

The Future of Humanitarian Aid

Hugo Slim

Afterword by Liana Ghukasyan

A Public Lecture at Fordham University

October 19, 2022



Table of Contents

Introduction

Brendan Cahill

Executive Director IIHA 5

Lecture: *Ten Clues to the Humanitarian Future*

Hugo Slim

*Senior Research Fellow Institute for Ethics, Law and Conflict
Blavatnik School of Government University Oxford* 7

Afterword: *Three Priorities for the Humanitarian Future*

Liana Ghukasyan

*Deputy Head of Delegation/Deputy Permanent Observer IFRC
Delegation to the United Nations* 15

Hugo Slim Biography 18

About the IIHA 19

Introduction Brendan Cahill

For over twenty years Fordham's Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs (IIHA) has served as a bridge between academia and the humanitarian sector, looking at training and research as means to improve the efficacy and dignity of providing aid to those that are vulnerable.

Humanitarian experience has a strong role in the Institute's approach to education, with our faculty and lecturers having worked within complex emergencies throughout the world. Our lectures, webinars, research, publications and exhibitions reflect this grounded and global approach. We seek to partner and collaborate with aid organizations to combine and leverage our strengths.

The role of academia in the humanitarian sector, however, is one that needs to be further defined and strengthened. It is the academy critiques, compares and convenes, adding value to agencies and NGOs deployed to crises. Forward thinking, as well as historical analysis, brings needed attitudinal and organizational change.

We were honored to welcome Hugo Slim and look forward to future events.

Lecture Hugo Slim

Predicting the future is notoriously tricky. While we may get some things right, we tend to miss the really big events. Most policy-makers missed the Arab Spring, the financial meltdown of 2008, the COVID pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Just as often we miss very positive game changers like tiger economies, medical breakthroughs, remote working technology, and Black Lives Matter. With this in mind, Hugo Slim resists prediction, and, instead, searches for clues to the humanitarian future in the present and the past.

This blog is based on a lecture delivered at the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University in New York on 19 October 2019.

Ten Clues to the Humanitarian Future

Clues to the Future from the Past:

I started my humanitarian career in 1985 on the border of Sudan and Ethiopia working with starving and Tigrayan refugees fleeing attack by the government in Addis Ababa. The return of conflict to Ethiopia today gives us our first clue to the future.

Clue Number 1 Long unresolved conflicts will keep bubbling, boiling, and re-exploding over decades. Many of the wars humanitarians are working in today will still be there in the future, existing alongside others we never expected.

Ethiopia in 1985 was a Marxist-Leninist state. All government officials wore blue Chairman Mao suits and we had to call them Comrade. The Cold War was entrenched. The world was divided. I had never met anyone from Eastern Europe, Russia, or China. We did not expect it to be any other way.

In 1987, I was working for the UN in Ethiopia and monitoring famine conditions in two northern regions. Both regions were full of Soviet military forces but none of us had any contact with them.

I regularly passed the Russian General on the road with his army flag waving from his Soviet jeep, while my UN flag waved above my old white Land Rover.

Clue Number 2 We will always be surprised by global political events and what we least expect will suddenly happen to make an unimagined future.

My final clue from the past takes a longer historical sweep with a comparison of Syria in 1916 and Syria in 2016. In 1916, thousands of sick and starving Armenians were being forcibly displaced and marched to their deaths in the scorching drylands of Syria, and Aleppo was used a staging post in this genocidal process.

In 1916, there was no great humanitarian operation to help these Armenians but only a handful of church people, business people and the occasional compassionate Ottoman official, plus a few US and European diplomats trying desperately to raise the alarm. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were brutally killed.

In 2016, Syria was again in a war that focused around Aleppo. Again, hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee. But, in 2016, they walked towards a huge international humanitarian system that had developed institutions, norms, laws and financing over the course of a century. It was an amazing change and a fantastic humanitarian achievement.

Clue Number 3 Citizens, governments and religions of goodwill will gather around a good cause.

Humans are politically gregarious and will rise to an ethical challenge to create new imagined communities, important new institutions, new practices, new professions, new targets, and new laws. We should expect this in the climate emergency, new wars, and new diseases of the future, and we should actively encourage new humanitarian institution building across the world.

Clues to the future from the present:

Today's geopolitics gives us important insight into future global systems. We are obviously heading once again to a world defined by "spheres of influence"—big geographical blocks of power which will resist, exclude and compete with other big blocks of power and influence.

This means there is no chance of achieving a single international humanitarian system. Ambitions that the Western humanitarian system might expand to become the global system are redundant. Instead, we will have a humanitarian system of systems where each big block organizes its own humanitarian relief in its own way.

Clue Number 4 We will see civilizational humanitarian systems—Chinese, Indian, Muslim, European, African, North and South American systems. These will embody systems of democratic humanitarianism and authoritarian humanitarianism, culturally liberal and culturally conservative systems.

It will be vitally important that these systems talk to each other and coordinate in some way, like a sort of Humanitarian COP where governments meet, share their humanitarian plans and cooperate where they can.

Geopolitics today also tells us about future warfare. We not only live in a multipolar world, but we now know that this new geopolitics involves multipolar enmity.

Clue Number 5 Big geopolitical enemies are back and with it the risk of "Big War" between huge planetary forces operating across the seven domains of land, sea, air, outer space, cyber space, economics, and personal information space.

Big War will be very different from the militarily small wars that civilians and humanitarians have experienced in the last fifty years. Ukraine gives us a small window into wars with massive military casualties, multiple domains, and global repercussions, like global hunger, inflation and energy poverty.

IHL needs to adapt to Big War with laws that have greater specification on AI-based weapons, cyber warfare, and economic warfare—the latter is currently impoverishing millions as a strategy in the war between Russia and Ukraine.

Multipolar enmity also means humanitarian neutrality will not hold in many wars. Humanitarians will take sides and often work as politically committed humanitarians. They will combine a desire to save lives with a desire to win as resistance humanitarians, like those we see in Myanmar and Ukraine. Such side-taking humanitarianism is legitimate, and it will grow.

Current calls for the greater localization and de-colonization of Western humanitarian aid suggest the future of Western aid will continue to demand a rebalancing between global institutions and citizens' movements.

Future emergencies will need large scale responses, but people and governments will rightly demand a greater stake in humanitarian scale, and international agencies will not achieve the required scale to save the world on their own. UN agencies, the ICRC and the World Bank may be too big to fail but they will also be too small to succeed, and too expensive. Cheaper national humanitarian platforms must be grown to scale.

Clue Number 6 We should expect and encourage less international domination of humanitarian aid and a greater self-determination of national humanitarian institutions. Hopefully, these will be born from a strong sense of humanitarian citizenship in all countries.

The biggest and best predicted challenge today is the global climate crisis. We know that our world will change enormously in the future because of existing and future damage from climate change.

Our humanitarian future will see extraordinary changes in human geography, non-human life, disease, and the global economy. Sea level rise, extreme heat and intense winds and floods will see human society and our economy relocate away from unlivable

areas and towards newly habitable areas, particularly around the Arctic and the wider High North.

Land and resources will be dramatically devalued in unlivable spaces and revalued upwards in livable places. Land, sea, air, and outer space will be desirable if they are climate strategic—good places to live and trade, near natural resources that are essential to the post-carbon economy.

This global reset will be extremely turbulent for nature and society. We will need cooperation, collaboration, and collective action but, as always, we will struggle to achieve it. The results will be suboptimal and create new classes of climate rich and climate poor, those who are suffering and those who are thriving.

Mitigation, adaptation, and resilience will be strategic priorities for all States, and we can expect climate wars if people fight over adaptation—being greedy for their own adaptation and denying adaptation to others. Resistance and survivalist movements will emerge around climate disruption. Climate adaptation may come to be considered a just cause for war.

All this will need new norms and laws. The current schema of human rights law and international humanitarian law will overlap and provide initial protections, but much greater specification will be needed.

Just as we have developed IHL so we will need to develop ICL—International Climate Law. Humanitarians, notable the IFRC, must play a big part in this with new treaties and policies on climate-related suffering from extreme heat, hurricanes, floods, evacuation, anticipation, and human movement. And all humanitarians must continue to green their operations and impact.

IHL will need to adapt to climate crisis too. Environmental damage from war suggests we should start advocating for “green weapons”—low emission, clean weapons which kill and destroy particular humans but spare the natural world and the climate.

Clue Number 7 Climate-related disaster humanitarianism will be more important, or as important, as war humanitarianism in our humanitarian future. If the last 30 years were the era of war humanitarianism, the next 30 years will be the age of climate humanitarianism and need new international law.

The climate emergency will be universal. Traditionally rich States will be faced with pressing humanitarian demands of their own. Heatwaves in London, wildfires in France, more intense cyclones in the USA and disastrous floods in Germany already suggest that the supply and demand pattern of traditional rich world/poor world humanitarianism is changing. The supply of disasters is increasingly global and demand for humanitarian aid will be global too.

Clue Number 8 Humanitarian priorities will change because traditional donor governments will need to keep more money for themselves and their strategic neighbors. Aid will be spent closer to home in the “home-shoring” and “friend-shoring” of humanitarian supply chains. The rich world may keep its universal values but reduce its universal spending as humanitarian demands from their own citizens dramatically increase.

Many of us now live in physical space and virtual space. This opens up a new digital geography for future humanitarian aid in which AI will play an enormous role as humanitarians support people in their physical lives and digital lives.

Clue Number 9 As bi-spatial humans we need bi-spatial aid. We already know that people experience threat, risk, suffering, protection and physically and virtually. This will increase as AI and biotech take us deeper into a double life and a new hybrid life in which our very species and ontology may evolve significantly from our fusion with AI and biotech.

The existential challenges to human life posed by climate crisis and our hybrid evolution suggest one final clue to the future.

Clue Number 10 The principle of humanity itself will change because of climate change and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

In recent years, humanitarians have done well to create the principle of diverse humanity. This sees human beings as the same and different—as women, men, girls, boys, LGBTQ, different colors, different classes, and different cultures. This recognition of diversity and intersectionality has made humanitarian aid more nuanced and better targeted at a wide variety of humanity.

But the future demands that we evolve the principle further in three ways.

First, we can no longer be so anthropocentric as humanitarians—focused on human life alone. The risk of so many species extinctions calls humanitarians to value non-human life as well as human life.

Secondly, we should not only recognize non-human life in nature. We must also consider AI-based non-human life. Non-human combatants will soon be fighting autonomously in war, and we will have to come up with new legal ideas of hybrid liability which shares responsibility between humans and non-humans. Non-human robots will also be increasingly responsible for humanitarian aid—analyzing, distributing, treating, and caring in many different ways.

Finally, the principle of humanity will need to think of future human and non-human life. This means extending humanity to consider the rights of future generations as we make humanitarian decisions in the present.

Three Priorities for the Humanitarian Future

Historically, the humanitarian system has undergone several changes triggered by political and economic factors, security considerations, multiplicity of actors, vulnerable populations at risk, volunteers, and new technologies; the latter being the spark which ignited unprecedented innovation into humanitarian affairs. I would like to focus on three priorities that have changed the way humanitarian assistance is delivered and that will be instrumental in shaping the humanitarian future.

Participatory aid

Participatory aid enables the more direct participation of affected people from all over the globe to have a greater impact on how aid is designed, delivered, and evaluated. Much of this will be enabled by 'digital humanitarianism' which has already progressed in the last ten years and the spark of this was the response to Haiti earthquake in 2010.

Our era of advanced technologies has enabled a qualitatively different model of humanitarian response. In a world where there are more mobile-connected devices than there are people, communication technologies are rapidly transforming the way in which humanitarian assistance is delivered. The social media and the increasingly cheap availability of mobile technology had transformed the way that an average person interacts with their fellow human beings and governments.

Dwelling on our long experience to working closely with and within communities and improving our response based on their feedback, we know the added value of community involvement and engagement and we want people in vulnerable situation to be digitally included and actively in charge of the aid that they and their loved ones need to receive.

At the IFRC, we want a humanitarian future in which affected people

are digitally connected to the advice, information, aid, and data protections that can save their lives and keep them safe.

We also want them connected to their families and safely enrolled in digital systems of social protection, healthcare, and education.

But this connection should be a two-way process so that people can co-design aid, inform disaster response and influence our work for the better.

Anticipatory action

Our second priority should be scaling up anticipatory aid. We have invested a lot of efforts and resources in championing and further developing this approach.

It is becoming more and more obvious that we need to move from a reactive approach to an anticipatory approach, and we now have the technology and expertise to make this shift.

According to an analysis about humanitarian financing undertaken by the Overseas Development Institute and the START Network, at least half of all humanitarian crises are foreseeable and twenty per cent of humanitarian crises highly predictable.

Yet only one per cent of crisis funding is pre-arranged. We can and must do better in the face of predictable shocks—especially when our early warning ability to forecast is improving so much—as our own Climate Centre has been showing in recent floods, heatwaves, and storms.

There is a growing bank of evidence showing that anticipatory action approach is effective.

In Mongolia in 2018 for example, livestock keepers who received animal care kits and cash before severe winter cold saw fewer of their animals die.

In Bangladesh, an anticipatory intervention reached more people

with assistance at half the cost compared to previous years.

In Senegal in 2019, the number of households reporting going a whole day without eating reduced by 19% during a six-month anticipatory project.

The World Bank estimates upgrading early warning and early action capacity in all developing countries can save an average of 23,000 lives per year and avoid losses worth between USD 300 million and USD 2 billion per year.

We know that anticipatory action is and will be an important element that will shape the future of humanitarian action. But it is important to note that anticipatory action is not a panacea and there are several prerequisites for successful anticipatory action and one of them is sufficient, predictable, and flexible financing. Some government donors are leading the way on anticipatory financing, and we need others to follow.

Climate Law

As we continue to witness increasing intensity and frequency of climate crisis, we are going to need new international laws to protect people in climate- and weather-related disasters—new treaties and resolutions that are more specific and more targeted than what we have now.

Laws can be a struggle to make and do not lead to instant compliance, as we know from IHL. But we have seen the importance of regulatory frameworks in many instances and most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The process of agreeing treaties helps to affirm global norms and once they are law, new treaties give states, institutions, and citizens movements a framework to work with and aspire to in practice.

We at the IFRC network have been prioritizing these three areas for many years and we need to continue our efforts to make sure that participation, anticipation, and new legal frameworks play a central role in the future of humanitarian action.

Biography

Hugo Slim specializes in the study of ethics, war and humanitarian aid and is leading the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict's Red Cross funded research on the 21st century battlefield and humanitarian response. This is his second fellowship at ELAC where he previously led research on humanitarian ethics from 2012–2015 and was also part of the team working on the Individualization of Warfare funded by the European Research Council.

Hugo's career has combined academia, frontline humanitarian operations and policy making. From 2015 and 2020, he was Head of Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, where he led humanitarian policy making and diplomacy, and also coordinated the ICRC's delegation to the United Nations in New York.

Hugo did his BA in Theology at St John's College, Oxford. He then worked with Save the Children for five years and with the United Nations before joining Oxford Brookes University to co-lead their award-winning MSc in Development and Humanitarian Practice between 1994 and 2003. He received his PhD by Published Work from Oxford Brookes. He was then Chief Scholar at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva from 2003 and 2007 and has also been on the Boards of Oxfam GB and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD).

Hugo has published 30 refereed journal papers and 17 book chapters in ethics, humanitarianism and war studies. His latest books are *Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disasters* in 2015, which thinks through the applied ethics of humanitarian action, and *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War* in 2007, which analyses the causes and ethics of civilian suffering in war.

About the IIHA

The Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs (IIHA) prepares current and future aid workers with the knowledge and skills needed to respond effectively in times of humanitarian crisis and disaster. Our courses combine academic theory with the practical experience of seasoned humanitarian professionals.

We have designed our graduate and non-credit course offerings to be accessible to aid workers of various backgrounds and levels of experience as they continue to work in humanitarian crises around the world. Our undergraduate courses are informed by our extensive experience within the field of humanitarian training and embody the moral ideals and critical analysis of a Fordham University education. In addition to our educational programs, the Institute has five areas of research—Children and Armed Conflict; Design for Humanity; Food Insecurity and Conflict; Education in Emergencies; Water and Migration. It regularly offers webinars and lectures. The Institute has its own publishing imprint, The Refuge Press, and an exhibition venue, The Refuge Gallery. Its Podcast, hosted by Jamie McGoldrick, is *Humanitarian Fault Lines*.



Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs
Fordham University
2546 Belmont Avenue, Bronx, NY 10458
<http://www.fordham.edu/iiha>



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK