

From: James Darcy, ODI

To: Michael Mosselmans, DfID CHASE

28th February 2006

HPG feedback on the DfID Humanitarian Policy draft of 17 January 2006

General comments

1. We found the report clearly written and well structured. It is a strong statement of UK Government intent and addresses many of what we believe to be the most pressing issues of concern in the functioning of the international humanitarian system. Most importantly, it represents an explicit articulation of governmental humanitarian policy when such specific policy commitments are still rare amongst international donors. It could in that sense serve as an example of good practice that might usefully be translated into a commitment by GHD/DAC donors to articulate their own policies, although the specific content of such policies would inevitably vary between donors. It could perhaps be further strengthened by being linked to an implementation plan.

2. It is not always clear whether the document speaks for DfID specifically or the UK Government generally. There is some inconsistency of usage in this respect: 'we' sometimes refers to 'we DFID' and other times 'we the UK Government'. While there may be an assumption of policy coherence across government, there is perhaps a need to articulate the 'fit' between this and (i) other parts of DfID policy (e.g. on fragile states) and (ii) other parts of UK Government policy. The policy document would be stronger if it clearly represented a set of UK whole-of-government commitments.

3. The policy represents a strong and welcome statement of support for (reformed) multilateralism, reiterating support for the UN coordination role as well as for pooled funding arrangements. We also agree with the statements concerning coordination through the wider IASC mechanism at global and country levels. However, the acid test of such developments must be the collective impact of international efforts on humanitarian outcomes. We think DfID is right to stress the need to have much better ways of gauging these outcomes and the impact of interventions.

With this in mind, we would suggest including a commitment (perhaps in paragraph 27) to monitor the effect of reforms (cluster leads, the CERF, etc.) on outcomes – and to review institutional mechanisms and options accordingly. In other words, we would caution against getting too tied to particular initiatives, even ones the UK has championed. Changes to some parts of a system can sometimes have unexpected (and undesired) effects overall. And while a multilateral approach may represent the best general approach, timely bilateral intervention is what may be crucial to good outcomes in a given context.

4. The policy could be stronger on the question of accountability and related issues of transparency and participation. It could also perhaps say more about the issue of cost effectiveness and about the gauging of impact, which is currently rather missing from the text under Policy Goal 1. We suggest some points in the detailed comments below where this might be done. We also feel that the policy appears to be strongly premised on delivery of assistance through international agencies, and that support to national relief efforts (where appropriate) might be given greater prominence.

Specific comments on the text

Para 2: suggest adding: ‘and the potential for an avian flu pandemic’

Para 7: ‘helps saves millions of lives’ – we doubt this would stand up to scrutiny and would suggest a more modest formulation.. Perhaps ‘helps protect the lives and livelihoods of millions of people’.

Para 9: suggest deleting ‘related’ – we would argue for a clearer separation of assessments from specific appeals for funds

Para 10: suggest explicit mention here of work to strengthen local and national capacity, with international actors substituting only where necessary, and looking to complement where possible.

Para 11: suggest mention of lack of global *capacity* as well as issue of coordination, and the need to strengthen this.

Para 16: suggest adding better *political* analysis, in relation to conflict-related human crises, essential not least to the responsibility to protect agenda

Para 20 (Box 1): the wording of the principles here, mirroring that in the GHD formulation, is obviously an *adaptation* of the Red Cross principles. While we think the formulations are reasonable, there remains work to be done to think through the implications of these once taken out of the context of a non-governmental humanitarian agency – and particularly when applied to governmental actors. Humanity and impartiality are clear enough in this regard, but the neutrality and independence principles less so. The principle of independence as framed here could have profound consequences for the way in which governmental policy is set and implemented.

We would also caution against conflating ‘humanitarian principles’ with the ‘principles of humanitarian action’. The former would include the principle of distinction between combatant and civilian, and other core principles of IHL. They would also include the principle of *non-refoulement* of refugees. Suggest re-naming the box ‘Principles of humanitarian action’ and then making distinct reference to the other principles when discussing UK policy generally.

Para 21: suggest re-wording first sentence (e.g. ‘should not be underestimated’)

Para 22: suggest re-wording 'appear to be becoming'. Also qualifying the second sentence, to reflect the reality that many are much *less* vulnerable than before (e.g. in Bangladesh) because of effective preventive action.

Para 23: Suggest rechecking the 271 figure and providing source/s before the policy is published

Para 24: suggest removing specific country examples. The list is slightly arbitrary (Zimbabwe could be included, for example) and arguably wrong in the case of Ethiopia.

Para 29: suggest linking this commitment to the proposed benchmarks

Para 35: suggest inserting 'and others' after OCHA (might include e.g. FSAU, VAC)

Para 38: we would emphasise the need to think across and beyond the specific sectors to ensure appropriate responses

Para 39: in the light of the catastrophic failure to protect IDPs in Darfur, Eastern DRC, Angola etc, 'leaves significant room for improvement' seems a gross understatement. Suggest a stronger formulation, e.g. 'is severely constrained'.

Para 45: suggest adding that DfID will support local and national actors where appropriate

Para 46: suggest re-wording second sentence (e.g. 'military forces have specific responsibility for the welfare of populations under their control, including ensuring the provision of appropriate relief'.)

Para 48: this is weak on accountability/voice. Suggest strengthening by reference to transparency (people know their entitlements) and participation (are involved in the design and implementation of programmes)

Para 63: suggest adding reference to working with the Home Office on asylum policy.

Para 66: it is unclear how the second sentence relates to the first. Is this a statement about conditionality of development aid? If so, it is a crucial statement that could be made more clearly, and should also include reference to international human rights law.

Para 68: suggest re-wording second sentence to read 'support them *in*'

Box 6: suggest distinguishing here the distinct functions of relief (acute/short-term need), welfare (chronic need) and development (transformative) approaches