TO: Members of the Policy Committee  
A: Participants at the 13 July Policy Committee Meeting  
(see distribution list)  

DATE: 18 July 2016  

THROUGH:  
S/C DE:  
FROM: The Secretary-General  
DE:  

SUBJECT: Decisions of the Secretary-General – 13 July Meeting of the Policy Committee  
OBJET:  


i) The Secretary-General endorses the attached UN Crisis Management Policy developed by the UN Crisis Management Working Group. (Action: EOSG)  

ii) The Executive Office of the Secretary-General will inform the most senior UN officials at country level that the UN Crisis Management Policy is in effect and that the UNOCC, as the Chair of the Working Group, is available to offer guidance to ensure effective implementation. (Action: EOSG, UNOCC)  

iii) Principals of relevant UN entities will inform their staff, including field presences, of the UN Crisis Management Policy and take all necessary steps, including training if appropriate, to ensure immediate implementation. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General, through the UNOCC, will be responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with this policy and for assisting UN entities with implementation. (Action: all UN entities, as appropriate)  

iv) Relevant UN entities will ensure that their specific crisis management guidance is harmonized with this policy. This policy will be reviewed no later than two years after its approval. (Action: all UN entities, as appropriate)  

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United Nations Crisis Management Policy

I. Purpose and Scope

1. This policy applies to relevant UN system entities\(^1\). It articulates how UN actors should coordinate efforts to respond collectively to situations that due to their magnitude, complexity or gravity of potential consequence, require a UN system-wide coordinated and multi-disciplinary response. The policy provides clarity on roles and responsibilities and the architecture for decision-making, coordination, information exchange and communications.

2. This policy does not stipulate how individual UN entities or specific pillars prepare for and respond to crisis situations within their respective mandated areas of responsibility. Existing coordination mechanisms, such as those set out under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)\(^2\), the United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS), the Decision of the Secretary-General on Integration\(^3\), the Integrated Assessment and Planning Policy and the Human Rights up Front Action Plan\(^4\), are not altered by these arrangements.

3. For the purpose of this policy, crisis is defined as an incident or situation, whether natural or human-made, that due to its magnitude, complexity or gravity of potential consequence, requires a UN wide coordinated multi-disciplinary response, and includes two or more of the following: a) presents an exceptional risk to the safety and security of UN personnel, premises and assets, b) presents an exceptional threat to the effective functioning of a UN mission or other field presence, c) presents an exceptional threat to the effective implementation of the mandate of a UN mission or other field presence, d) may have a significantly negative humanitarian impact, or e) may give rise to serious violations of international human rights or humanitarian law. Crisis management is defined as decision-making in support of the identification, prioritisation, coordination and execution of crisis response activities. Crisis response is defined as the spectrum of activities undertaken to respond to a crisis situation.

II. Crisis Management Guiding Principles

4. Crisis management in the UN should be guided by the following principles, articulated in more detail in the Annex:
   - Accountability.
   - Field-focus.
   - Adaptation to context.

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\(^1\) Relevant UN system entities include members of the UN Crisis Management Working Group (see paragraph 43) and members of the Policy Committee.

\(^2\) It should be noted that the IASC mechanisms will continue independent of crisis management mechanisms established by this policy for the duration of the humanitarian emergency, with coordination and information-sharing as per this policy.

\(^3\) Decision No. 2008/24.

\(^4\) Human Rights Up Front Action Plan, launched by the Secretary-General in 2013, seeks to strengthen the UN’s ability to undertake early and preventive action in crisis situations that may result in serious or widespread human rights violations. The Action Plan includes point 13 which aims to “streamline coordination mechanisms for situations of concern”. The UN’s response in human rights crisis situations should be consistent with the relevant elements of the Action Plan.
• Inclusiveness.
• Simplicity and predictability.
• Respect for the values, standards and principles of the UN Charter.
• Respect for the humanity, independence, impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian action.

III. Accountability, Roles and Responsibilities

Overall responsibilities

5. The Secretary-General is responsible for ensuring that the UN system responds appropriately to crisis situations and for ensuring the effective coordination of UN crisis response at Headquarters and in the field.

6. The Secretary-General typically delegates the responsibility for ensuring an effective, coordinated UN crisis response to a lead coordinating entity or entities at Headquarters and to senior individuals in leadership roles in the field.

7. All Under-Secretaries-General, including heads of agencies, funds and programmes, are individually responsible and accountable for directing preparedness and response activities within their entities, in their mandated areas of responsibility.

8. All UN entities are jointly responsible for the development and implementation of UN-wide crisis response strategies in the field and at UN Headquarters, including communicating and coordinating their response with the crisis coordination mechanisms outlined in this policy.

Field leadership roles and responsibilities

9. Crisis response activities in the field should be implemented at the lowest effective level of authority, with Headquarters playing a supporting role. Unnecessary layers of management should be removed.

10. At field level, the following responsibilities and accountabilities apply:

   a. The senior-most UN official in country (Head of Mission/SRSG/ERSG, RC/HC or RC) is responsible and accountable for coordinating UN crisis management efforts in-country. In line with the principle of mutual accountability, the UN leadership team is jointly accountable for the development and implementation of UN strategy.5

   b. The Resident Coordinator should remain in the lead for coordinating all operational activities for development and should continue to perform the UNDP Resident Representative and Designated Official functions when applicable. Where a Humanitarian Coordinator has been designated, she/he should remain in the lead for coordinating the humanitarian response, reporting to the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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5 As per the Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict (A/63/881-S/2009/304), where paragraph 38 refers to the “mutual accountability between the senior representative and the members of the United Nations presence for delivering on agreed responsibilities”. 
c. The Designated Official in-country (normally the senior-most UN official in-country) has specific security management responsibilities pursuant to the Security Policy Manual and is accountable to the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security. He or she is responsible for the security of UN personnel, premises and assets throughout the country or designated area of operation and for leading security management team meetings.

11. Field-based interagency decision-making and operational coordination bodies should be established spanning all pillars of the UN and leveraging existing mechanisms and ensuring collaboration across existing fora (e.g. Senior Leadership Forums in integrated UN presences, UN Country Teams, Humanitarian Country Teams, Security Management Teams, etc.).

12. If the situation requires, the Secretary-General may:
   a. Review existing leadership arrangements in the field, including by requesting the Chair of the UNDG to recommend an alternate RC for the duration of the crisis.
   b. Request the Emergency Relief Coordinator to designate the RC as HC or to establish the most appropriate humanitarian leadership model.
   c. Appoint a senior official or special envoy to oversee the overall response or specific aspects of a response. Should a senior official or special envoy be appointed, any response strategies developed by that individual shall be consulted in advance with the RC/HC in the affected countries, taking into account the assessments by the RC of the situation on the ground. The RC shall be kept fully informed of such deliberations and decisions.

13. In exceptional circumstances, such as incapacitation of the field leadership or when the scope of the crisis extends beyond the capacity of the UN presence in the field, Headquarters may assume greater crisis management responsibilities until such time as field leadership capacity can be strengthened or re-established.

Headquarters coordinating responsibilities

14. Lead coordinating entities will usually be determined as follows based on the type of UN field presence on the ground:
   a. In mission settings, DPKO is the lead coordinating entity for countries/areas with peacekeeping operations deployed, and DPA is the lead coordinating entity for countries/areas with special political missions deployed;
   b. In non-mission settings, DPA and the relevant Regional UNDG Chair shall oversee crisis response coordination efforts as co-leads.

15. The lead coordinating entity/entities shall be responsible for ensuring the effective coordination of UN crisis response efforts.

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7 In line with the IASC reference document on “Humanitarian system-wide emergency activation: definition and procedures” (April 2012). Also note that the ERC can alter humanitarian leadership models in his/her capacity as the Chair of the IASC and without recourse to a request from the Secretary-General.
8 During crisis activation in mission settings, the Head of Mission shall retain operational authority at all times over deployed uniformed personnel and shall exercise his or her operational authority over the military and police components through the respective heads of those components. The Head of the military component and/or the Head of the police component shall continue to exercise operational control over all military and police personnel in the mission.
When it is necessary to have multiple coordination mechanisms operating in parallel, the lead coordinating entity/entities shall ensure appropriate collaboration and information sharing between these mechanisms, through the support of the United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC).

16. Depending on the nature of the crisis, additional entities have the following coordinating responsibilities for specific aspects of a crisis response:
   a. UNDSS retains lead responsibilities in all instances involving a major safety and security event and/or hostage incident, and shall ensure that any decisions taken through the Security Management Team (SMT) at the field level or Executive Group on Security at UNHQ are coordinated and communicated through the crisis management arrangements agreed in this policy and vice-versa.
   b. In humanitarian crisis situations, the ERC, through OCHA, shall ensure that relevant IASC decisions and actions are communicated and coordinated with the crisis management arrangements established in this policy.
   c. In the event of serious health emergencies rising to the level of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) that may span across different types of field presences, the UN response to the situation shall be coordinated by the WHO through the mechanisms established under its governance programme.
   d. In the event of grave violations of human rights law, OHCHR shall have lead responsibilities, including in coordinating the design of UN response strategies dealing with human rights issues.

17. In all cases the Secretary-General shall make the final determination on the lead coordinating entity/entities.

18. In exceptional circumstances, the Secretary-General, in consultation with relevant entities, may decide that the nature of a situation warrants the highest level of management engagement and shall either directly oversee or delegate the authority to the Deputy Secretary-General or an appointed EOSG representative to oversee the coordination of the UN response. This determination shall be made by the Secretary-General, either at his/her discretion, or upon request by at least two affected UN entities.

19. Whenever individual UN entities, UN field presences or other coordination structures such as the Inter-Agency Security Management Network (IASMN) or IASC plan to activate their own crisis response arrangements this should be communicated to the Secretary-General through the UNOCC Director, and closely coordinated, as appropriate, with the crisis coordination mechanisms described below. The UNOCC will be responsible for maintaining an overview of the different arrangements and meetings taking place, as well as supporting lead coordinating entities in keeping track of implementation of agreed action points from various forums.

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9 The management of important public health events is governed by the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005), which is an agreement among 196 countries, including all WHO Member States, to work together for global health security. In accordance with the IHR (2005), WHO plays the coordinating role in managing international public health emergencies. The WHO Director General, advised by the IHR Emergency Committee (a high level committee of experts), can declare serious public health events that endanger international public health as Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC). This declaration will be followed by specific emergency measures for the State Parties and the activation of a WHO-led international crisis response.
IV. Headquarters Crisis Response Coordination

20. Upon the rapid and significant deterioration of a situation or in the event of the sudden onset of a crisis that requires coordination among multiple pillars of the UN, arrangements for accelerated and streamlined decision-making, operational coordination, information flow and communications shall be put in place and/or strengthened.

Headquarters decision-making architecture 10

21. When a crisis response is activated, lead coordinating entities or, in exceptional circumstances, the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General or an appointed EOSG representative should establish structures for clear, centralised and joint crisis management at two levels, as follows:

a. A leadership-level, cross-pillar decision-making body to serve as a Crisis Management Team (CMT), chaired by a Crisis Manager. The lead coordinating entity/entities will (jointly) designate a Crisis Manager, who will usually be the USG or ASG of one of the lead coordinating entity/entities. In the absence of the USG and ASG, existing succession arrangements for the delegation of authority are retained. In exceptional circumstances the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General or an appointed EOSG representative may assume this role.

b. A working-level, cross-pillar operations coordination body led by a Crisis Coordinator, to support day-to-day operations of the crisis response, including develop policy recommendations, ensuring effective information management and managing common messaging. The Crisis Coordinator will be appointed by the Crisis Manager. The person may differ depending on the nature of the crisis, but will be a person of sufficient seniority and capability as well as provided with adequate resources and authority to undertake the task as Crisis Coordinator.

22. The Crisis Manager shall determine the CMT membership based on the specific nature of the crisis. It should include representation from relevant UN entities, including political, security, military, police, humanitarian, human rights, development as well as relevant administrative, support and public information entities. Wide representation from the different pillars of the UN should be balanced against the need for streamlined and effective coordination. Representation of agencies, funds and programmes should be assured, at a minimum, through the 2+4 formula 11 and based on the nature of the crisis.

23. The UNOCC supports the crisis coordination structures, the Crisis Manager and Crisis Coordinator by providing situational awareness, maintaining a crisis venue and information management platforms, providing secretariat services for relevant meetings, ensuring secure communications, and tracking action points.

Activation

24. UNOCC shall consistently monitor developments and liaise with the designated lead coordinating entity/entities and other UN entities on situations potentially requiring

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10 Detailed terms of reference for the mechanisms outlined in this policy and support documents and toolkits for crisis managers and crisis coordinators should be developed and made available when crises are activated. The UNOCC with the UN Crisis Management Working Group are responsible for ensuring these documents are developed and kept updated.

11 The “2+4” formula was adopted in 2006 and states that humanitarian and development actors are represented by OCHA and DOCO, respectively. In addition to these two, up to four representatives from the UN agencies, funds and programmes may participate based on their involvement in the country in question and capacity to engage.
activation of crisis coordination mechanisms.

25. On behalf of the Secretary-General, the lead coordinating entity/entities shall be responsible for activating the crisis coordination mechanisms. The lead coordinating entity/entities should consult the senior-most UN official(s) in-country, including the RC (and HC, if distinct), and in the relevant UN regional office in non-mission settings, and the Designated Official, if different, and inform them if activation is being considered. When a decision to activate is taken, the UNOCC will notify the UN system, including at field level, on the decision and next steps.

26. The Senior Action Group or other Principals-level forums chaired by the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General or Chef de Cabinet may request the lead coordinating entity/entities to activate the crisis coordination mechanism on behalf of the Secretary-General.

27. If there is disagreement among lead coordinating entities or other entities on the need to activate or review crisis coordination mechanisms, any member of the UN Crisis Management Working Group may request the Secretary-General, through the UNOCC, to convene and chair a Principals-level meeting to assess whether such mechanisms need to be activated or reviewed.

Initial actions

28. Upon activation, the lead coordinating entity/entities and the CMT should, at a minimum:

   a. Establish and maintain direct communications with the field presence to assess the situation on the ground and its initial support requirements.

   b. Clarify the relationship between the CMT and any other existing crisis response coordination mechanisms that may be active, and in consultation with the chairs of these other mechanisms, recommend measures to streamline these as appropriate.

   c. Determine whether an existing coordination mechanism such as an Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) or Integrated Task Force (ITF) is appropriate to serve as the cross-pillar operations coordination body for the period of the crisis, including reviewing its membership and terms of reference, or whether a time-bound ad hoc body should be established and agree on an initial timeframe for activation, frequency of meetings, information requirements and communications arrangements.

   d. If not already in place, determine whether special administrative measures are needed to support response and surge efforts and identify funding sources to support the response. In rare situations where the standing administrative measures are determined to be insufficient for crisis response, additional special measures may be requested. Within the UN Secretariat, the Crisis Manager, in coordination with DFS, shall request the activation of standing administrative measures for crisis response and mission start-up. Other UN entities may have their own internal procedures to allow for special administrative measures.

Crisis information management

29. The Crisis Manager shall be responsible for sharing decisions taken by the CMT and the cross-pillar operations coordination body with all relevant UN entities in a timely manner.

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30. Members of CMT may decide to alter existing reporting, analysis and information sharing arrangements in frequency and format, which should be consolidated both at Headquarters and in the field to streamline information flows.

31. The Crisis Manager, together with the UNOCC and in consultation with the field, shall be responsible for ensuring that information is collected and disseminated in a timely fashion within the UN system. The UNOCC shall monitor the development and implementation of relevant standard operating procedures (SOPs) and toolkits in this regard.

**Crisis communications**

32. There are two crucial aspects to crisis communications: external communications, including reputational management, with Member States, affected communities, media, private sector, donors and wider civil society; and internal communications with staff (including affected staff, responders, and all staff) and their dependants.

33. The CMT should decide on key common messaging to ensure coherence across the system. DPI should be called upon to provide support and guidance on crisis communications issues and support the production and dissemination of relevant internal and external crisis communications products.

34. Individual entities may issue their own advocacy messages as per their respective mandates. These should be consulted through existing coordination mechanisms and with the Spokesperson’s office, and in all circumstances shared.

35. For internal communication, DM, DFS (for peace operations), DSS and DPI, are responsible, in consultation with the lead coordinating entity/entities, for coordinating timely and continuous internal information dissemination to UN personnel.

**Review and deactivation**

36. The CMT has the sole responsibility of determining when to deactivate crisis coordination mechanisms. The need for continuing crisis coordination arrangements should be reviewed at least every two weeks after activation.

37. The decision may be made, *inter alia*, because the crisis has abated and no longer requires sustained accelerated attention and support from Headquarters, in which case at its last meeting, the CMT should outline any measures that should be taken and if and how mechanisms such as IATFs/ITFs should continue to monitor the situation and inform the system on follow-up measures. Crisis coordination mechanisms may also be deactivated if the crisis has become protracted or if mission-planning has commenced and it is determined that there is sufficient standing capacity both at Headquarters and in the field to manage the situation, and thereby no longer requires additional support from the dedicated crisis response coordination architecture.

38. Following deactivation of crisis response arrangements, lead coordinating entities shall in all cases conduct after action reviews, in consultation with all members of the crisis coordination mechanisms, and share the findings with the UNOCC.

V. Personnel matters

39. In compliance with the overall UN accountability framework as well as the specific roles and responsibilities set out in this policy and other relevant policy documents on crisis management, the heads of departments or offices should make every effort to
laterally reassign within their respective department or office international staff members in the field in case the host government expels them for implementing the UN system-wide strategy.

VI. Implementation, Monitoring and Compliance

40. Each UN entity shall ensure that its individual crisis management guidance is harmonized with this policy, including the provision of necessary financial and material resources to facilitate implementation. Each entity is responsible for informing and training their staff on the contents of this policy and for ensuring its implementation. The UNOCC will support joint efforts in developing training exercises and materials upon request.

41. The EOSG, through the UNOCC, is responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with this policy and for assisting UN entities with implementation.

42. UNOCC is responsible for:
   a. Chairing the UN Crisis Management Working Group, when activated;
   b. Reporting annually to the UNOCC Steering Committee and other interested or relevant UN entities on the various system-wide activations and crisis management arrangements set up at Headquarters during the year and highlighting lessons learned, including those based on after action reviews;
   c. Maintaining a shared repository of relevant crisis management guidance and crisis scenarios across the UN system;
   d. Supporting lead coordinating entities in the conduct of after action reviews;
   e. Supporting the review of this guidance and developing complementing system-wide protocols, SOPs and checklists as required that can support training and implementation of the policy; and
   f. Initiating at least one crisis management table top exercise at Headquarters every two years, supporting lead coordinating entities in their own exercises and trainings, and supporting the field missions in developing their crisis management frameworks and SOPs.

43. The UN Crisis Management Working Group, when activated, shall serve as a consultative body, chaired by the UNOCC/EOSG, comprised of representatives from interested and relevant UN entities, and tasked to review UN system-wide crisis management practices and develop guidance on UN system-wide coordination on crisis management. At the time of the approval of this policy, members of the Working Group include DFS, DM, DOCO, DPA, DPI, DPKO, DSS, EOSG, OCHA, OHCHR, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.

44. DPA, DPKO, DFS, DOCO, OCHA and UNDSS should work together to ensure that Heads of Mission, RC/HCs and DOs, and through them UNCT, are properly informed of this guidance. UN senior officials in the field, in turn, are responsible for keeping mission personnel, UNCTs and HCTs informed accordingly.
45. UN entities which have field presences and are members of the UN Crisis Management Working Group are responsible for ensuring that proper guidance and toolkits are disseminated to UN field presences on crisis management. The UNOCC shall support UN entities in this responsibility.

46. The United Nations Communications Group Principals Group, chaired by DPI, is responsible for updating SOPs on crisis communications, including related to the use and monitoring of social media. The guidance provides all UN entities a generic set of guidelines on how to coordinate communication strategies during moments of crisis.

47. Complementing guidance and toolkits referred to in this document should be finalized and distributed to broader system within one year after the approval of this policy.

VII. History

48. This policy supersedes the following:
   - Policy on Special Circumstances in Non-Mission Settings;
   - Policy Committee decision and Update on UN Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government;

49. This policy shall be reviewed no later than two years after its approval.
Annex: Crisis Management Guiding Principles

United Nations crisis management should be guided by the following principles:

- **Accountability.** Crisis management should be guided with clear accountability framework and structures.

- **Field-focus.** Necessary response activities should be implemented at the lowest effective level of authority in the field, with Headquarters playing a supporting role. Unnecessary layers of management should be removed. In exceptional circumstances, such as incapacitation of the field leadership or when the scope of the crisis extends beyond the capacity of the UN presence in the field, Headquarters may assume greater crisis management responsibilities until such time as the field can be strengthened or re-established.

- **Adaptation to context.** The UN response to any crisis should be managed to reflect the prevailing circumstances. Form should follow function, and responses should be based on criteria of expected impact, transaction costs and assessment of risks. UN entities should ensure that their readiness, capacity and response level is appropriate to the evolution of a situation.

- **Inclusiveness.** In response to any crisis, there should be appropriate consultation among UN entities and between the field and Headquarters such that the various streams of response activity and messages are complementary and harmonised to the degree possible, taking into account all recognised principles of UN engagement across humanitarian, human rights, development, political and security areas. Views of those affected by crisis and relevant stakeholders need to be taken into account and help guide UN actions in the field and at Headquarters.

- **Simplicity and predictability.** UN crisis management architecture and processes should be clear, light and simple and known by all stakeholders to allow for a certain level of predictability in any response. Decision-making, coordination and information sharing should be streamlined to enable an accelerated response. Structures set up for crisis response should be time-bound with clear activation and de-activation protocols with proper follow-up arrangements agreed upon at the conclusion of the response.

- **Respect for values, standards and principles.** Crisis management should be guided by the overall values, standards and principles articulated in the UN Charter and relevant international law, including the Secretary-General’s renewed commitment to uphold the responsibilities assigned to the UN whenever there is a threat of serious and large-scale violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.¹³

- **Respect for Humanitarian Principles.** Crisis management arrangements should take full account of recognized humanitarian principles. As per UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (19 December 1991) and subsequent resolutions, humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Adherence to these principles reflects a measure of accountability of the humanitarian community.

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¹³ As per The Secretary-General: Renewing our commitment to the peoples and purposes of the United Nations, 21 November 2013.
- **Humanity**: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings;

- **Neutrality**: Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature;

- **Impartiality**: Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

- **Independence**: Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

The perception among parties to conflict, populations in need and other relevant actors that humanitarian operations are neutral and impartial is critical to their acceptance and therefore to the ability of humanitarian actors to access populations in need, provide humanitarian assistance and alleviate suffering wherever it is found. Consequently, maintaining a clear distinction between the role and function of humanitarian actors and that of military or political actors is a determining factor in creating an operating environment in which humanitarian organisations can discharge their responsibilities both effectively and safely.