



CONCEPT NOTE

‘The Humanitarian Reset and its implications for the Dutch humanitarian field’

KUNO expert meeting

23 September | 15:00 – 17:00 - followed by drinks | The Hague

As an effort to address the humanitarian field’s crisis of funding and legitimacy, sparked by the sudden demise of USAID, Tom Fletcher - UN OCHA’s Emergency Relief Coordinator - launched the ‘[Humanitarian Reset](#)’, a policy reform agenda. This agenda, calling for a drastic shift in the UN-coordinated/led humanitarian system, is presently taking shape through prioritisation of responses, policy dialogues and consultations. It triggers debate across the humanitarian system. While details are still to be determined, the Reset’s expected impact on the Dutch humanitarian field will be significant.

Against this backdrop KUNO invites policymakers and humanitarian practitioners for a meeting to unpack the Reset, to review the latest developments, assess their implications, and consider possible responses.

Speakers(tbc)

Representatives of:

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) / UN OCHA
- Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Netherlands-based iNGOs
- Local NGOs

About the Reset

Driven by shifting power dynamics, the global order is becoming increasingly multi-polar. This trend unfolded over several decades but became markedly visible in 2025. The multilateral order is eroding and there is a growing disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights. Funding for humanitarian action is confronted with drastic cuts after 15 years of upward financing. The withdrawal of USAID-funding was a major case in point. It does, however, not stand alone and rather fits a broader trend amongst – most Western - donors.

These trends have serious consequences for people affected by crises. Numerous local NGOs have had to shut down their operations and thousands of layoffs at the UN and at (i)NGOs have led to direct negative consequences in the delivery of humanitarian action. [A study published in The Lancet](#) projects that significant cuts to USAID funding, combined

with the potential dismantling of the agency, could result in more than 14 million additional deaths by 2030, including 4.5 million deaths among children younger than 5 years. These shifts demand a redefinition and strengthening of the complementary roles of local, international and governmental actors, ensuring that each can act their part effectively. This is key for the humanitarian field to continue to have its role in saving and upholding dignity of as many lives as possible in a principled manner.

One response to the shifts is the 'Humanitarian Reset'. Its aim is to continue the delivery of aid where most needed and drastically change power dynamics and funding flows - based on 'hyperprioritisation', reorganisation and reform. The latter is emerging as what has been referred to as a 'reform on steroids', with elements of longer-standing conversations around needed change.

The focus of the meeting

Much is in motion and not yet specifically defined. It is clear, however, that the shifts set in motion by the Reset do and will continue to affect Dutch humanitarian action. This knowledge session will focus on:

- an informed view on the Humanitarian Reset and its trajectory, proposals and process;
- insights in how the present challenges related to the Reset affect the operations of participants' organisations;
- explore how the Dutch policy regarding the Reset is taking shape and what will be the input in the international debate;
- explore how to move forward as a field and which actions could be taken, at which level. There are concerns, but also opportunities; the conversation will focus on what is crucial, what should be done collectively, and what separately.

Background information

What is the Humanitarian Reset?

The humanitarian reset refers to a proposed overhaul of the humanitarian aid system aimed at improving efficiency and effectiveness in response to "a profound crisis of legitimacy, morale, and funding". The reset was instigated by Tom Fletcher, the Emergency Relief Chief, on 10 March 2025. In a letter to the IASC Principals, he outlined his vision: "We must both regroup and renew at the same time. I propose we do so on the foundation of three strategic priorities: the best possible crisis response with the resources we have; urgent work to reform and reimagine how we work; and shift power to our humanitarian leaders in country, and the people we serve." (Source: ICVA briefing)

What is the latest update from the Emergency Relief Coordinator?

Reset Phase 2 - On 19 June, a second statement on the Reset was released by Tom Fletcher: [the Humanitarian Reset Phase Two](#). It sets out the aims to **Define** a hyper-prioritised GHO, **Deliver** coordinated humanitarian action, with an emphasis on girls and women, **Devolve** responsibility to country contexts, **Defend**

the principles and International Humanitarian Law. He concludes: “Alongside practical changes, this is a mindset shift. Fundamentally, radical reform requires those with power to give it away. Everyone in the sector must be asked: what power do you have: and how will you share it? Can what we are doing be better done by the community we are serving?” (source: Phase Two statement)

- ***Where does the Humanitarian Reset stand and what are responses?***

Sources with updates and overviews:

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee, [webpage on the Humanitarian Reset](#)
- ICVA, a global network of non-governmental organizations for principled and effective humanitarian action, compiled a [strategic briefing](#) on the Humanitarian Reset, last updated 16 June.
- Joint statement from civil society representatives in response to Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher’s announcement of the ‘Humanitarian Reset’ initiative: [Humanitarian Reset: A Call for Transformative Change](#)
- [A letter to UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher](#) by 21 donors (the Stockholm Group) in June, calling for ‘bolder action’ of UN OCHA and donors in relation to operations, coordination, funding and localisation
- [Grand Bargain joint statement on efficiency measures in response to the humanitarian funding crisis](#), by IASC Caucus on Efficiency Measures