

May 11, 2016

The Honorable Barak Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. President,

As leaders of some of the major American nongovernmental organizations involved in preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul May 23-24, we wish to share with you four points on how world leaders can best seize this critical opportunity and how we might concert our efforts to advance a shared vision of success.

Demonstrate leadership and underscore commitment to vigorous follow-through: The Summit holds the potential to bring together all those with a stake in addressing humanitarian crises and chart a new course forward that begins and ends with helping the increasing number of people in need. Momentum is now building towards what could be an historic moment with 45 heads of state already reportedly planning to attend. As the world's largest humanitarian donor, a permanent UN Security Council member and indispensable world leader, it is vital that the United States Government show leadership and be a catalytic force for significant change at this forum, as it did at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit last September. These two agendas are closely intertwined. Although all participants are expected to announce new commitments in Istanbul, the real work of changing the way humanitarian crises are addressed will take place afterwards through agreement to a comprehensive roadmap that will require rigorous and time-bound implementation. Such a roadmap must include addressing egregious gaps in civilian protection and blatant disregard for international humanitarian law. If you are unable to attend, then it's important that the Vice President or Secretary of State lead a strong U.S. delegation to send an unequivocal signal to the rest of the world and to ensure that follow-up in the U.S. will be a serious and sustained priority.

Establish a high bar on addressing displacement: The UN Secretary General's Agenda for Humanity sets forth an ambitious set of strategic, operational and policy shifts for the global community to initiate in Istanbul, but many of those changes can only be made by states and their political processes, which do not change easily or quickly. As you have recognized in your initiative to host a September Summit on refugees in New York, the sixty million forcibly displaced people and refugees around the world, many of whom are displaced for decades at a time, urgently need support and tangible action. The Summit is an opportunity for the United States and others to launch an ambitious global undertaking to reduce all forms of displacement, improve the way that the international community provides assistance to the displaced and share responsibility for large-scale movements of refugees. The idea of a "new deal" for internally displaced people and refugees – one which can truly increase support for host governments, increase refugees' self-reliance through expanded education and livelihood opportunities

and usher in bolder commitments to share responsibility through the resettlement of refugees -- could be launched in Istanbul and then operationalized at your summit and the related United Nations summit on refugees and mass migration. You can count on our strong engagement in such an initiative, including collaboration with the private sector.


The U.S. should also commit to addressing the root causes of displacement earlier in humanitarian responses. In today's protracted, conflict-affected crises, development actors must assume a larger role in dealing with forced displacement. Neither humanitarians nor development actors can wait for a vaguely defined "transition" point between emergency aid and early recovery to start addressing the root causes of fragility.

Change the way we all do business by supporting local ownership and building national capacity: We wholeheartedly support the Secretary General's call to shift from a mindset of delivering aid to one of ending need. Making this shift will necessitate concrete changes by the United Nations agencies, government, civil society and the private sector alike that empower local actors and better align limited resources toward achieving collective outcomes. Some of those changes we can and will make on our own, but others will require support from the U.S. Government agencies with whom we often work and asserting U.S. influence to improve the practices of international institutions. Investing in the long-term capacity of national nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and civil society partners to play a more significant role, ensuring adequate investment in national preparedness and response systems, and setting aside more resources to measure and evaluate are several of the changes where the United States and NGO partners together can make a critical contribution in Istanbul. Your leadership in pushing the international system, including the World Bank and other bilateral donors, to engage with fragile and conflict-affected states to more effectively address governance gaps and engage communities would also help build local ownership and spur effective development.


Usher in a new era of transparency and accountability: Finally, for this summit to engender self-sustaining improvement in the years ahead by creating a better flow of information that can facilitate continuous review, it will need to intensify the humanitarian system's commitment to accountability, rooted especially in transparency to those affected by crisis. We look to the U.S. to champion a push at the summit for greater accountability and transparency to be achieved by developing specific, streamlined monitoring and reporting mechanisms. There is no reason people in need should not be able to assess the extent to which high-level donor commitments have translated into significant support for their communities. Ensuring this level of transparency is critical both to sustaining trust in the humanitarian system in a world that is increasingly integrated and globalized as well as to having the necessary data to make further course corrections going forward. We should aspire to a world in which affected populations can access humanitarian response plans and rightfully expect to understand how they are being implemented, where and by whom. And while all stakeholders can commit to greater transparency at the Summit, the real proof of our efforts will be in whether we can hold ourselves to the goals we set on transparency, and everything else, after the Summit is over.

Thank you for your time and attention. We would be pleased to meet with your team to discuss these points in greater detail.

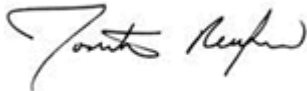
Sincerely yours,



Michelle Nunn
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President & CEO
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