



City Haven

People on the Move • Harboring the Displaced
Event Brief

Amman, Jordan



New York, New York
February 2016

From Harm to Home | Rescue.org

Overview

With over 50% of the world's displaced and about 80% of Syrian refugees moving to urban areas, towns and cities are, more than ever, places where people seek safety, security, and dignity. Despite this, we are often presented with images of refugees living in white tented camps, with the implication that they can only be helped by international aid agencies. This is not the case. The displaced have assets, skills, and are often already urbanites. Their presence in cities means that we must all work to ensure they find what they are looking for: a city that welcomes them, supports them, and gives them a haven.

On February 18, 2016, Emergency Humanitarian Relief Coordinator and UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O'Brien, welcomed guests to the United Nations in New York City for a special event entitled *City Haven: People on the Move • Harboring the Displaced*. The event highlighted the challenges and opportunities of responding to urban emergencies, including the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and the Syrian refugee crisis. It sought to change our perceptions of displaced people and propose new ways to ensure towns and cities are safe and inclusive places for all – including refugees and migrants. Referencing the urban context as it relates to both Sustainable Development Goal Number 11¹ and the UN Secretary-General's five core responsibilities for the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit,² O'Brien started the discussion by stating that, "we will commit to a concrete set of actions and commitments that will enable all – including member states, affected populations, civil society, and the private sector – to better prepare for and respond to crises, and to become more resilient to shocks." In order to put these commitments in to practice, O'Brien announced that a new form of collaboration, the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, will be launched during a special session at the World Humanitarian Summit. The Alliance joins a diverse group of actors, who do not currently work together (including municipal authorities, urban professionals and humanitarian and development agencies) to deliver humanitarian responses in urban areas.

Panel Discussion

With **Miriam Elder**, the Foreign Editor of BuzzFeed, moderating, the panel brought together:

- **David Miliband**, President International Rescue Committee (IRC), former UK Foreign Secretary
- **Aisa Kacyira**, Deputy Executive Director UN Habitat, former Mayor of Kigali
- **Daniel Zarrilli**, Director for Resilience in the Office of the Mayor of New York

David Miliband, speaking on behalf on an international aid agency fast becoming a policy and practice leader in improved urban humanitarian response, emphasized the need for humanitarians to take long-term, sustainable approaches to working with both the urban displaced and their host cities. Referencing the IRC's work to support the livelihoods of refugees living in cities in Lebanon and Jordan, Miliband spoke of how allowing refugees to

¹ SDG 11 is to "make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable." The complete text on SDG 11 may be found here: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>

² The five core principles are as follows: 1. Secure political leadership to prevent and end conflicts, 2. Uphold the norms that safeguard our humanity, 3. Leave no one behind, 4. Change people's lives by moving from delivering aid to ending needs, and 5. Investing in humanity.

work not only ensures their long-term financial wellbeing, but also strengthens local economies. Beyond secure livelihoods, Miliband stated the need to give urban refugees a “voice,” particularly given the severity of the current global refugee crisis.

Aisa Kacyira, drawing from her experience both locally as the Mayor of Kigali and internationally as the Deputy Executive Director of UN Habitat, spoke of the need to invest in cities’ capacities to respond to crises. This is especially important given that local authorities often bear the largest burden while funding is primarily channeled through the national government. “Many Mayors around the world are responding to crises much bigger than their capacities,” she stated. Furthermore, Kacyira spoke of the value of alliances and encouraging organizations, governments, and funding bodies to work together, breaking down the silos that separate them in order to collectively enact solutions that are more in tuned with realities on the ground. This particular mantle will be taken up by the *Global Alliance for Urban Crises*.

Daniel Zarilli, who was at the forefront of New York City’s recovery and subsequent resilience-building following Superstorm Sandy, spoke of the city’s emphasis on reducing the number of internally displaced residents within the five boroughs during the recovery process. The city immediately focused on getting people displaced by the storm back into their homes, so as to concentrate efforts on longer term resiliency rather than a protracted IDP response. Zarilli emphasized the need for other cities to recognize and plan for risks, an endeavor that relies more on a comprehensive approach than it does a wealth of resources. As such, the lessons from New York City are applicable to any city that seeks to bolster its resilience, regardless of its level of fragility.

Film

The event served as the debut for a new short-film entitled [“For My Son”](#) that told the story of a Syrian father who fled his war-torn country and sought refuge in Amman, Jordan. Desperate for a place where his young son, Muhammad, could be safe from harm and yet still have the opportunities and freedoms that refugees are so rarely afforded, the father – like hundreds of thousands of other Syrian refugee families – chose Amman over a camp. The creators, RYOT, developed a virtual reality accompaniment, giving attendees a chance to view Amman through the eyes of a refugee.

Attendees also viewed the film “Canaan: A Community Grows in Haiti,” which tells the story of the unplanned and informal creation of a new urban area, inhabited by Haitians displaced by the 2010 earthquake, just north of Port-au-Prince. Many of Canaan’s inhabitants left camps in favor of a more permanent environment which they could build on their own terms, but received little support or guidance from the international community to do so safely.

Organizers

The event was organized by the Urban Coordination Cell for the World Humanitarian Summit and the Global Alliance for Urban Crises. The Urban Coordination cell includes:

- Filiep Decorte, Chief Technical Advisor, UN Habitat
- Lucy Earle, Urban Policy Advisor, Humanitarian Policy and Partnerships Group, DFID/IRC
- Jo Henderson, Urban Policy Advisor, IRC
- Ann Young Lee, CEO, J/P HRO

Links

[UN TV recording of the City Haven event](#)

[Storify Article on the City Haven event](#)

[World Humanitarian Summit Urban page](#)

[International Rescue Committee Urban Crises page](#)

[Video: Canaan: A Community Grows in Haiti](#)

[Video: "For My Son," a virtual reality film](#)

Acknowledgements

This **City Haven Brief** is generously funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the DFID–IRC Advocacy and Learning Partnership on Urban Crises. The partnership is part of the DFID Urban Crises Program on the urban aspects of humanitarian action. Outputs from the program will feed into a broader consultative process on the urban aspects of humanitarian action, focused on the World Humanitarian Summit and Habitat III. The process is led by the World Humanitarian Summit Secretariat, UN-Habitat, IRC and DFID.

Additional information and similar publications may be found online at www.rescue-uk.org/what-we-do/urban-crisis.

