

# PERSPECTIVE: Is there still a role for humanitarian actors?

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WHILE the call for the party to be “overhauled” was reportedly the central theme of the recent Umno General Assembly, His Royal Highness Sultan Nazrin Shah Lecture Series 2014 also had a similar theme.

Held at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) and hosted jointly by Mercy Malaysia and IDFR, International Committee Red Cross director Yves Daccord delivered a speech titled *From Baghdad to Bangui, from Moscow to Kuala Lumpur: Is There Still a Role For Humanitarian Actors?* at the lecture series.

In what looks like another form of overhaul, he listed five major drivers.

The first is the level of complexities that we see and experience in the world today in order to address a multitude of needs.

Take the spread of Ebola as an example. While it is acknowledged as a medical issue, no less relevant are the social ones associated with it.

These range from violence to war and even poverty that must be taken into account before any significant impact can be seen in the fight against the fatal disease.

The problem is not singular any more. So too the Gaza crisis that exhibits multiple pressures, making the quest for long-lasting solutions a difficult task.

The second is the changing political landscape that seems to have no political convergence, let alone consensus, be it on issues ranging from climate change to that of ethnic and religious in nature.

There is virtually no international convergence to rely on in resolving differences. Instead, there is an increasingly lack of compromise and negotiation, making the issue more prolonged. Syria was quoted as an example.

The third is the irony of being highly connected, yet in many ways, fragmented.

The emergence of new media is perhaps a good example where the chance to be well-connected is very high. Yet devices such as mobile phones keep users apart as “individuals”, creating the fragmentation.

The chain of command is blurred where the leaders are not necessarily the point of reference.

The leadership can come from any level in the hierarchy. To make it worse, there seems to be no global and political leaders today who can bring the world together.



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This makes it challenging to rally to a consensus, what more in the complex situation today.

This may have to do with the fourth driver which is related to “trust”.

Without trust, there will be greater suspicions or rumour-mongering that tend to further erode whatever trust left. Some blame the media for the “sensationalisation” of news report to increase sales.

Last but not least is the fact that no one can remain immune to the ever changing trends in the world today.

We need new sets of thinking and perception skills to make it easier to draw closer together. The dichotomy of being connected but still remaining fragmented must be well-handled.

Taken together, these five drivers are minimally vital to consider before any attempt to overhaul can be undertaken. One can already imagine the difficulties involved.

To move forward, we must be humble enough to accept that while humanitarian issues are vital, there are other imperatives that must be considered. There is, however, no panacea for trying to solve the problem.

Compounding this is the necessity to be closer to the “target” groups as partners, now more than ever.

This is because the same level of complexity also exists among them, requiring a deeper understanding at the local level. More so the coping mechanism therein.

The approach is not only to try and assist but also provide protection. There is no room for outsourcing or being risk adverse which will only render the quest for solutions even more difficult.

In the final analysis, rethinking seems imperative so that new forms of the relationship allow for co-creation and collaboration as the way of the future.

This means that there can be a form of revolution to enable all the major drivers to be leveraged on simultaneously, resulting in an overhaul that has the potential to promote change for the greatest benefit to the larger population in the most humanitarian way possible.