

First of all, I would like to welcome this joint initiative of France and Germany and thank you, Ministers, for the invitation to Humanity & Inclusion (the new name of the Federation Handicap International) to testify about the challenges my organization experience to protect its humanitarian workers.

HI has been working for more than 35 years in conflict contexts, with people at risk and with people with disabilities:

- HI responds to humanitarian needs generated by armed conflicts in 21 out of the 60 countries in which we operate;
- The safety and security of the women and men who work to implement our projects is a constant concern.

Why is it important to focus specifically on the protection of humanitarian personnel?

- Because they are more often exposed to risks, by the nature of their work, to care for the wounded and the most vulnerable in the most dangerous areas;
- Because they can be targeted because of their work and this is unacceptable;
- But also, and above all, because their protection is the sine qua non for maintaining access to essential and vital services for populations affected by the crises.

I would like to underline here the kind of threats that are crucial issues for a player in the field like HI.

The first of the threats is the political instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid:

- The assistance provided must not be subject to any other objective than the humanitarian imperative;
- Fight against terrorism, issues of sovereignty, confusion between military and humanitarian objectives... none of these agendas must call into question the absolute necessity of neutral and independent impartial help;
- If States are responsible for the application of international law on their territory, the Security Council has a key role to play in recalling and promoting humanitarian principles, to ensure that they are respected in theaters of crisis;

-Seen from the field, it is not only a question of great theoretical principles, but of a daily necessity to guarantee the continuity of access to essential services and not to make humanitarian workers a target.

The second threat concerns the risks related to explosive weapons that make up to 90% of civilian casualties when used in populated areas:

-Is it necessary to recall the recent death of one of our colleagues by a mortar fire in Yemen?

-Or the countless destruction of health facilities by bombing or shooting in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan?

-The intensity with which urban areas are subject to shelling, raises the level of risk for the civilian population and for humanitarian workers in appalling ways;

-The effect is devastating for the delivery of aid and for access to basic services and, for anyone, on the long-term, because of the contamination;

-We look forward to a decisive engagement of the international community against the use of high-impact explosive weapons in populated areas, in line with the call of the Secretary General of the United Nations;

-In addition, mine action, including risk education, depollution and victim assistance, should be considered an integral part of humanitarian response plans.

The third issue concerns the often increased risks faced by local staff of international or local NGOs:

-They are often at the heart of the humanitarian response and best placed to ensure continuity of services to communities, during conflicts and after when population vulnerability remains high;

-They face specific risks related to their humanitarian mandate: assassinations, injuries, arbitrary arrests, condemnation to heavy prison sentences, displacements...

-They must be able to be protected, for example when the area where they work changes control, and be able to continue to work if they choose to do so;

-The international community bears a collective responsibility to strengthen their protection, while the localization of aid is everywhere on the agenda

-The establishment of an inter-agency mechanism of evacuation and protection is one of the proposals to explore.

In conclusion, I would like to make a solemn appeal to this chamber:

- Attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel must stop;
- The Security Council and the entire international community must mobilize to systematically denounce and condemn the attacks and put an end to them;
- The Security Council must support the establishment of concrete solutions to strengthen the protection of humanitarian workers, according two ways:
 - Through the establishment of an independent mechanism attached to the Secretary General of the United Nations in charge of identifying attacks against humanitarian and medical personnel;
 - Facilitating the considerations of specific protection issues for humanitarian workers in the measures put in place to protect civilians, guarantee their safety, protection and freedom of movement in ceasefire agreements, truces, and reconciliation agreements or of peace.

Thank you