

Humanitarian Principles

Humanitarian Principles
World Vision Australia's
Public Policy Position

World Vision Australia's position on humanitarian principles

World Vision Australia carries out all its humanitarian work in accordance with the humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief,¹ the Sphere Project's Handbook² and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) are all based on the humanitarian principles and provide guidelines for applying them in practice.

The humanitarian principles are critical for establishing and maintaining access to all affected people in natural disaster or armed conflict situations.

World Vision Australia takes the view that the principle of neutrality does not preclude undertaking advocacy about violations of international law. World Vision Australia is committed to holding the Australian government to account regarding its commitments under the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, most importantly, to the humanitarian imperative to provide assistance on the basis of need, irrespective of where that need arises. World Vision Australia also supports the need to continuously reflect on and improve standards and methods for carrying out humanitarian work.

In particular, World Vision Australia supports:

- People-centred humanitarian response which puts affected populations at its centre
- Increasing the accountability of humanitarian agencies and donors to the people they assist
- Avoiding exposing people to further harm through humanitarian assistance
- Building on local capacities rather than replacing them, and seeking to reduce future vulnerabilities as well as meet basic needs

In addition to the humanitarian principles, World Vision Australia's work in humanitarian contexts is always guided by the Convention of the Rights of the Child.³

World Vision International has endorsed the Code of Conduct and the Sphere Project's Handbook, which includes the Humanitarian Charter, Protection Principles, and Core and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. World Vision International has committed to being accountable to the communities it serves.⁴ To this end, World Vision International submits regular reports to Accountable Now,⁵ as a board member of the CHS Alliance⁶ and has undertaken to carry out a self-assessment against the CHS by the end of 2017.⁷

World Vision's mandate to advocate for humanitarian principles

World Vision is a non-governmental, humanitarian organisation, operating in accordance with the humanitarian principles and international law.⁸ World Vision works in humanitarian contexts in order to reach the most vulnerable children and their communities.⁹ The humanitarian principles underpin and drive World Vision's humanitarian work. World Vision's adherence to these principles directly contributes to the wellbeing of children in emergencies and conflict.

World Vision Australia's policy recommendations for change

World Vision Australia calls on the Australian government to:

Continue Australia's long bipartisan history of responding to humanitarian crises in accordance with humanitarian principles by:

1. Ensuring humanitarian funding is allocated in proportion to need, irrespective of where that need arises. The Australian Government's decision to prioritise its development assistance to the Indo-Pacific region must not limit the provision of humanitarian assistance globally, especially to countries where need is most acute or underfunded. This is particularly important as the highest humanitarian needs are presently located outside the Indo-Pacific region.
2. Ensuring humanitarian funding is allocated independent of political, economic, military or other motivations. To ensure that humanitarian programming decisions are made in a neutral, impartial and transparent manner in accordance with humanitarian principles, they should continue to be made in a stand-alone humanitarian division within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
3. Promoting reform of humanitarian systems and processes through Australia's role as co-chair of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Group from 2016 to 2018, its role on the World Food Program Executive Board until the end of 2017, and its continuing membership of the UN OCHA Donor Support Group and in regional forums such as the ASEAN Dialogue Partnership.

World Vision Australia calls on parties to conflict and states experiencing natural disasters to:

4. Respect and promote the the humanitarian principles, namely, humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

World Vision Australia calls on humanitarian organisations to:

5. Continue reflecting on challenges and solutions to upholding the humanitarian principles while ensuring access and protection in complex security environments.
6. Endorse the Core Humanitarian Standard, conduct regular self-assessments and promote compliance by other actors, especially with respect to accountability to beneficiaries.

Background

International framework

The four principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are widely accepted as the foundations of humanitarian action.¹⁰ The four principles are derived from the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.¹¹ The first three principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality were affirmed as the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 46/182 of 1991,¹² and the principle of independence was added by Resolution 58/114 of 2004.¹³ The widely accepted definitions of the principles are:

1. **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.
2. **Neutrality:** Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
3. **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 adverse distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion.
4. **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 Australian policy landscape

The four humanitarian principles are enshrined in the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD Principles), which Australia agreed to in 2003.¹⁴ Australia is the co-chair, together with Germany, of the Good Humanitarian Donorship group from 2016 to 2018.

Key resources & references

Key resources

The Core Humanitarian Standard, *The Standard*, 2017, available at: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

The Sphere Project, *The Sphere Handbook*, available at: <http://www.spherehandbook.org/>

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief*, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>

Accountable Now, *Accountability Commitments*, available at: <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/our-accountability-commitments/>

References

¹ International Red Cross, *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief*, 1994, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>

² The Sphere Project, *The Sphere Handbook*, 1997, available at: <http://www.spherehandbook.org/>

³ Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, entry into force 2 September 1990 in accordance with Article 49. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>. The Board of World Vision International has officially endorsed the Convention, its principles and its optional protocols. See World Vision International (2012) *Here We Stand: World Vision and Child Rights*, p.1, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/child-rights/publication/here-we-stand-world-vision-and-child-rights-2nd-edition>).

⁴ See World Vision International's commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit (2016), Commitment 6: <http://www.wvi.org/disaster-management/our-commitments>. See also 'Accountability' in World Vision International, 2015 Annual Review, 2015, p. 7, available at: http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/20161030_WVIAnnualReview.pdf.

⁵ Reports by World Vision International, *Accountability Report: Accountable Now* (previously called the INGO Accountability Charter), available at: <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/charter-members/world-vision-international/>. In light of significant progress made until 2014, Accountable Now only requires accountability reports from World Vision every second year.

⁶ CHS Alliance, Groupe UDR and the Sphere Project, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, available at: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>.

⁷ Core Humanitarian Standard (26 May 2016), "Donors, UN agencies and NGOs commit to the CHS at World Humanitarian Summit". Statement by Kevin Jenkins available at: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/news/donors-un-agencies-and-ngos-commit-to-the-chs-at-world-humanitarian-summit>.

⁸ Namely, international human rights law, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights*, and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, international humanitarian law,

including the four Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and international refugee law, including the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

⁹ World Vision, *Disaster Management 2020* (Video), available at: <http://www.wvi.org/disaster-management/video/disaster-management-2020>.

¹⁰ *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief*, 1994, available at: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>. CHS Alliance, Groupe URD and the Sphere Project, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, 2014, available at: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>. *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*, 2003, available at: <http://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html>. United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), *OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles*, June 2002, available at: https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Emergency Handbook*, available at: <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/44766/humanitarian-principles>.

¹¹ Proclaimed in 1965 in Vienna by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. In addition to the four principles now widely accepted by the international community, the International Committee of the Red Cross also proclaimed voluntary service, unity and universality as core principles.

¹² General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (1991) (Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations), A/RES/46/182, available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r182.htm>.

¹³ General Assembly Resolution 58/114 (2004) (Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations), available at: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/58/114.

¹⁴ *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*, 2003, available at: <http://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html>.