



## ***Summer Course 2024: Introduction to Humanitarian Aid***

### **Training**

10-11 July 2024, The Hague

#### *Summary report*

For six years now, KUNO has hosted its annual Summer Course, and we are happy to also this year have completed the KUNO Summer Course 2024: Introduction to Humanitarian Aid.

With a high number of humanitarian crises around the world - enforced by global challenges like climate change, protracted crises, and the high intensity of violence in conflicts, humanitarian aid seems more vital than ever. This summer, we invited professionals to embark on a journey of learning and exploration into the intricate realm of humanitarian assistance. In this two-day introductory course on humanitarian aid, experienced humanitarian professionals discussed relevant aspects of their humanitarian work, deepened with their specific expertise. A mixture of lectures, discussions and practical assignments fed the participants' brains, enhanced their skills and provided the opportunity to connect with others. Participants even embarked on a simulated mission to the DRC, where they were challenged to jointly solve complex security dilemmas.

#### **Day 1**

##### **Session 1 [morning]: Humanitarian action & the changing global context**

**Thea Hilhorst**, Professor of Humanitarian Studies ISS (Humanitarian Studies Centre, Erasmus University) and Director of Humanitarian Studies Centre (HSC).


Thea Hilhorst kicked off the Summer Course on the first day with an interactive presentation on the history of humanitarianism. She explained the historical development from the humanitarian aid paradigm to resilience humanitarianism, which we mostly know as the contemporary humanitarian practices and standards today. By the hand of a timeline, from the Battle of Solferino (1859), the beginning of

the humanitarian principles, via the Biafra War (1967- 1970), the Rwanda genocide (1991), and the politicised humanitarian interventions in for example Kosovo (1999), Thea highlighted the origins, the trends, the unavailability of politics and the emergence of humanitarian institutions and their mandates. The participants engaged in interesting discussions and Thea underscored the importance of International Humanitarian Law. Despite it being severely tested and undermined in today's conflicts such as Gaza, we should never take it for granted.

*"I very much enjoyed the interactive style and discussion for mutual learning."*

## **Session 2 [afternoon]: The Netherlands & Humanitarian Action - policy, priorities & practice**

**Paul van den Berg**, Political Advisor Cordaid and Chair Visibility Working Group DRA;  
**Rolf Wijnstra**, Senior Policy Advisor in Humanitarian Aid & Diplomacy of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



### **HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY & POLICY**

**General focus areas**

- **Promote 'principled humanitarian action'**, effective international action and optimizing the humanitarian system through boards of partners and fora and networks (e.g. Grand Bargain, GHD, EU): e.g. coordination, prioritization, funding
- **Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law**: humanitarian space & access, humanitarian exemptions in sanction regimes, UNSC 2417 (conflict & hunger)
- **Crisis specific diplomacy**

**Specific focus areas**

- Localisation/locally led action
- Risk sharing
- Mental health (MHPSS)

Paul and Rolf led an interesting collaborative session on the Dutch approach and priorities in humanitarian action. Rolf began the session with a comprehensive overview of the Netherlands' humanitarian policy. Participants gained insights into Dutch humanitarian diplomacy, policies, focus areas, and the reasoning behind funding and budget schemes. Rolf also highlighted challenges such as the flaws in the "Western-rooted" system and the inherent tensions between humanitarian principles and global and national political interests.

Paul then explained the origins of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), a collaboration of 14 Dutch NGOs that work globally in partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He detailed the DRA's joint response mechanisms, which address both protracted and acute crises, and discussed challenges and dilemmas, such as the issues in the process of localising aid, with the participants. The session concluded with a lively discussion involving questions from the group, addressed by Paul, Rolf, and the speaker of the next session, Pia Zeinoun, who joined the conversation from the perspective of a local NGO.



### Session 3 [afternoon]: Humanitarian Action – A Local Perspective

**Pia Zeinoun**, Research Lead at Oxfam Novib, Netherlands. Vice-president of Embrace (Lebanon) and former Director of the Embrace Mental Health Center.

In the last session, we were happy to have Pia Zeinoun speak about local aid and the local NGO Embrace, which she founded in Lebanon. Embrace specifically focuses on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. Pia explained how Embrace began as a small mission-driven organisation, but since the Beirut explosion (2020) rapidly developed into a free community mental health centre, providing mental health first aid in (future) emergencies. She addressed the many challenges Embrace faces, which are also familiar to other local NGOs, such as finding sustainable funding that is given directly to Embrace (and not through a chain of international organisations), and finding authentic partnerships.

*"It was very interesting to hear the local perspective."*

*"It was very good to get an insight on the basic need of mental health."*



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"IF EVERYONE HAS TO THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX, MAYBE IT IS THE BOX THAT NEEDS FIXING."

MALCOLM GLADWELL

## Day 2

### Session 1 [morning]: Security Risk Management in the field: A fine balancing act!

Henrieke Hommes, Security Advisor at ZOA.

Henrieke Hommes started the second day of the training by explaining the security risks that humanitarian INGOs and local staff, volunteers and drivers are daily confronted with while working in high-risk environments. She then introduced Security Risk Management. She highlighted that the practice is surely not just an exercise, but that the threats are present and real - as we saw in the DRC a few days ago. Read more about it [here](#).

The participants of the Summer Course were split up into groups and Henrieke presented scenarios in a specific context to which all groups had to reply and present findings at the end of every scenario. All the scenarios focused on threats and dangers, and difficult decisions that NGOs, Head Quarters and local leaders have to make daily. The scenarios varied from choosing a hotel, to one that was about ensuring safe transport and travel. At the end of the morning, the participants were better informed of the types of risks that people in the field are facing, the coordination mechanisms and the difficulties that come with that when deciding about delicate or sometimes very complex issues. One of the learnings was that making a decision is rarely clear-cut, and careful consideration and collaborative action are needed to find the best option.

*"Great interaction and very interesting scenarios."*



## **Session 2 [afternoon]: Introduction to Humanitarian Communication**

**Emiel Martens & Wouter Oomen**, Founders and Directors Expertise Centre Humanitaire Communication.

In the final session of the Summer Course, Emiel Martens and Wouter Oomen talked about the importance of ethical communication. During this session, they provided an introduction to the features and pitfalls of communication on humanitarian aid and international cooperation.

The discourse on communication on humanitarian aid and international cooperation became more and more part of popular culture from the 1970s and 1980s, the decades that INGOs increasingly reached out to the general public for funds and support, different from mostly depending on government funds. The debate on the use of spectacle, stereotyping and power imbalance in campaigns of Western (international) NGOs to raise public funds emerged. How should NGOs portray people in need and how do we avoid creating a gap of 'we' [the West] and 'them' [people in need] led to a very interesting discussion during which became clear that still today we notice that organisations and institutions do not always stay away from the - as Emiel and Wouter call it - unethical ways of humanitarian communication.

As a practical assignment, Emiel and Wouter showed their selection of some unethical examples of Dutch INGO campaigns - [The Humanitarian Communication Awards](#) are annual awards given to the best and worst campaign of a Dutch INGO, respectively the High Flyer Award and Fly in the Eye Award. After which the participants of the training could identify bad practices of a campaign. This led to another discussion, since the nominations were all campaigns focused on creating awareness and not fundraising campaigns. 'Is it not easier to keep away from the pitfalls of communication on humanitarian aid when the goal of a campaign is not to raise money? Finding the right answer to this question remains difficult.

Emiel and Wouter ended this Summer Course by showing one of the best recent campaigns - according to their standards. Participants were pleased to see that there is movement in the right direction. The main message that Emiel and Wouter tried to bring across was that INGOs should focus on communication that is ethical, inclusive and equitable - whatever the purpose of the campaign is.

*"Great introduction to the field of humanitarian communication, it was a nice critical reflection on communication."*



### Concluding remarks

The Summer Course was again a great success. Both new as well as experienced staff working for the humanitarian sector were able to learn, strengthen their network and exchange ideas on humanitarian action. Every year again it is great to see how the humanitarian fieldworkers, communication, project and fundraising officers, employees of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and academics come together to share knowledge and personal experiences. KUNO aimed to include as many aspects of humanitarian work as possible - the history and development of humanitarian aid, (Dutch) policy, local and MHPSS emergency aid, security risk management, and communication - in one programme. We hope to have provided a diverse and satisfactory programme.

Do you have any questions, or suggestions on what to include in the next training, please contact us at [kuno@kuno.platform.nl](mailto:kuno@kuno.platform.nl).