

## **Humanitarianism, Aid and Politics**

**School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)  
Johns Hopkins University**

**Prof. Victor Tanner  
Spring Term 2003  
United States of America**

### **Course Description:**

This course focuses on arguably the most important issue in humanitarian assistance: the interplay between politics and emergency aid programs, and how these programs can empower, rather than further marginalize, communities affected by crisis.

Students in this course will acquire skills critical to pursuing professional activities in and around the field of humanitarian assistance:

- They will gain an understanding of the political dimensions of emergency aid programs with respect to both international and local politics.
- They will develop a feel for the practical analysis of the political repercussions of emergency assistance programs.
- They will learn to think critically and creatively of how external actors — donors, multilateral organizations, non-profit agencies and for-profit contractors, peace-keepers, and so on — intervene in the lives of local people and local societies.

The course, rooted in the extensive field experience of the professor, emphasizes a field-based, ground-up focus while including a balance of discussion on the dominant literature and theoretical debates.

The course is relevant to professionals and aspiring professionals in humanitarian assistance, human rights, foreign policy, academia, and the military who intend to work with societies in crises.

### **Purpose of the Course:**

The course will review the relationship between humanitarian aid and politics — both local and international — with a special emphasis on conflict-related crises and so-called complex humanitarian emergencies (otherwise known as wars).

While the international arena has changed dramatically following the September 11th attacks in the United States, the transformation that has occurred since the end of the cold war is nearly as impressive. Over the course of the last decade, the attention given to the humanitarian consequences of conflict has risen considerably, thanks in part to media technology advances. These so-called ‘humanitarian crises’ are marked by large numbers of civilian casualties, massive population displace-

ment, widespread food insecurity, the breakdown of traditional political and economic structures, warlordism, widespread insecurity and human rights abuses, conflict over natural resources such as oil, diamonds, timber, or poppy, and so on. The increased visibility of the human toll of these conflicts has placed enormous public pressure on donor nations and aid agencies to respond with rapid and effective assistance, at a time when foreign aid levels are at their lowest since the 1960s. This assistance carries huge political repercussions, both at the local level, and at the international level.

This course examines these repercussions, their causes, and the tendency of the humanitarian community to disengage from the political sphere. It provides a foundation for understanding the context of conflict and humanitarian emergencies, laying out such components as the nature of conflict, forced migration, humanitarian law, how the international aid community, and the use of militaries in humanitarian interventions. The course also follows current trends in humanitarian action and track the dynamics in specific crises.

The course draws on the experience of the professor, who has worked in a variety of functions and settings in the field over the past 12–15 years, and also has extensive analytical experience in writing and teaching about humanitarian aid and related subjects.

## **Syllabus:**

*January 23*

### **Class 1: Setting the Scene I: What Is a Humanitarian Crisis and the Foundations of Humanitarianism**

Introduction. Syllabus and methodology. Course assignments, readings, and expectations. Presentation and brief discussion of the course's themes: the interplay between humanitarianism and politics.

*January 30*

### **Class 2: Setting the Scene II: What Is a Humanitarian Crisis and the Foundations of Humanitarianism**

A short history of humanitarianism. Defining the terms: complex humanitarian emergency, complex political emergency vs. humanitarian crisis. Various components of humanitarianism. International actors on the scene and their roles and obstacles. Coordination and its discontents. Funding mechanisms. A first look at the so-called dilemmas in international humanitarian operations.

#### **Readings:**

Chambers, Robert: *Challenging the Professions: Frontiers for Rural Development*.

(Intermediate Technology Publications, 1993) — Chapter One: "Normal Professionalism, New Paradigms and Development" (pp. 1–14).

McKnight, Robert: *The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits* (Basic Books, 1995) — "Professionalized Service and Disabling Help" (pp. 36–52).

USAID/OFDA Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response (on library reserve) (skim).

The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Humanitarian Assistance. Chapter One: "Introduction," pages 1–31 and Annex: "The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief" (on library reserve).

Tamara Jones, "Relief Cowboy," *The Washington Post Magazine*, 4 July 1999.

Duffield, Introduction: "The New Development — Security Terrain" (pp. 1–17).

De Waal, Chapter Four: "Retreat from Accountability part II: The Humanitarian International" (pp. 65–85).

### *February 6*

#### **Class 3: Conflict As a Backdrop for Aid**

Changes in conflict over the past century. The context of conflict and its interrelationship with aid. Social, economic, political, environmental impacts of conflict. Regional implications of conflict. Conflict and displacement. The media factor in aid and political responses to conflict.

#### **Readings:**

Maynard, Kimberly: *Healing Communities in Conflict: International Assistance in Complex Emergencies* (Columbia University Press, 1999) — Chapter Five: "Communities in Conflict" (pp. 107–122).

Anderson, Mary: *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace-or War* (Lynne Rienner, 1999) Chapter 3: "Characteristics of Conflict Areas" (pp. 23–29).

Maas, Peter: "Emroz Khan is Having a Bad Day," *New York Times Magazine*, October 21, 2001.

Duffield, Chapter Five: "Global Governance and the Causes of Conflict," pages 108–136.

Reno, William: *Warlord Politics and African States* (Lynne Rienner 1999) — Chapters One "The Distinctive Political Logic of Weak States" (pp. 15–44) and Seven "Warlords in the Global Systems of States" (pp. 217–228).

Rufin, Jean-Christophe: "The Economics of War: A New Theory for Armed Conflicts," in *International Committee of the Red Cross, War, Money and Survival* (Geneva 2000), (pp. 22–27).

Keen, David: "Going to War: How Rational Is It?" in *International Committee of the Red Cross, War, Money and Survival* (Geneva 2000), (pp. 28–31).

#### **Optional Readings**

International Peace Information Service (IPIS): *Supporting the War Economy in the Democratic Republic of Congo: European Companies and the Coltan Trade* (Antwerp, January 2002).

Keen, David: "The International Functions of Violence in Civil Wars," *International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 320*.

### *February 13*

#### **Class 4: Aid Writ Large: Foreign Policy**

The interaction between domestic politics, foreign policy and local wars. Plots versus unintended consequences. Interests of the local society versus interests of the external actors. Short-term versus long-term interests. The power of organized charity.

**Readings:**

Natsios, Andrew: *US Foreign Policy and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Humanitarian Relief in Complex Emergencies* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1997) Chapter 2: "Complex Humanitarian Emergencies and the US National Interest," (pp. 19–32).

Natsios, Andrew: *The Great North Korean Famine: Famine, Politics, and Foreign Policy*, (US Institute of Peace, 2001) Chapters 6: "The Diplomacy of the Famine," and 7: "The Politics of Famine: The Battle in Washington." (pp. 123–163).

De Waal, Chapter Nine: "Humanitarian Impunity: Somalia 1993, Rwanda 1994," (pp. 179–191, Somalia part only).

Fawcett, John and Victor Tanner: "Birth of the Aid Juggernaut in Former Yugoslavia (1991–1992): Humanitarian Plot or Unintended Consequences?" (Washington DC, 2000.).

*February 20***Class 5: Military Intervention in Humanitarian Crises**

"Humanitarian Intervention" — a view from history. Military roles in humanitarian crises. The positive side of military intervention. Contentious use of the military. The political agenda of military use. Soldiers and aid-workers, soldiers as aid-workers.

**Readings:**

Cuny, Frederick C.: "Dilemmas of Military Involvement in Humanitarian Relief," occasional paper, no date.

Stapleton, Barbara: "A British Agencies Afghanistan Group Briefing Paper on the Development of Joint Regional Teams in Afghanistan," (Kabul, January 2003).

Reuters: "U.S. Army Under Fire for Giving Afghans Aid," 13 January 2003.

Langewiesche, William: "Peace is Hell," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2001, pages 51–80.

**Optional Reading**

Cuny, Frederick C.: "Humanitarian Intervention: A Study of Operation Provide Comfort" (Intertext, Dallas 1995).

*February 27***Class 6: Protection and Human Rights Issues**

Current debates in human rights. Preventive protection. IDPs: Debate over policies, responsibility, and methodologies. Protection for local citizens and remainees.

**Readings:**

Mendiluce, Jose-Maria: "War and Disaster in the Former Yugoslavia: The Limits of Humanitarian Action" in *World Refugee Survey* (US Committee for Refugees, 1994).

Fawcett, John and Victor Tanner, "Bosnia 1992–1994: Fighting Ethnic Cleansing with Humanitarian Action?" Washington DC, 2000.

Paul, Diane: "Protection in Practice: Field-Level Strategies for Protecting Civilians from Deliberate Harm," RRN Paper no. 30, Humanitarian Practice Network, Overseas Development Network (London, 1999).

Hathaway, James: "New Directions to Avoid Hard Problems: the Distortion of the Palliative Role of Refugee Protection," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, volume 8, no. 3, 1995 (pp. 288–294).

"Change and Stability: A Strategy to Combat Reprisals and Human Rights Abuses.

During and After Régime Change in Iraq," Washington DC (forthcoming).

Cuny, F.C.: Kuwait City 1991 anti-reprisal action memo.

### ***March 6***

#### **Class 7: Humanitarianism and The Neutrality Principle**

Mid-Term Take-Homes Due

Foundations of the neutrality debate. The meaning of neutrality and impartiality. The uses and opportunities of neutrality. So-called 'operational neutrality.' The case for and against impartiality. Advocacy and its role.

#### **Readings:**

Zinn, Howard: "Growing Up Class Conscious" (from *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*), in *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy* (Seven Stories Press NY, 1997), (pp. 145–162).

Weber, Max: "Politics as a Vocation" (originally a speech at Munich University, 1918), from H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (Oxford University Press, 1946), (pp. 77–128).

Exteberria, Xabier: "The Ethical Framework of Humanitarian Action," in *Reflections on Humanitarian Action: Principles, Ethics and Contradictions*, Humanitarian Studies Unit ed., (Pluto Press, London 2001), (pp. 78–98).

### ***March 20***

#### **Class 8: When Aid Does Harm I — War and Aid in Sudan**

Triggering displacement. Making victims more vulnerable. Hurting refugee prospects for protection and return. Creating dependency. Encouraging conflict. Undermining the social fabric. Destroying the environment. Economic implications.

#### **Readings:**

Prendergast, John: *Frontline Diplomacy: Humanitarian Aid in Times of Conflict in Africa*, (Lynne Rienner, 1996) — Chapters One ("The Context of Aid in Complex Emergencies: The Seven Deadly Sins") and Two ("Good Intentions on the Road to Hell") (pp. 1–36).

Cuny, Frederick C.: *Disasters and Development* (Oxford University Press, 1983) Chapter 5: "Disaster Assistance: Some Concerns," (pp. 89–100).

Davies, Robin: "Humanitarian Assistance: Negative Spin-Offs for the Host Country," in *International Committee of the Red Cross, War, Money and Survival* (Geneva 2000), (pp. 82–87).

Duffield, Chapters Eight (“Internal Displacement and the New Humanitarianism: Displacement and Complicity in Sudan”) and Nine (“Aid and Social Subjugation: Displacement and Complicity in Sudan”) (pp. 202–256).

African Rights: Food and Power in Sudan: A Critique of Humanitarianism (London 1997)—Chapters 8 (pp. 175–185, part on Nuba Mountains only) and Eleven (“Aid Resources and Disunity in the SPLA” pp. 262–292).

African Rights: “Imposing Empowerment? Aid and Civil Institutions in Southern Sudan,” Discussion Paper No. 7 (London, December 1995).

### **Optional Readings**

Mertus, Julie: “The Impact of Intervention on Local Human Rights Culture: A Kosovo Case Study” USIP 2001.

Terry, Chapters Two (“Afghan Refugee Camps in Pakistan,” pp. 55–82), Three (“The Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Refugee Camps in Honduras,” pp. 83–113), Four (“The Cambodian Refugee Camps in Thailand,” pp. 114–154) and Five (“The Rwandan Refugee Camps in Zaire,” pp. 155–216).

### *March 27*

#### **Class 9: When Aid Does Harm II: Bosnia After Dayton, A Case Study**

A close look at the repercussions of post-conflict assistance in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina after the Dayton Accords.

#### **Readings:**

Gersony, Robert and Cynthia Gersony. “A Summary of Findings and Recommendations: Bosnia Reconstruction Assessment,” USAID/BHR, April 1996.

U.S. Agency for International Development: “Bosnia: When Customers Tell Us What We Don’t Want to Hear,” The Participation Forum, USAID (Washington, D.C.), 23 January 1997.

Fawcett, John and Victor Tanner, “OFDA After Dayton: The Emergency Shelter Repair Program and the Political Repercussions of Reconstruction Aid,” in Review of USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in the Former Yugoslavia (1991–1996), (Washington DC, March 2002), (pp. 96–159).

### *April 3*

#### **Class 10: The Positive Potential of Aid**

Enhancing potential for recovery. Smart aid. Livelihoods and coping mechanisms. Empowerment. Building the resilience of affected communities. Long term perspectives. Using aid to build peace.

#### **Readings:**

Cuny, Frederick C.: “Working with Local Communities to Reduce Conflict: Spot Reconstruction” Disaster Prevention and Management Journal, volume 4, no. 1.

Lautze, Sue: “Savings Lives and Livelihoods: The Fundamentals of a Livelihood Strategy,” Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, March 1997.

UNDP/World Bank: Document on the Nuba Mountains Programme for Advancing Conflict Transformation (NMPACT), forthcoming.

Fisher, Ian: "Can International Relief Do More Good Than Harm? Amid the complexities of post-cold-war trouble spots, aid groups have stumbled badly. In remote Nuba, they have a chance to get it right." *The New York Times*, 11 February 2001.

Cutts, Mark: "Surviving in Refugee Camps," in *International Committee of the Red Cross, War, Money and Survival* (Geneva 2000), (pp. 62–67).

### **Optional Readings**

Mancino, K. et al, "Developmental Relief: NGO Efforts to Promote Sustainable Peace and Development in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies," *InterAction's Transition Working Group*, June 2001.

Cuny, Frederick C.: *Disasters and Development* (Oxford University Press, 1983) Chapter 10: "Program Kuchubal," pages 164–193.

## *April 10 & 17*

### **Classes 11 and 12: Debating the Aid Dilemmas**

In class debates on the dilemmas of humanitarian aid: Does relief inhibit development? Can relief prevent ethnic cleansing? Does aid prolong wars? Can one fight a war with humanitarian aid? The *génocidaire* dilemma: when do aid agencies decide to deny assistance? How much aid is appropriate?

#### **Readings Class 11:**

Slim, Hugo: "Doing the Right Thing: Relief Agencies, Moral Dilemmas and Moral Responsibility in Political Emergencies and War," *Disaster* 1997, 21 (3), pages 244–257.

Vaux, Tony: *The Selfish Altruist*, (Earthscan Publications, 2001) Chapter 1: Kosovo: the Loss of Impartiality, pages 17–42.

Martone, Gerald: "Relentless Humanitarianism," in *Global Governance*, vol. 8, nr. 2 (Lynne Rienner, May 2002) (pp. 149–154).

Terry, Introduction (pp. 1–16).

#### **Readings Class 12:**

Macrae, Joanna: *Aiding Recovery? The Crisis of Aid in Chronic Political Emergencies* — Chapter Five: "Legitimacy Dilemma: Aid in a Vacuum," and "The Sustainability Dilemma," (pp. 73–119).

Terry, Chapter One: "Humanitarian Action and Responsibility" (pp. 17–54).

## *April 24*

### **Class 13: Final class: Monitoring the Political Impact of Aid**

Monitoring the aid mechanisms. Who influences the system? Who can hold whose feet to which fire, and how? Who is accountable to whom? Who is the 'client?' Follow the money. Public influence. Coalitions. Changes on the horizon.

**Readings:**

Brauman, Rony: "Refugee Camps, Population Transfer, and NGOs" in *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*, Jonathan Moore ed. (Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), (pp. 177–193).

Duffield, Chapter 10: "Conclusion." (pp. 257–265).

Tom Brennan, "Final Report on Humanitarian Assistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina," USAID/OFDA, 7 December 1992.

De Waal, Chapter 11 "Political Contracts and Humanitarian Dilemmas" (pp. 213–221).

Terry, Chapter Six "Humanitarian Action in a Second Best World" (pp. 216–244).

**Course Readings:**

The recommended publications below are the primary reference sources for students taking the class. Students are advised, but not required, to purchase these books (all available in paperback). Additional material is listed under each class. All readings are either from the primary publications, or on e-res or library reserve. Class handouts of current articles will further augment the reading.

**Recommended works:**

*Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa.*

Alex de Waal, Indiana U. Press (1997).

*Global Governance and the New Wars: the Merging of Development and Security.*

Mark Duffield, Zed Books (2001).

*Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action.*

Fiona Terry, Cornell University Press (2002).

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