



WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?



→ **The Watchlist identifies growing humanitarian need and explains the reasons for it. The guardrails against crisis have been weakened. Wars are longer and more virulent; the climate crisis is a conflict multiplier and is causing economic pain today; and the economic shock waves from the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict in Ukraine are hitting the most vulnerable the hardest.**

The erosion of guardrails meant to address these underlying issues means that humanitarian crises are spiraling. We are increasingly contending with runaway humanitarian crises where the humanitarian response is not a last resort for the few, but a lifeline for large swaths of countries' populations.

The IRC will respond by running critical programs for people caught up in crisis around the world and targeting the most vulnerable. We are also committed to using our voice to advocate for interventions that will help people survive, recover and gain control of their lives. In the context of the Watchlist, that means advocating for changes to strengthen the guardrails against crisis.

Aid as usual will not meet the moment. The nearly 340 million people who require aid in 2023 need more humanitarian funding for greater and better programs, but they also need and deserve more and different. While the challenges are big, solutions exist.



The international community should start to rebuild the guardrails against crisis in 2023 by setting ambitious goals to:



Break the cycle of crisis



Protect civilians in conflict



Manage shared global risks

AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE, FROM THE MICRO TO THE MACRO



TOP RIGHT: Barat, 57, builds a shovel to clear the snow off of their makeshift home in Kabul, Afghanistan.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Amin Adamo, a coffee farmer, walks through his farm after it was destroyed by severe drought in Ethiopia.

BREAK THE CYCLE OF CRISIS

→ **Guardrails are weakened because the international system treats every crisis as though it is short term and an exception.**

Breaking the cycle of crisis requires targeted interventions—starting by fixing the broken international response to the hunger crisis, investing in national responses to stop the slide from fragile to failed state and investing in the frontlines of humanitarian response.

Many Watchlist countries are stuck in a state of protracted crisis. In six countries (Afghanistan, Somalia, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen), critical humanitarian aid is required for half or more of the country's population in 2023. Humanitarians are no longer just a lifeline for the few, but expected to be the final guardrail to stop countries' descents from fragile to failed states. A failure to address underlying causes leaves donors funding far more costly emergency responses year after year. The world is contending with a record-high \$50 billion humanitarian appeal for 2023, surpassing one of the world's largest development programs, the World Bank's IDA program, funded at roughly \$31 billion per year.² As articulated by the Alliance of Small Island States at COP27, these contexts need "solidarity not charity" with equitable partnerships that treat them as allies in solving global challenges and support them with the tools for recovery.

01 Reboot the global response to extreme hunger.

Food insecurity is a complex challenge, but the slide into famine is manmade, driven by international inaction as well as local circumstance. Deaths from famine and untreated malnutrition are preventable and unacceptable. Amid a once-in-a-generation hunger crisis, reforms to global responses could help save the lives of many of the record one million people at risk of starvation and two million children likely to die each year from malnutrition.

There is a mechanism to supercharge this effort, but it needs to be repurposed. The international community should start by reenergizing the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on Preventing Famine to target the countries most at risk of famine.

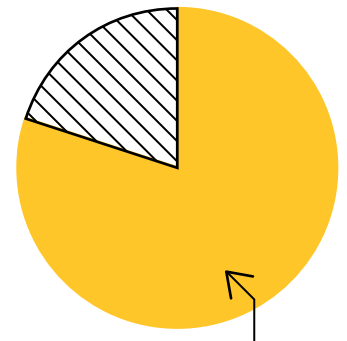


Eugenie is a nurse at an IRC-supported medical facility and survived Ebola in Mabalako, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The task force's mandate should be narrowed to target the countries identified by the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and FAO as "highest concern" in their regular Hunger Hotspots analysis, mobilizing action well before a formal famine declaration. This year, that tier consists of six countries, all on the Watchlist: Somalia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Yemen, northeast Nigeria and South Sudan. The task force's membership should also be expanded to include donors, international financial institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to start to break down the humanitarian-development divide in these responses.

The international community should also aim to treat every child enduring acute malnutrition. A staggering **80%** of malnourished children are not getting treatment, leading to roughly two million deaths annually. Two decades ago, the United States launched the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). With bipartisan political leadership and a public health approach, PEPFAR has played a critical role in bringing the HIV epidemic to heel, saving **21 million** lives. A similar approach is needed now as 52 million children suffer from acute malnutrition. Fortunately, a proven solution exists in the form of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), a nutrient-rich, peanut-based paste. But the delivery approach is inefficient and difficult to scale. A bifurcated system treats severe and moderate forms of malnutrition with different products, different supply chains and at different delivery points. The IRC's research and evidence show that a shift towards a simplified, combined protocol with one treatment product could turn the tide and save millions of children's lives.

HUMANITARIANS ARE NO LONGER JUST A LIFELINE FOR THE FEW, BUT EXPECTED TO BE THE FINAL GUARDRAIL TO STOP ENTIRE COUNTRIES DESCENDING INTO CATASTROPHE



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² The International Development Association (IDA) supports the poorest developing countries in economic growth and IDA20 was just replenished for \$93 billion for 2022-2025, meaning an average of \$31 billion per year.

02

Stop the slide from fragile to failed state.

By 2030, **two-thirds** of the extreme poor will live in fragile and conflict-affected states, including half in Watchlist countries alone.³ **Four in five** fragile and conflict-affected states are off-track to achieve select targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Humanitarian aid is not enough. Parallel aid and service delivery systems are shortsighted. It is not enough to keep people alive; they should be supported with a path towards self-sufficiency and recovery. Conflict, climate change and economic shocks have left poor economies, weak governance and low state capacity. Governments are racking up debt to survive; **60%** of low-income developing countries are in debt distress or at high risk of it—a doubling since 2015. They are then cutting public services, subsidies, etc. to repay it, leaving people without sufficient social safety nets or access to health, education and other basic services. This is not just the way it is in developing countries—these contexts are getting worse and falling behind in global progress.

03

Fund the frontlines with a people-first MDB strategy.

Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) are increasingly facing the need to operate in fragile and conflict-affected states where governments are often unable (or unwilling) to support all populations or donors are opposed to funding the authorities in power. So a new mindset is needed. While MDBs are accustomed to a government-first strategy, they should shift towards a people-first strategy that centers on communities in need.

MDBs should formalize a strategy for funding nongovernment organizations to better support areas without viable options for government programs, while still designing programs in ways that leave the door open to transitioning programs to governments in the future. This requires standard ways of working and criteria for when to directly support civil society. There are a growing number of ad hoc precedents in places like Yemen, South Sudan and Afghanistan where MDBs funded the UN or NGOs to provide basic services. Most recently, donors were unwilling to fund the new

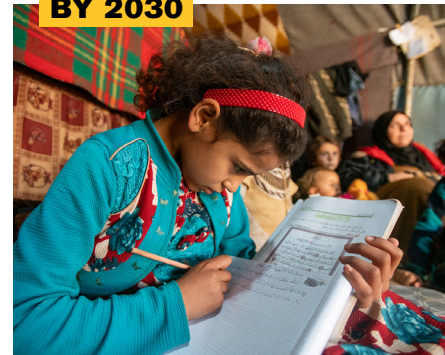
Given their domestic crises, these states are particularly reliant on foreign donor support to break the cycle of crisis with wider economic and development support. Donors should prioritize these settings by committing 50% of bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) to fragile and conflict-affected states—up from 27% currently. That shift would direct at least an additional \$25 billion per year to these contexts.⁴ This funding should come in the form of greater grants and more favorable concessional financing and wider debt relief as the risk of a debt crisis rises. The top priority for the use of this additional funding should be restoring basic service delivery, like education systems, to support the **260 million** children out of school given **only 3%** of humanitarian aid currently supports education, as well as essential health, water and other services. Financing should be accompanied by policy commitments from recipient governments on critical issues like governance and anti-corruption measures to ensure these systems best serve their population.

authorities in Afghanistan after the shift in power in 2021, but remained committed to supporting the Afghan people. They successfully navigated this challenge by reconfiguring a World Bank-led trust fund to move all funds via the UN and NGOs to sustain the country's health system, education and large-scale livelihoods and agriculture programs.

Even in places with government programs, civil society can complement them; they can quickly scale up when disaster strikes (e.g., cash transfer programs) via shock-responsive strategies and target those most affected like displaced populations, women and girls and marginalized groups. Nongovernment organizations, particularly NGOs, often have a long-standing presence in these communities, trust and an understanding of intersecting needs and local dynamics. They can operate in ways that are effective, efficient and conflict sensitive. For instance, the IRC is **partnering with GAVI** to launch an ambitious effort across East Africa to reach “zero dose” children who have not received a single routine vaccine, often due to living in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach areas or places with weak or nonexistent health systems.

2/3

**OF THE EXTREME
POOR WILL LIVE
IN FRAGILE AND
CONFLICT-AFFECTED
STATES, INCLUDING
HALF IN WATCHLIST
COUNTRIES ALONE,
BY 2030**



10-year-old Heba in a Syrian displacement camp. Her school closed down after shelling made it unsafe to keep it open.

**DONORS SHOULD
SHIFT TOWARDS
A PEOPLE-FIRST
STRATEGY THAT
CENTERS ON
COMMUNITIES
IN NEED**



Zhwan Mall has seen an increase in his crops after being a part of a canal construction in Afghanistan.

3. IRC analysis of projections by the World Data Lab's **World Poverty Clock**. The countries on Watchlist 2023 will be host to 46% of the world's extreme poor by 2030. This data excludes five countries with missing data: Myanmar, Lebanon, Syria, Ethiopia and Ukraine.

4. IRC analysis of **OECD** data of bilateral ODA in 2020 provided by members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) using the World Bank's **classification** of states as fragile or conflict-affected.

PROTECT CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT

➔ **Guardrails are weakened because the laws of war are disregarded with impunity. The world does not need new laws; it needs to assert and enforce existing ones.**

Adherence to the laws of war is being eroded. International humanitarian law is designed to spare civilians from the worst aspects of conflict. But across Watchlist countries, civilians are facing the indiscriminate use of force and even deliberate attacks. Parties to conflicts are even weaponizing critical aid, blocking it from reaching certain populations. Nearly **40 countries**, including every Watchlist country, are experiencing high constraints on humanitarian access. These acts are accelerating with impunity. The world does not need new rules or laws, but a re-invigorating commitment to implement existing ones. All UN member states have already signed onto the Geneva Conventions. It is time to work to restore the guardrails previously created and agreed upon.

01

Re-establish people's right to aid.

The denial of humanitarian access is happening in the dark. Humanitarian organizations operating on the ground are unable to raise alarm for fear of retaliation. Even the UN is constrained in its ability to speak out as access becomes politicized. Those restricting aid are not just nonstate actors, but also UN member states. As a result, the UN Security Council (UNSC) is gridlocked. There is an urgent need for someone to shed light on the weaponization of access and speak truth to power.

Establishing an independent organization, such as an Organization for the Promotion of Humanitarian Access (OPHA), could fill this gap and act as a watchdog group. It should be made up of global leaders and experienced humanitarian negotiators. It should produce an annual report on challenges and trends in humanitarian access, provide regular analysis and early warnings when access is deteriorating and make recommendations and



convene stakeholders to galvanize collective commitments on access. These efforts should seek to reassert the long-standing principles underpinning humanitarian work.

Given gridlock in the UNSC, the General Assembly (GA) and regional bodies should also play a greater role in supporting humanitarian affairs. An OPHA should encourage the UNSC, GA and relevant regional bodies to consider and take action on the most serious incidents from its reports, such as starvation as a weapon of war or attacks on healthcare or aid workers. The GA or UNSC could then establish independent fact-finding missions that investigate these instances, recommend ways forward and report their findings back to the GA and UNSC for further action. To keep attention on the importance of humanitarian access, individual UNSC member states should consider hosting regular Arria Formula meetings, informal meeting of UNSC members, to draw attention to access challenges and recommendations for improvement in regular country briefings.



TOP RIGHT: Fose Abdiel fetches water at the water point in Kambe Kebele, Elele district, Somali Region.

BOTTOM RIGHT: An IRC staff member provides PPE to protect a local health facility from Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

02

Tackle impunity for mass atrocities.

The most severe abuses of civilians require actions that transcend politics and polarization. Yet the UNSC is paralyzed, jeopardizing its credibility and setting dangerous precedents that will allow impunity to flourish.

UNSC permanent members should support the proposal from France and Mexico, backed by over 100 states, to suspend the veto in the UNSC in cases of mass atrocities. The five permanent members of the UNSC would voluntarily refrain from using their veto power in these instances. Implementing this commitment would require a clear, neutral way to identify cases that merit veto suspension. The determination of mass atrocities should be set by a new standing, independent panel in order to minimize the risk of politicization or disagreement over the applicability of veto suspension. A first order of business for this panel should be defining “mass atrocities.” Both

the French proposal and the UN Framework of Analysis for the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes have defined atrocities as including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Limiting the veto in these situations would be a critical first step to ease gridlock and start to depoliticize UNSC action on some of the worst humanitarian crises and conflicts.

When the UNSC falls short, the General Assembly should step up, starting by regularly enforcing Liechtenstein’s “veto initiative,” passed in 2022. It seeks to hold UNSC permanent members accountable and raise the political stakes when they use the veto by creating a standing mandate for the General Assembly to convene every time a veto is cast in the UNSC. During these convenings, the General Assembly should re-energize the “Uniting for Peace” mechanism, which was meant to enable it to step into gaps left by the UNSC. General Assembly measures could include mandating commissioning inquiries or removing countries from privileged UN roles.

03

Empower women in peace and security efforts.

Efforts to prevent and resolve conflict should be accountable to those most affected in each context. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work for crisis settings. Adapting to the intersectional nature of conflict means shifting power and decision-making towards local groups and women in particular. Women have an outsized role to play in strengthening the guardrails for communities in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

That requires a focus on women at every stage of conflict—from efforts to prevent violence, move towards peace and support sustainable recovery. That necessitates greater funding to women-led organizations tackling issues at the heart of rising violence, including structural inequalities, a lack of social cohesion and resilience. The international community has been backsliding here. Peacebuilding efforts, whether

local, national or international processes, need to have women at the negotiating table to make these processes accountable to the wider population and thus more durable. Women made up only **19%** of participants in UN-led processes in 2021. Yet peace accords are **35%** more likely to last at least 15 years if women participate in them. All states should codify UNSC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which urges actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives into conflict prevention and resolution into their own domestic legislation and national action plans. All of this must be underpinned by sustained funding for protection and empowerment programs, from gender-based violence responses to economic programs, to address the disproportionate impact on women during and after conflict.

19%

**OF PARTICIPANTS
IN UN-LED PEACE
PROCESSES IN 2021
WERE WOMEN**



Loyce Tabu is a 'Listen Up' activist with Togoletta women's group in the Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Uganda.

CONFRONT SHARED GLOBAL RISKS

Guardrails are being weakened because risks are increasingly global, yet resilience remains national.

Borderless crises define Watchlist 2023, most notably climate change, the lingering threat of the next pandemic and record levels of forced displacement. These crises extend beyond the capacity of any one country to manage—particularly states already in the midst of humanitarian crisis—and thus require greater international coordination and investment. Measures to mitigate these challenges are true global public goods. The success of global efforts to combat these challenges will hinge in large part on investments in Watchlist settings and innovative approaches. At a time of global polarization and fragmentation, these shared risks should be a space for greater unity and common interests.

01

Break down the climate-humanitarian divide.

In all the talk of net zero, we cannot forget about the ground zero of climate disaster: fragile and conflict-affected states who are hit hardest today. The failure to proactively invest in climate change prevention and mitigation is leading to more need for adaptation. A failure to fund adaptation in the places hit hardest today leads to more cause for “loss and damage” payments for the damage that has now been done. Reparations come too late to address what communities needed in the first place.

While the climate crisis requires a global response, one size does not fit all. In these settings, we need to focus on better mapping of risks, innovation in climate resilience and coordinated funding that addresses the climate-humanitarian divide.

A better mapping of climate risks in humanitarian settings is needed to assess the slower onset, shadow crises that are emerging—the ways climate change destroys agriculture and livelihoods, worsens cyclical drought and erodes coping mechanisms.

If we can pinpoint risk more accurately, we can deploy resilience-building interventions in



advance, not just aid after the fact. Successful programs are already being piloted and should be brought to scale. This includes climate-resilient agriculture to support rural communities facing future recurring shocks, anticipatory cash programming, investments in seed security and a scaling up of community-based disaster-risk reduction such as early-warning systems.

Financing also needs to be better coordinated, breaking down the humanitarian-climate divide that leaves crisis settings falling through the cracks of international responses. Current climate finance is highly risk averse. Crisis settings are punished for their double exposure to conflict/fragility and climate change. UN Development Program (UNDP) research finds the more fragile a country is, the less climate finance it receives. Climate finance orients toward more stable settings with efforts at prevention and mitigation, while support for fragile and conflict-affected states is often reduced to short-term emergency aid. These states miss out on critical investments in longer-term resilience programs and climate adaptation, despite being at the knife's edge of climate change. Donors should rectify this imbalance by not only fulfilling their long-delayed promise of \$100 billion per year in climate financing to developing countries, but also committing to provide 50% of climate financing for adaptation to help states cope with the crises in front of them today. Lastly, donors should provide public pledges for funding the newly agreed upon “loss and damage” fund that is supposed to be in place by the next UN climate change conference in 2023.



**IF WE CAN
PINPOINT RISK
MORE ACCURATELY,
WE CAN DEPLOY
RESILIENCE-
BUILDING
INTERVENTIONS
IN ADVANCE, NOT
JUST AID AFTER
THE FACT**

TOP RIGHT: Women walking to drier areas in the district Sanghar in Pakistan as the flood water surpasses the roads.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Amin Abduraman, a coffee farmer, holds the branches of a coffee tree destroyed by the severe drought in Ethiopia.

02

Pandemic-proof the world.

COVID-19's devastating impacts have made clear that pandemics are not solely health issues. They are economic issues, security issues, social issues and deeply political issues. The world remains in danger if pandemics sit solely on the desks of health ministers and the World Health Organization (WHO). Prevention, preparedness and response require whole-of-society action which can only be mobilized from the highest levels of government and the international system.

In line with this finding, the Independent Panel on Pandemic Preparedness and Response recommended a Global Health Threats Council that convenes at leader level. This multisectoral council would sustain political commitment to pandemic preparedness and response, identify gaps, monitor progress towards clear goals and

advise on the allocation of additional resources pooled through a new Pandemic Fund. With a small but diverse membership, the council would balance legitimacy, inclusion and effectiveness with the ultimate aim of holding countries and international bodies accountable for ending the current pandemic and preventing future ones.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) also has a vital role to play given the economic shocks unleashed by COVID-19. In line with the panel's recommendation, the IMF should regularly assess its member countries' pandemic preparedness, including their economic response plans. This engagement could be modeled on the IMF and World Bank's existing monitoring through their Financial Sector Assessment Programs.



Hend Abu Dabour, an IRC nurse, prepares a COVID-19 vaccine at the IRC's clinic in Za'atari Camp in Jordan.

03

Strike a new deal for the forcibly displaced.

Refugees and other people on the move are not the crisis—mismanaged responses to displacement are. The welcoming response to many Ukrainians fleeing to Europe this year should be the norm, not the exception. Yet the majority of the world's refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income states, which are among those least equipped to support large refugee populations. A record level of forced displacement and the protracted nature of it merits a step change in support for these populations and those hosting them, who are providing a global public good.

This requires greater support to both those displaced and their hosts. Host communities are often the first and primary frontline responders during a displacement crisis. International financial institutions and major donors should respond with more ambitious aid and beyond-aid solutions. This should include significantly scaling up the World Bank's IDA Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR) and the Global Concessional Financing Facility for states that commit to welcoming policies for

refugees like access to work, education, health services and documentation. Regional MDBs should follow suit.

This crisis also requires dedicated strategies from donors in response to the internally displaced people (IDP) crises, which are too often forgotten despite the fact that there are twice as many IDPs as refugees globally. Like refugee crises, IDP movements can overwhelm local systems, become protracted and often result in parallel humanitarian responses rather than a scale up of the state's response. While refugees often face legal barriers to basic services, those internally displaced are often hosted in areas with active conflict and fragility, meaning there are extremely limited services and development in host communities that are often pushed to the brink by the sudden arrival of IDPs. The result is limited access to jobs, children left out of school and a dependency on aid. Additional financing and policy guidance is required to target these populations that are at risk of falling through the cracks of state responses.

**HOST COMMUNITIES
ARE OFTEN THE
FIRST AND PRIMARY
FRONTLINE
RESPONDERS
DURING A
DISPLACEMENT
CRISIS**





The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and rebuild.

Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

Ingenuity, fortitude and optimism remain at the heart of who we are. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls.

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