*The League of Nations at its opening session in Geneva. 15 November 1920. UN Photo #97289 by Jullien.*

Near the end of the Second World War, the Allied powers (the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States) met at the Yalta Conference to plan for the future of international security. The Allies agreed to create a new international body — the United Nations — to succeed the League. Many of the League’s agencies, like the ILO, continued to function and eventually affiliated with the UN.

18) United Nations Office at Geneva, “Chronology”. Available from: <[https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/3DA94AAFE9E8E76C1256F340047BB52/\\$file/sdn\\_chronology.pdf](https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/3DA94AAFE9E8E76C1256F340047BB52/$file/sdn_chronology.pdf)>.

19) Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (October 2007), pp. 1091-1117.

The Allies intended to make the United Nations more effective than the League had been by reforming its structure. The original membership of the UN included 51 countries, and it has since grown to include 193 Member States. With a greater membership, the UN established greater legitimacy in international affairs than the League ever had. The principal allied countries — the Republic of China, France, the UK, the US, and the USSR — became the five permanent members of the new Security Council. Security Council decisions are binding on all members of the UN, and any of the permanent members can veto resolutions put before it. While the League Council (the forerunner of the Security Council) required unanimous votes to approve resolutions, the Security Council requires only nine “yes” votes with no vetoes from a permanent member to pass resolutions.

Like the League before it, the UN does not have its own standing armed forces. However, the UN has been more successful than its predecessor when calling on its members to contribute to armed interventions, for example, repelling the invasion of the southern part of Korea from the north and the peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. Additionally, economic sanctions and embargos are other tools the UN can use.

The aftermath of the Second World War also saw the creation of several UN and other agencies, as well as large non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on providing humanitarian aid worldwide. Lesson 2 will examine these groups and their actions in greater detail.

### Section 1.3 Different Types of Emergencies and Disasters

This section refers to official UN documents to be as precise as possible in defining some disasters and emergencies.

- » **Disaster:** “A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

Comment: Disasters are often described as a result of the combination of: the exposure to a hazard; the conditions of vulnerability that are present; and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce or cope with the potential negative consequences. Disaster impacts may include loss of life, injury, disease and other negative effects on human physical, mental and social well-being, together with damage to property, destruction



*Residents of the commune of Torbek on the outskirts of Haiti's western city, Les Cayes, struggle to pick up the pieces after the devastating passage of Hurricane Matthew. 13 October 2010. UN Photo #699469 by Logan Abassi.*

of assets, loss of services, social and economic disruption and environmental degradation.”<sup>20</sup>

Besides the physical impact of the natural phenomenon, the social context (which consists of five variables) might transform this phenomenon into a disaster: demography, poverty, environment, existing mechanisms in risk prevention and management, and the level of infrastructure and organizations in place.<sup>21</sup> These five variables can have a multiplying effect, as was seen during the 2010 Haiti crisis.

The humanitarian community distinguishes mainly between “natural disasters” and “complex emergencies”.

- » **Natural Disaster:** “Natural disasters are events brought about by natural hazards that seriously affect the society, economy and/or infrastructure of a region. Depending on population vulnerability and local response capacity, natural disasters will pose challenges and problems of a humanitarian nature. The term ‘natural disaster’ is used for ease. It is important to understand, however, that the magnitude of the consequences of sudden natural hazards is a direct result of the way individuals and societies relate to threats originating from natural hazards. The magnitude of the consequences is, thus, determined by human action, or the lack thereof.”<sup>22</sup>
- » **Natural hazard:** “Natural process or phenomenon that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.

Comment: Natural hazards are a sub-set of all hazards. The term is used to describe actual hazard events as well as the latent hazard conditions that may give rise to future events. Natural hazard events can be characterized by their magnitude or intensity, speed of onset, duration, and area of extent. For example, earthquakes have short durations and usually affect a relatively small region, whereas droughts are slow to develop and fade away and often affect large regions. In some cases hazards may be coupled, as in the flood caused by a hurricane or the tsunami that is created by an earthquake.”<sup>23</sup>

20) United Nations, *2009 UNISDR Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction*, Geneva, Switzerland, UNISDR, May 2009. Available from: <[http://www.unisdr.org/files/7817\\_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf](http://www.unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf)>.

21) Frédéric Thomas, *Haiti, L'échec humanitaire : le cas haïtien* (Bruxelles, Belgium: Entraide & Fraternite), 2. Available from: <[https://www.entraide.be/IMG/pdf/e\\_f\\_thomas\\_ecran.pdf](https://www.entraide.be/IMG/pdf/e_f_thomas_ecran.pdf)>.

22) ReliefWeb, “Glossary of Humanitarian Terms”.

23) United Nations, *2009 UNISDR Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction*.

Sources sometimes use the same definition for both the terms “natural and technological disasters” and “natural disasters”. The term “natural and man-made disasters” also appears sometimes. Technological disasters can be related to man-made disasters: one can result from the other, or both can be the direct consequence of a natural disaster (e.g. an earthquake causing a technical failure that releases pressure from a dam, bursting it and causing a tidal wave and heavy flooding in a large, densely populated area). Many natural disasters have had technological consequences, such as the earthquake and tsunami that caused the 2011 Fukushima nuclear power plant accident. Increasingly, accidents with a significant environmental impact are considered to be disasters whenever national authorities are unable to deal with them, especially when they affect population centres.

- » **Complex Emergency**<sup>24</sup>: “A multifaceted humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires a multi-sectoral, international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country programme. Such emergencies have, in particular, a devastating effect on children and women, and call for a complex range of responses.”

The *UN Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord) Field Handbook* uses the following shorter, more user-friendly definitions for natural disasters and complex emergencies:

- » “**Natural disasters** are events caused by natural hazards that seriously affect the society, economy and/or infrastructure of a region. The humanitarian consequences depend on the vulnerability of affected people and their coping and local response capacity.
- » A **complex emergency** is a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single and/or ongoing UN country programme.”<sup>25</sup>

## Emergencies – Levels

The Humanitarian Reform process of 2005 began as a direct consequence of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 2004<sup>26</sup> that caused the deaths of more than 200,000 people.<sup>27</sup> The 2010 Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods reinforced the need to reform multilateral humanitarian responses

24) ReliefWeb, “Glossary of Humanitarian Terms”.

25) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *UN-CMCoord Field Handbook (v1.0)*, Geneva, Switzerland, OCHA, 11. Available from: <[https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/CMCoord%20Field%20Handbook%20v1.0\\_Sept2015\\_0.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/CMCoord%20Field%20Handbook%20v1.0_Sept2015_0.pdf)>.

26) Inter-Agency Standing Committee, “IASC Transformative Agenda”. Available from: <<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>>.

27) “Indian Ocean tsunami: Then and now”, *BBC News*, 25 December 2014. Available from: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30034501>>.

to disasters, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) released its Transformative Agenda (TA) on the issue in December 2011.<sup>28</sup> The TA aimed to fine-tune the overall disaster response by building on lessons learned in 2010 and overcoming shortfalls from the humanitarian reform of 2005.<sup>29</sup> One of the major outcomes of the TA was the creation of new systems and terminology related to these large-scale disasters.

One of the innovations of the TA was the classification of three “levels” of emergencies. While not specifically defined, the TA considers a **Level 1 (L1)** emergency as one in which the national and international resources available in the country are sufficient for the response and do not require outside assistance. **Level 2 (L2)** Emergencies require some support from neighbouring countries, regional entities, and possibly agency headquarters.<sup>30</sup> A **Level 3 (L3)** emergency is a major, system-wide humanitarian crisis triggered by a natural disaster or conflict that requires system-wide mobilization and response. The TA included the L3 classification as a way to strengthen leadership, coordination, and accountability in inter-agency responses to major humanitarian emergencies. Originally designed for sudden-onset emergencies, the L3 classification now includes slow-onset emergencies in exceptional circumstances where the gravity of the situation justifies it. Lesson 2 examines this process in more detail.<sup>31</sup>

## Section 1.4 Humanitarian Principles and Legal Aspects

### The Humanitarian Principles

- » **“Humanity:** Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.
- » **Neutrality:** Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
- » **Impartiality:** Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.



*Nadia Hadi (right), a UN Humanitarian Affairs Officer, coordinates the provision of humanitarian assistance with the manager of a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). 2 April 2009. UN Photo #366069 by Martine Perret.*

28) IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. See also: <<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/>>.

29) Lesson 2 also explores this issue.

30) OCHA, *UNDAC Field Handbook (6<sup>th</sup> edition 2013)*. Available from: <[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDAC%20Handbook%202013\\_english\\_final.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDAC%20Handbook%202013_english_final.pdf)>.

31) This course focuses on L3 emergencies, as they are often the most complex and involve many actors and sectors.

- » **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.”<sup>32</sup>

## Origin

The four humanitarian principles of **humanity**, **neutrality**, **impartiality**, and **independence** form the foundation for all humanitarian action — during a natural disaster, complex emergency, or otherwise.<sup>33</sup> The UN has endorsed all four principles at different times. It affirmed the first three principles in General Assembly resolution 46/182 in 1991 and the fourth principle in General Assembly resolution 58/114 in 2003.

These principles originate in the core principles that guide the activities of the ICRC and the national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and are embodied in several documents. The *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief* provides a set of common standards for all organizations involved in humanitarian activities.<sup>34</sup> The Sphere Project, an international effort<sup>35</sup> to establish standards in core areas of humanitarian assistance, drafted the Humanitarian Charter to affirm the humanitarian imperative<sup>36</sup> and express the shared convictions among humanitarian agencies that are universally applicable to all affected by disaster or conflict.<sup>37</sup>



Anthony Banbury, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), visits an Ebola treatment centre in Kenema, Sierra Leone, run by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). 2 November 2014. UN Photo #610332 by Ari Gaitanis.

The humanitarian principles are fundamental to most humanitarian actors; however, the number and diversity of response actors increased greatly in recent years — and often with a different interpretation of the humanitarian principles. Many of these actors are NGOs, profit-oriented aid or security contractors, and business-oriented individuals or networks with different objectives and cultures and varying levels of expertise and experience in humanitarian affairs. This places significant constraints on the humanitarian principles.

When the Darfur crisis began in 2003, many organizations challenged their neutrality by actively advocating for sensitive civilian protection issues, which were within the clear role and responsibility of

32) OCHA, “What are Humanitarian Principles?” in *OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles*, June 2012, 1. Available from: <[https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples\\_eng\\_June12.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf)>.

33) OCHA, “What are Humanitarian Principles?”.

34) ICRC, *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*. Available from: <<https://www.icrc.org/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>>.

35) The Sphere Project, “The Sphere Project in brief”. Available from: <<http://www.sphereproject.org/about/>>.

36) That action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict, and that nothing should override this principle.

37) The Sphere Project, *The Humanitarian Charter*. Available from: <<http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/95530/The-Sphere-Project-Handbook-20111.pdf>>.

the Sudanese authorities. Some agencies pressed for increasing the power of the African Union/United Nations peacekeeping mission through a stronger mandate, as security issues were hampering relief operations.<sup>38</sup> This public advocacy resulted in threats (mainly from the authorities) against agencies to expel staff members, which was sometimes carried out. Some aid workers were arrested and detained. Humanitarian actors also faced difficulties in renewing working papers for aid workers and long processing times for humanitarian visas and customs clearances. The agencies engaged in policy and protection issues or humanitarian visas and customs clearances faced particularly long processing times, sometimes waiting up to three months.<sup>39</sup>

It may be difficult to determine the boundary between neutrality and engaging publicly in matters of political controversy. Public advocacy for additional security, better access to certain areas, or highlighting the responsibilities of various actors can come across as political statements. This is particularly true regarding protection issues related to a conflict. Although certain humanitarian agencies may be willing to compromise their strict neutrality in cases of life-threatening situations involving affected populations and aid workers, humanitarian actors must find a proper balance between public advocacy and the humanitarian principle of neutrality to avoid the perception of engaging in political or military matters. This “new” or “pragmatic” form of neutrality is not without risks.

## Legal Aspects

This section provides an overview of the principal legal documents that contextualize the humanitarian principles and humanitarian actions.<sup>40</sup>

### The Peace of Westphalia

In 1648, the Holy Roman Empire, the Kingdom of Spain, the Dutch Republic, and other European powers gathered in the Westphalian cities of Osnabrück and Münster to sign a series of peace treaties. The treaties ended the major religious wars that divided Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and ushered in the so-called **Peace of Westphalia**. While the treaties did not restore peace throughout all of Europe, they did create a basis for national self-determination. Two ideas emerged from the peace and became central to the world order that developed over the subsequent centuries: respecting the boundaries of sovereign states and non-interference in their domestic affairs. Those principles remain in effect today. Over time, the long-term significance of the peace treaties came down to:

- The principle of the sovereignty of States and the fundamental right of political self-determination;
- The principle of (legal) equality between States; and
- The principle of non-intervention of one State in the internal affairs of another State.

Many new countries formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The decolonization that occurred in the twentieth century (especially after the Second World War) created even more independent countries. Decolonization spread the Westphalian principles, especially the concept of sovereign States, throughout the world and made them the basis of international law.

38) Overseas Development Institute, “Humanitarian advocacy in Darfur: the challenge of neutrality”, HPG Policy Brief 28, October 2007. Available from: <<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/476.pdf>>.

39) During the Darfur crisis, a Belgian C-130 working for the World Food Programme under a UN call sign was grounded for several days upon arrival by Sudanese (transport and custom) authorities because they wanted to control all numbered parts of the aircraft.

40) For additional key documents, refer to the *Sphere Project Handbook*, Annex 1.

According to the United Nations, **international law** defines the legal responsibilities of countries in their conduct with each other and the treatment of individuals within their boundaries. It encompasses a wide range of issues of international concern including human rights, disarmament, international crime, refugees, migration, problems of nationality, treatment of prisoners, the use of force, and the conduct of war.<sup>41</sup> It also regulates the global commons, such as the environment, sustainable development, international waters, outer space, global communications, and world trade.<sup>42</sup>

As previously noted, international law includes the responsibilities of the State to protect its own population. The *Report of the Secretary-General*, “Implementing the responsibility to protect”, affirmed that “each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”.<sup>43</sup> Failure to respect these responsibilities could lead to a humanitarian intervention.

In the twentieth century, the international community developed definitions for crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes as part of international law. The tribunals at Nuremberg and Tokyo after the Second World War used these definitions to prosecute leaders of the Axis powers for war crimes, crimes against peace, and crimes against humanity committed during the conflict. In the 1990s, the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR) tried crimes committed within specific time frames during the conflicts in those countries.

In 1998, 120 States adopted the Rome Statute, the legal basis for establishing the permanent International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC is an independent international organization based in The Hague, and it is not part of the United Nations system. The ICC has heard several cases, and some remain ongoing.<sup>44</sup>



Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt of the United States holding a Declaration of Human Rights poster in English. 1 November 1949. UN Photo #1292 by United Nations.

## The Universal Declaration of Human Rights >>

*“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.” –Article 2*

Read the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:  
<[www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/)>.

41) The First Geneva Convention of 1864 is one of the earliest formulations of international law. See Section 1.2.

42) United Nations, “International Law and Justice”. Available from: <<http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/international-law-and-justice/index.html>>.

43) United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General*, “Implementing the responsibility to protect”, A/63/677, 12 January 2009.

44) International Criminal Court, “Situations under investigation” (8 November 2016). Available from: <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/pages/situations.aspx>>.

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Representatives with different national, legal, and cultural backgrounds drafted the Declaration, and the General Assembly proclaimed it in Paris on 10 December 1948 in General Assembly resolution 217 A (III). The Declaration serves as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. It sets out fundamental human rights that should be universally protected.

**International Humanitarian Law** is a set of rules that, for humanitarian reasons, seek to limit the effects of armed conflict. A major part of International Humanitarian Law is contained in the four **Geneva Conventions of 1949** and **Additional Protocols of 1977** relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts. These only apply to armed conflict and do not cover internal tensions.<sup>45</sup>

## Section 1.5 The Changing Operating Environment and its Consequences

Since the end of the Second World War, the environment in which humanitarian organizations operate has changed, with humanitarian aid workers facing a growing threat. Several reasons account for this:

1. The nature of warfare is increasingly irregular. New kinds of non-State actors — part ethnic, part political, and part criminal — conducted the decolonization that followed the Second World War. Their command and control structure was often weak with little or no internal discipline. Respect for internationally recognized symbols increasingly became an issue of concern.<sup>46</sup>
2. The number of humanitarian organizations increased, and the perceived impartiality of humanitarians eroded. While the Red Cross movement previously dominated the provision of humanitarian services in armed conflict, more organizations — some more humanitarian than others — joined the field. Some did not adhere to the humanitarian principles (for example, some were profit-oriented), jeopardizing the humanitarian action of the agencies that did adhere to the principles.
3. The role of humanitarian organizations changed, and the perception of their impartiality eroded. Some organizations were seen as being too close to political or military actors, especially during (armed) conflicts. Additionally, some organizations contracted private security agencies, some of which carried arms.

Recently, there has been a major development in the way humanitarians conduct their actions. Previously, most humanitarian workers had little to no knowledge about “humanitarian work” when they entered the field. Compassion or adventurism compelled them to provide assistance, and many learned on the job. Today, increasing numbers of young aid workers have a high degree of academic and/or “humanitarian” education. New resources (e.g. ReliefWeb, project websites, etc.) and tools (handbooks,

45) ICRC Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, “What is International Humanitarian Law?”, July 2004. Available from: <[https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/what\\_is\\_ihl.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf)>.

46) Lesson 5 covers safety and security issues due to the changing environment.

manuals, directives, etc.) added to the professionalization of humanitarian action and the aid worker. Each new crisis resulted in an additional layer of regulations and new directives to improve the system, often making the humanitarian environment seem impenetrable for outsiders.

Despite these positive developments, competition among aid organizations for funding and visibility remains a subject of concern. The proliferation of organizations in recent decades and the struggle for funding has at times incited unethical behaviour by some actors on the ground. In some ways, humanitarian assistance has become “big business”. Some organizations and agencies emphasize visibility to ensure donor money for the next financial year, thereby safeguarding jobs, power, and personal interests. They may spend money with little to no accountability or expected results for the affected population. Some have criticized the aid industry in general for lacking efficiency, professionalism, and coordination, which often results in duplication of effort and wasted resources.<sup>47</sup>

### **Accountability**

In light of these issues, accountability became important for many donors, both private and State-funded. Professional standards emerged that focused on the quality of humanitarian action. Donors began holding organizations accountable for the performance of staff and directly linked donor money to the improvement of an organization’s management system. This led to an increased delegation from headquarters to field managers and local staff, as they could best measure the ways to deliver aid. Donors began to require regular reporting — financial and otherwise — or aid organizations ran the risk of forfeiting the funds and/or becoming subject to a fraud investigation. Donors began to pressure main stakeholders, such as national governments and UN agencies, to comply with certain policies and courses of action.<sup>48</sup> Finally, donors began keeping themselves accountable by aiming for the highest possible result at the lowest possible cost. Selecting the “right” project or programme to guarantee maximum efficiency became increasingly important to avoid both public and internal criticism.

The new focus on results had negative side effects, however. It led organizations to restructure into a bureaucratic system of proposal-writing, form-completing, and reporting. This forced managers in the field to spend more time ensuring compliance than delivering aid in the field. Another downside of this culture was increased risk aversion among donors when spending money. Donors wanted the highest results for their money and became reluctant to spend it on projects without a guaranteed outcome. Risk is inherent to humanitarian response. Crises are often chaotic and unpredictable despite advances in assessment tools and methodology. Eliminating risk often means limiting a programme to such an extent that it impacts outcomes (e.g. reducing the affected area, reducing the distribution area, or neglecting a specific vulnerable group). This could discourage managers from pursuing the most effective programme for fear of not receiving the necessary funding.

Although aid organizations made progress in recent decades, aid workers must be aware that accountability will remain an issue for all parties involved in the response to a disaster: the recipient aid organization, donors, the affected government, and the affected population. The way organizations design and deliver aid will have an impact on the operating environment, be it a disaster or armed conflict.

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47) Humanitarian Practice Network, *Humanitarian Exchange* No. 52, October 2011. Available from: <<http://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/1999/11/humanitarianexchange052.pdf>>.

48) Humanitarian Practice Network, *Humanitarian Exchange*, 45.

## Section 1.6 The “Do No Harm” Principle<sup>49</sup>

Many organizations and aid workers use the expression “do no harm”, but what does it mean? What is its link with humanitarian relief operations? Development scholar Mary B. Anderson describes the responsibilities aid agencies and staff members have in providing assistance during conflicts in her book, *Do No Harm*.<sup>50</sup>

Anderson writes, “aid given during conflict cannot remain separate from that conflict”.<sup>51</sup> This applies to disasters and the way this aid affects the aftermath of the disaster and the affected population. This is a starting point aid organizations and workers should recognize, no matter how innocent an action or assistance appears.

In the immediate aftermath of a crisis or disaster, aid organizations and workers often encounter reactions that are irrational and emotional. They come from politicians under pressure, heightened media attention to the disaster, or public opinion pushing authorities to “do something”. This not only affects political leaders but also applies to the aid industry and organizations eager to provide assistance — and those seeking to generate visibility. It is impossible to make a hasty decision and also analyse it to its full extent, measuring its impact and expected outcome. Handbooks, standards, guidelines, and institutional knowledge can help agencies know how to react to certain types of disasters, but organizations and workers must be careful to avoid missteps in delivering aid, which are often due to a lack of analysis.

Time is of the essence in responding to disasters, but aid organizations and workers must be sure to analyse the situation first. Acquiring first-hand information about the situation on the ground will depend on the capacity of each organization and the UN system to provide real-time information. In the chaotic initial phases, it is important to involve the affected population as much as possible; however, this may be difficult. In many cases, national or local authorities may represent the affected population, and those authorities may have their own agendas and (political) interests. Unfortunately, every crisis, disaster, or conflict has groups or individuals seeking to benefit and profit from the aid. This is especially true if authorities are unable or unwilling to control these profit-oriented groups and organizations.

Aid organizations and workers must clarify some essential questions:

- How will the aid be distributed and why?
- Who will distribute the aid and why?
- Who will receive the aid and why?
- What will the aid consist of and why?
- From where will it be distributed and why?

Another question to answer is, how will this impact the different (vulnerable) groups within an affected community? (e.g. If we only focus on the displaced people living in temporary shelters and do not consider those who might have sought refuge with family or relatives, will we

### Quote >>

“There are risks and costs to a programme of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”

–John F. Kennedy, US President,  
1961–1963

49) The environment during and after a natural disaster shares many parallels and commonalities with (armed) conflicts. Conflict forces aid workers to deepen their knowledge and analytical capacity regarding the way they provide assistance. Students should keep this in mind while reading this section. For more on this important subject, see: Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace--Or War* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

50) Anderson, *Do No Harm*.

51) Ibid, 36.

create tensions between these two groups?) Aid organizations and workers might assist minorities under the assumption that they are the weak ones, ignoring the suffering of others. Political interest and pressure on whether or not to provide aid are factors organizations, and workers may have to learn to resist. This can be exploited, however, as authorities may not want to distribute aid if the affected population belongs to a political opposition or minority group.

Another example of how aid could actually harm a population is so-called “cash for work” (CFW), especially if the programme has not been fully analysed and considered. CFW is often used for large public or community works projects (e.g. cleaning up rubble after a

disaster). It provides families with an income that they can spend freely; however, projects should consider the existing seasonal calendar to investigate whether the CFW activity may clash with other key household labour commitments, such as agriculture (e.g. planting, harvesting) or seasonal migration (e.g. assisting farmers/landowners in seasonal labour). Failing to do so can disrupt people’s survival and livelihood recovery strategies, often by manufacturing food shortages during the next season.<sup>52</sup>

The provision of food in particular requires a detailed analysis. Will it disturb the local market by affecting prices? How will it impact the whole commercial system, from the farmer to the market trader? Would it be better to provide cash instead of food to support local markets if there is enough food available locally? What are the short- and long-term consequences? Providing aid is a more complex effort than it may appear on the surface.

Aid delivery during conflict may also have unintended consequences. Local warlords and/or parties in a conflict may target aid delivery. Theft of aid is common, including at checkpoints (e.g. paying access to the area), at warehouses during the night, or simply stolen from the local population as a “tax” or protection fee. The stolen resources may be sold and the money used to buy weapons. In this way, aid can perpetuate a conflict. Understanding the context of a conflict is not easy. Examining all stakeholders and actors can help provide an understanding of the context. Who gains and who loses? Who has the power? How are the different actors related to each other? The warring factions will not view the aid and its delivery as totally neutral. Aid agencies must identify strategies on how to deter theft in their aid programmes. What works in one area might not be effective in another. There is no “one size fits all” solution.



*The World Food Programme (WFP) and their local partner, Fondation pour le Développement et L'encadrement de la Famille Haitienne (Fondefh), distribute food to residents of Torbek, a commune on the outskirts of Les Cayes that was heavily damaged by Hurricane Matthew. 13 October 2016. UN Photo #699472 by Logan Abassi.*

52) Sarah Bailey and Paul Harvey, “Cash transfer programming in emergencies”. Available from: <<http://odhpn.org/resources/cash-transfer-programming-in-emergencies/>>.



Cultural representatives present Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon traditional cuisine on his departure from Osh, Kyrgyzstan. 11 June 2015. UN Photo #634142 by Rick Bajornas.

There are many other examples of how aid delivery can negatively affect the environment and its population. The intentions of aid agencies and workers may be noble, with humanity as a basic principle. Whenever organizations and workers provide aid, they must ensure their actions do not create an unsustainable environment, disrupt the affected population, or create dependency.

## Section 1.7 Cultural Awareness

Aid organizations and workers must also be aware of one other significant issue: the cultural aspects of the affected community and environment. People may view their actions through their own frame of reference without considering another point of view. Aid organizations and workers must be aware that actions that are acceptable in their society might be unacceptable in another. The first contact with an affected population and its authorities can be a deciding factor in the relationship between aid organizations and the population. Accordingly, humanitarians must ensure they behave in a culturally acceptable manner.

How can aid organizations and workers manage cultural differences? In his book, *Les Identités meurtrières*, Amin Maalouf describes culture as the sum of two heritages: one vertical from our ancestors (tradition, people, community, mother tongue, religion, etc.), the other one horizontal and based on our personal context (job, living place, relations, social class, education, academic training, experience, etc.).<sup>53</sup> We tend to categorize people through preconceived ideas, leading to false perceptions of the “other”. If we are conscious of our cultural differences, we may be able to understand the social context better. There are 10 differences humanitarians should take into account when analysing cultural differences:<sup>54</sup>

53) Amin Maalouf, *Les Identités meurtrières* (Paris, France, Editions Grasset, 1998), 137.

54) Deborah Mancini-Griffoli and André Picot, *Humanitarian Negotiation: A Handbook for Securing Access, Assistance and Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict*, October 2004. Available from: <<http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/humanitarian-negotiation-manual.pdf>>.



*Residents of a Protection of Civilians (POC) site run by the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) perform at a special cultural event last Friday, in Juba. 27 March 2015. UN Photo #627382 by JC McIlwaine.*

- **Relationship with Authority:** How far are power and authority from the affected people?
- **Male-Female Relationships:** What are the gender roles and who decides?
- **Individualism and Collectivism:** Is the community more collectively or individually oriented?
- **Tolerance of Ambiguity:** Does everything need to be clear from the very start of the action?
- **Respect for the Rules:** Do we need to stick to them or are grey zones tolerated?
- **Time:** How is the notion of time perceived?
- **Space and Place:** Is it public or private? Is it accessible to both sexes?
- **Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication:** What can be said? What things should remain unspoken?
- **Sales Pitch:** How passionate do I need to be as a “salesperson”?
- **Bargaining:** Who sets the price first, vendor or buyer (bid)?

Respecting the cultural code of courtesy is often a tricky thing. What is accepted in one culture may be impolite in another. There are many anecdotes and best practices of “dos and don’ts”, but humanitarians should not be afraid to ask local staff in their organization for guidance. Appearance and behaviour also are part of culture, and aid workers may not be immediately aware of some of these issues:

- Hairstyle, body decoration, and manner of dress (some colours can express a social or political tendency);
- Wearing sunglasses, piercings, or tattoos;
- The consumption of alcohol with a host before a meeting; and
- A public expression of anger and irritation, arrogance, and provocation.

Aid workers often question to what extent they should adapt themselves to the prevailing cultural norms. On the one hand, imitating a counterpart's culture could be seen as a sign of respect; on the other, it could appear as a sign of foolishness.<sup>55</sup> Local hosts likely will know practitioners are different, but they will offer accommodations in accordance with their culture of hospitality. The best advice for aid workers is be yourself and use common sense.

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55) Mancini-Griffoli and Picot, *Humanitarian Negotiation*.

## End-of-Lesson Quiz »

1. **Which of the following is NOT part of the definition of a term commonly related to HRO?**
  - A. The immediate survival assistance to the victims of crisis and violent conflict
  - B. Save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards
  - C. Save infrastructure as the main priority
  - D. Save lives and reduce suffering in the short term, and in such a way as to preserve people's dignity and open the way to recovery
  
2. **All of the following sentences are true EXCEPT \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - A. Henry Dunant is the "father" of modern humanitarian action and organizations
  - B. Woodrow Wilson suggested the creation of an association of nations in his Fourteen Points
  - C. the League of Nations had its own armed forces
  - D. the Allied Powers agreed to create a new body to supplant the League of Nations' role during the Yalta Conference
  
3. **What are the five variables that might transform a phenomenon in a disaster?**
  - A. Population, wealth, disaster risk reduction, disease control, high buildings
  - B. Demography, poverty, environment, existing mechanisms in risk prevention and management, level of infrastructure and organizations in place
  - C. Population growth, labour, waste collection service, emergency services, level of infrastructure and organizations in place
  - D. Adequate birth control, food and nutrition, waste management plan, existing mechanism in risk prevention, poverty
  
4. **Natural disasters are events brought about by \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - A. human error
  - B. complex emergencies
  - C. technological or man-made disasters with no natural aspect
  - D. natural hazards that seriously affect the society, economy, and/or infrastructure of a region
  
5. **According to the *UN-CMCoord Field Handbook*, a complex emergency is a human crisis in a country, region, or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from \_\_\_\_\_ and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of a single and/or ongoing UN country programme.**
  - A. civil war
  - B. internal or external conflict
  - C. internal unrest
  - D. massive population movements
  
6. **What are the four humanitarian principles?**
  - A. Humanity, neutrality, sovereignty, impartiality
  - B. Humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence
  - C. Humanity, sovereignty, impartiality, independence
  - D. Humanity, neutrality, impartiality, accountability

*Answer Key provided on the next page.*

## End-of-Lesson Quiz »

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7. According to the *Report of the Secretary-General, "Implementing the responsibility to protect"*, the responsibility of a State is to protect its own population from \_\_\_\_\_.
- genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity
  - theft, poverty, and forced labour
  - minority groups, forced emigration, and crimes against humanity
  - murder, war crimes, forced emigration, and internal displacement
8. Which of the following was NOT a benefit of increased accountability of HRO?
- It often led organizations to restructure into a bureaucratic system of proposal-writing, form-completing, and reporting
  - It increased the ability to deliver aid in the field
  - It decreased levels of fraud
  - It increased the number of donors ready to fund
9. Which of the following is TRUE of aid delivery during conflict?
- Theft may be common
  - Local warlords and/or parties in a conflict may target it
  - It can be stolen from the local population as a "tax" or protection fee
  - All of the above
10. Our culture is the sum of two heritages: \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tradition and education
  - One vertical from our ancestors and one horizontal and based on our personal context
  - Cultural difference and cultural adaptability
  - Relationships and tolerance

### Answer Key »

- C
- C
- B
- D
- B
- B
- A
- A
- D
- B

## Appendix A: List of Acronyms

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<b>ABC</b>	Airways, Breathing, and Circulation
<b>ACAPS</b>	Assessment Capacities Project
<b>AJP</b>	Allied Joint Publication
<b>AMP</b>	Advanced Medical Post
<b>APARD</b>	African Partnership Aid Rehabilitation and Development
<b>ARI</b>	Acute Respiratory Infection
<b>ASAP</b>	As Soon As Possible
<b>ASR</b>	Assessment Search and Rescue
<b>AWSD</b>	Aid Worker Security Database
<b>B-FAST</b>	Belgian First Aid and Support Team
<b>BMI</b>	body mass index
<b>BoO</b>	Base Of Operations
<b>CA</b>	Comprehensive Approach
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>CBRN</b>	chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear
<b>CER</b>	claim, evidence, reasoning
<b>CERF</b>	Central Emergency Response Fund
<b>CFW</b>	Cash for Work
<b>CGD</b>	Community Group Discussion
<b>CHF</b>	Common Humanitarian Funds
<b>CIMIC</b>	Civil-Military Cooperation
<b>CIS</b>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CLA</b>	Community Level Assessment
<b>CMCoord</b>	Civil-Military Coordination
<b>CMCS</b>	Civil-Military Coordination Section
<b>CMR</b>	Crude Mortality Rate
<b>CSI</b>	Coping Strategies Index

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<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
<b>DG ECHO</b>	Directorate General of Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
<b>DHA</b>	Department of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>DO</b>	Designated Official
<b>DO</b>	direct observation
<b>DP</b>	distribution points
<b>DREF</b>	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
<b>DRO</b>	Disaster Relief Operations
<b>DRT</b>	disaster response team
<b>DSG</b>	Defence Strategic Guidance
<b>DSRSG</b>	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
<b>DZ</b>	drop zone
<b>ECOSOC</b>	Economic and Social Council
<b>EERC</b>	European Emergency Response Capacity
<b>EMT</b>	Emergency Medical Team
<b>EMTCC</b>	Emergency Medical Team Coordination Cell
<b>ERC</b>	Emergency Relief Coordinator
<b>ERCC</b>	Emergency Response Coordination Centre (EU)
<b>ERF</b>	Emergency Response Fund
<b>ERU</b>	Emergency Response Unit
<b>ERW</b>	explosive remnants of war
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ESB</b>	Emergency Service Branch
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EVD</b>	Ebola Virus Disease
<b>FA</b>	Flash Appeal
<b>FACT</b>	Field Assessment Coordination Team

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<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FCSS</b>	Field Coordination Support Section
<b>FMA</b>	Foreign Military Assets
<b>Fondefhf</b>	Fondation pour le Développement et L'encadrement de la Famille Haïtienne
<b>FTS</b>	Financial Tracking Service
<b>GA</b>	General Assembly
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GEGA</b>	Good Enough Guide to Needs Assessment
<b>GIS</b>	geographic information system
<b>GLS</b>	Global Logistics Service (IFRC)
<b>GO</b>	Governmental Organization
<b>HC</b>	Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HEB</b>	high energy biscuits
<b>HPN</b>	Humanitarian Partnership Network
<b>HRO</b>	humanitarian relief operation
<b>HuMOCC</b>	Humanitarian-Military Operation Centre
<b>IAEA</b>	International Atomic Energy Agency
<b>IARRM</b>	Inter-Agency Rapid Reaction Mechanism
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>ICT</b>	Information Communication Technology
<b>ICTR</b>	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
<b>ICTY</b>	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
<b>ICVA</b>	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person

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<b>IEHK 2006</b>	Emergency Health Kit 2006
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent
<b>IGO</b>	International Governmental Organization
<b>IHL</b>	International Humanitarian Law
<b>IHP</b>	International Humanitarian Partnership
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IM</b>	Information Management
<b>INSARAG</b>	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
<b>IO</b>	international organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IPC</b>	Integrated Phase Classification
<b>IRO</b>	International Refugee Organization
<b>J/P HRO</b>	Jenkins and Penn Haitian Relief Organization
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LEMA</b>	Local Emergency Management Authority
<b>LOAC</b>	Law of Armed Conflict
<b>LOG</b>	Logistics Operational Guide
<b>LRT</b>	Logistics Response Team
<b>MCDA</b>	Military Civil Defence Assets
<b>MINUSCA</b>	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
<b>MINUSMA</b>	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
<b>MINUSTAH</b>	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
<b>MIRA</b>	Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment
<b>MOSS</b>	Minimum Operating Security Standards
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MRE</b>	Meal Ready to Eat

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<b>MSB</b>	Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency
<b>MSU</b>	mobile storage unit
<b>MSF</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<b>MUAC</b>	Mid-Upper Arm Circumference
<b>NATF</b>	Needs Assessment Task Force
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NDMA</b>	National Disaster Management Authority
<b>NEMA</b>	National Emergency Management Authority
<b>NFI</b>	Non-Food Item
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>ORS</b>	Oral Rehydration Salts
<b>OSOCC</b>	On-Site Operation and Coordination Centre
<b>PAHO</b>	Pan American Health Organization
<b>PCCV</b>	Prominent Core Council for Vulnerable
<b>POC</b>	Protection of Civilians
<b>PSB</b>	Programme Support Branch
<b>PSF</b>	Peace Support Force
<b>PSO</b>	Peace Support Operations
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>RDC</b>	Reception Departure Centre
<b>RITA</b>	Relief Item Tracking Application
<b>ROE</b>	Rules of Engagement
<b>RS</b>	Richter scale

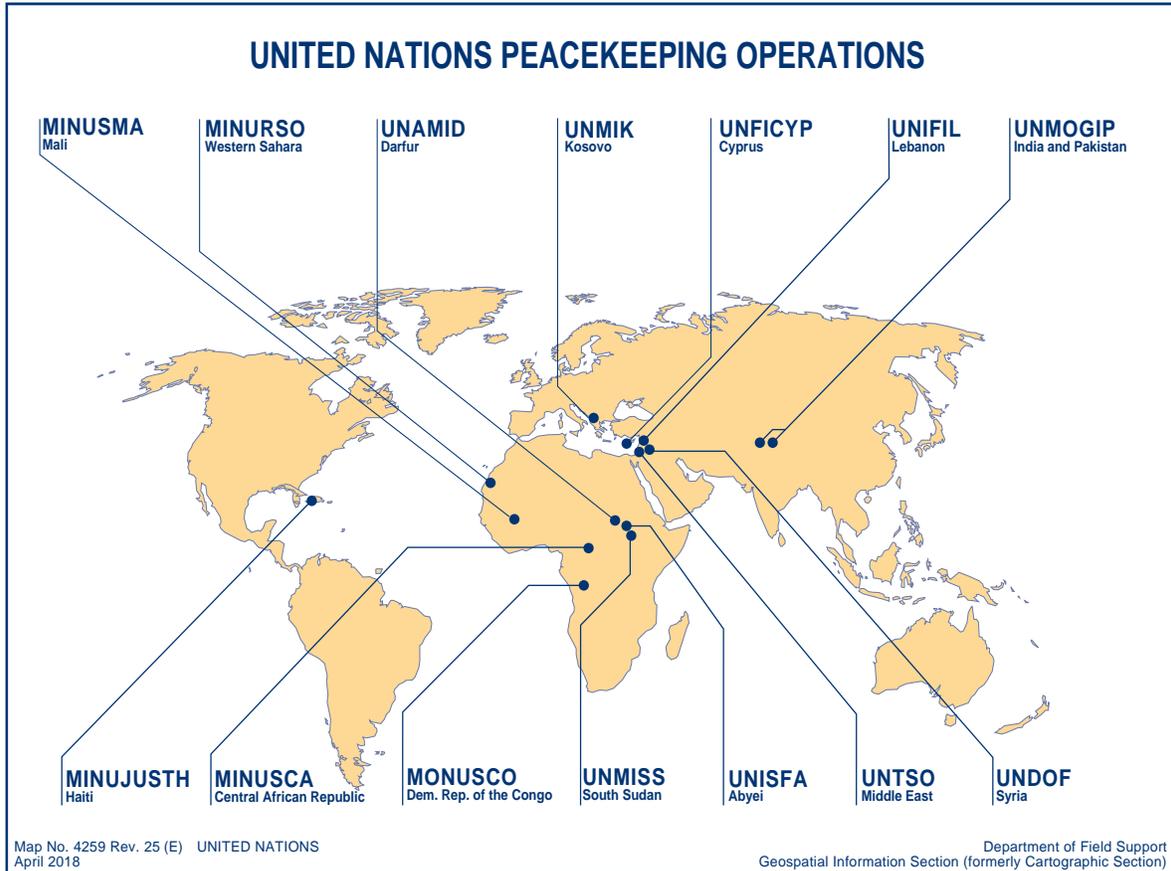
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<b>SA</b>	Situation Analysis
<b>SAM</b>	Severe Acute Malnutrition
<b>SCHR</b>	Southern Centre for Human Rights
<b>SDR</b>	Secondary Data Review
<b>SG</b>	Secretary-General
<b>SHCR</b>	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
<b>SLS</b>	Security Level System
<b>SMT</b>	Security Management Team
<b>SOFA</b>	Status of Forces Agreement
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure
<b>SPLA</b>	Sudan People’s Liberation Army
<b>SRP</b>	Strategic Response Plan
<b>SRS</b>	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
<b>TA</b>	Transformative Agenda
<b>TB</b>	Technical Brief
<b>THW</b>	Technisches Hilfswerk (German Federal Agency for Technical Relief)
<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>U5MR</b>	Under Five Mortality Rate
<b>UAV</b>	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
<b>UCC</b>	USAR Coordination Cell
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and Lesson 5)
<b>UGC</b>	Users’ Group Committee
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNAMID</b>	African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur
<b>UN-CMCoord</b>	United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

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<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDAC</b>	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
<b>UNDSS</b>	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	UN Population Fund
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	UN Human Settlements Programme
<b>UNHAS</b>	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNHRD</b>	United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot
<b>UNICEF</b>	UN Children’s Fund
<b>UNISDR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNMAS</b>	United Nations Mine Action Service
<b>UNMEER</b>	UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response
<b>UNMISS</b>	United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
<b>UNMIT</b>	United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USAR</b>	Urban Search and Rescue
<b>USG</b>	Under-Secretary-General
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>VO</b>	Virtual OSOCC
<b>VOICE</b>	Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WCO</b>	World Customs Organization
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## Appendix B: Current Peacekeeping Missions



UN Peacekeeping Map from the UN Cartographic Section, April 2018: <[www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/P\\_K\\_O.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/P_K_O.pdf)>.

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## About the Author: Lieutenant Colonel René Wagemans (Retired), Belgian Army

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Lieutenant Colonel René Wagemans (Retired) began his career in the Belgian Army in 1977 where he served as head of the Humanitarian Crisis Response Branch (OF-4) at the General Staff.

He retired in 2014 but still serves as reservist within the same staff position. In his career, Wagemans participated in several peacekeeping/peace enforcement missions in staff and command functions. As a representative of the Belgian Army and member of the Belgian First Aid and Support Team, he participated in several humanitarian relief operations, most recently after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. He has been an UNDAC member since 2005 and deployed as a team member and team leader to several disasters. Since 2011, Wagemans has been a lecturer, facilitator, and coach for different UN-OCHA courses as well as courses related to the European Civil Protection Mechanism.

## Instructions for the End-of-Course Examination

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### Format and Material

The End-of-Course Examination is a multiple-choice exam that is accessed from the Online Classroom. Most exams have 50 questions. Each question gives the student four choices (A, B, C, and D), and only one is the correct answer. The exam covers material from all lessons of the course and may also include information found in the annexes and appendices. Video content will not be tested.

- » ***Access the exam from your Online Classroom by visiting <[www.peaceopstraining.org/users/courses/](http://www.peaceopstraining.org/users/courses/)> and clicking the title of this course. Once you arrive at the course page, click the red “Start Exam” button.***

### Time Limit

There is no time limit for the exam. This allows the student to read and study the questions carefully and to consult the course text. Furthermore, if the student cannot complete the exam in one sitting, he or she may save the exam and come back to it without being graded. The “Save” button is located at the bottom of the exam, next to the “Submit my answers” button. Clicking on the “Submit my answers” button will end the exam.

### Passing Grade

To pass the exam, a score of 75 per cent or better is required. An electronic Certificate of Completion will be awarded to those who have passed the exam. A score of less than 75 per cent is a failing grade, and students who have received a failing grade will be provided with a second, alternate version of the exam, which may also be completed without a time limit. Students who pass the second exam will be awarded a Certificate of Completion.

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