

## 2022 VALUE RESOLUTION #1

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Imposing conditions on humanitarian aid is morally justified.

### BACKGROUND

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Earthquakes in Nepal. Volcanoes in Guatemala. Typhoons in the Philippines. Conflict in Yemen. Ebola in West Africa. Every year, disasters wreak havoc across the globe, unduly devastating countries—democracies and dictatorships alike—without the financial resources or infrastructure to prepare. When citizens ruled by oppressive regimes scream for relief, developed countries face a crucial choice: Do they provide humanitarian aid regardless of the recipient, or do they leverage this opportunity to change political structures, placing conditions on aid to induce governments to change their ways?

**What is humanitarian aid?** According to Elrha, a nongovernmental organization researching global crises, humanitarian aid is “designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies.”<sup>1</sup>

Practically, this often involves

- *Material relief assistance and services (shelter, water, medicines etc.)*
- *Emergency food aid (short-term distribution and supplementary feeding programmes)*

- *Relief coordination, protection and support services (coordination, logistics and communications)*
- *Reconstruction relief and rehabilitation (repairing pre-existing infrastructure as opposed to longer-term activities designed to improve the level of infrastructure)*
- *Disaster prevention and preparedness (disaster risk reduction, early warning systems, contingency stocks and planning)<sup>2</sup>*

**Who provides humanitarian aid?** The system of administering aid is fairly complex, involving numerous different private and nongovernmental actors in a globally interconnected system: “[T]he efforts of the most prominent international actors – states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement – have coalesced into a loosely connected ‘system’, with links on the level of finances, operations, personnel and values. They work in collaboration, complementarity, or competition with other providers of humanitarian assistance, such as affected communities themselves, diaspora groups, religious organisations, national actors, militaries and the private sector.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the two are frequently related, humanitarian aid and developmental assistance are importantly distinct in their emphases and timeframes. Humanitarian aid constitutes a short-term disaster response intended to save lives, whereas developmental assistance comprises a long-

term initiative to improve systemic problems.<sup>4</sup> In other words, saving citizens from the aftermath of a tsunami is humanitarian aid, whereas assisting the government with improving structural integrity and evacuation routes to protect against future tsunamis is developmental assistance.

## STRENGTHS

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While most LD resolutions have international implications, this resolution directly thrusts debaters into relevant global issues with a clear and balanced philosophical conflict and solid research base. Additionally, it engages meaningful questions of government obligation from a different vantage point than prior NCFCA resolutions.

## WEAKNESSES

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Some of the research is dense and may be difficult for younger debaters. Moreover, with a plethora of real world applications, some debaters may be tempted to shirk the underlying philosophical issues altogether and predominately appeal to examples, not principles.

## VALUES

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Although value resolutions usually contrast two concepts, this resolution is still fundamentally a value resolution: Debaters must articulate and defend standards for moral justification and evaluate the conditioning of humanitarian aid according to those standards.

Standards for moral justification can be categorized in two groups: deontological and consequentialist arguments. The former refers to the idea that morality

fundamentally consists in fulfilling one's duty or obligation regardless of the consequences (deontology is derived from *deon*, Greek for "duty"). The latter suggests that the practical consequences determine morality.

In the context of humanitarian aid, deontological arguments revolve around the extent of a government's obligation to supply humanitarian assistance:

- Do governments have a duty to provide humanitarian aid?
- If so, is this duty inherently unconditional, as postulated by Henry Dunant's principles of impartiality and neutrality?<sup>7</sup>
- Many philosophers have theorized that "ought implies can," meaning that a moral obligation presupposes the ability to fulfill the obligation—since it would be ludicrous to say, for example, you have a moral duty to help every homeless person on the planet. You're physically (not to mention financially) incapable! However, since humanitarian aid may be intrinsically politicized and therefore not neutral, do governments even have an obligation to uphold neutrality?<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, consequentialist arguments pose two questions about humanitarian aid:

- Does imposing conditions on humanitarian aid accomplish its objective? Or is it inherently impossible to influence political outcomes using aid?
- Does imposing conditions inherently create other negative consequences?<sup>9</sup> If a government is unwilling to acquiesce on the conditions, does this not create more suffering?

Note the use of the word “inherently” to qualify both questions. Of course, examples exist where conditions have proven effective or ineffective. To avoid degenerating into an example-oriented debate, the debater’s job is to prove that conditions will inherently create a particular outcome—based on some essential element of the concept itself. Examples can help illustrate a necessarily effective or ineffective feature of conditions on aid, but consequentialist arguments must be predicated on principles to avoid fallacious reasoning.

## RESOURCES

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<sup>1</sup> “Humanitarian Parameters,” Humanitarian Innovation Guide, Elrha, 2021, <https://higuide.elrha.org/humanitarian-parameters/>. Accessed March 7, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “Humanitarian Parameters.”

<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Davey, John Borton, and Matthew Foley, “A history of the humanitarian system: Western origins and foundations,” HPG (Humanitarian Policy Group) Working Paper, Overseas Development Institute, June 2013, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8439.pdf>. Accessed March 7, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> “From Humanitarian to Development Aid,” Humanitarian Coalition, 2021, <https://www.humanitariancoalition.ca/from-humanitarian-to-development-aid>. Accessed March 7, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Mikael Barfod, “Humanitarian Aid and Conditionality: ECHO’s Experience and Prospects Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy,” in “Terms of Engagement: Conditions and Conditionality in Humanitarian Action,” HPG Report 6,

Overseas Development Institute, July 2000, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/303.pdf>. Accessed March 7, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Beat Schweizer, “Moral dilemmas for humanitarianism in the era of “humanitarian” military interventions,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 86, no. 855 (September 2004): 561, [https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/irrc\\_855\\_schweizer.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/irrc_855_schweizer.pdf). Accessed March 7, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Mick Moore and Mark Robinson, “Can Foreign Aid Be Used to Promote Good Government in Developing Countries?” *Ethics and International Affairs* 8 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7093.1994.tb00162.x>. Accessed March 7, 2021.