

Non-  
negotiable

The

**Human**itarian  
Must-haves

Speeches and  
Presentations

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**Humanitarian**  
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# Opening

## Lukas Wank

**Excellencies, representatives of governments and the European Union, bilateral agencies, UN organisations and international bodies, members of the Austrian parliament, representatives of civil society, distinguished guests and dear colleagues.**

My name is Lukas Wank and as the Director of Global Responsibility, the Platform for Development and Humanitarian Aid in Austria, and on behalf of the organisers it is my great pleasure to welcome you to 6th Humanitarian Congress in Vienna.

This edition of the Congress is held under the patronage of His Excellency Mr. Van der Bellen, President of the Republic of Austria.

A special welcome and a note of gratitude goes to Her Excellency Ms. Gewessler, Austrian Federal Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology and His Excellency Mr. Lenarčič, Commissioner for Crisis Management in the European Commission.

I would also like to thank all panellists, experts and speakers as well as the numerous volunteers contributing to this congress.

Last but certainly not least I would like to thank my colleagues from the organising committee, my predecessor, Ms Annelies Vilim, and Ms Monika Stumpf-Hulsroj, the congress manager, for her passionate commitment during the organisation of this congress.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start with a simple fact: Humanitarians are practical people.

One of the more recent proofs for that is how numerous Austrian humanitarian organisations –

often in cooperation with international partners – delivered assistance when the devastating earthquake hit Turkey and Syria earlier this year.

Hence, in the course of today's congress we will discuss very practical topics. We will do so by putting the focus on the question how the climate crisis, the use of food as a weapon or the forgotten suffering of humans – which mostly goes unnoticed – influence humanitarian work.

There are plenty of wake up calls that this is important and urgent at the same time: Just a few days ago, on Wednesday, a boat carrying 700 passengers sank, killing most of the people on board.

It is also important to look at the reasons why these people – and 108 million others in 2022 – were forced to leave their homes.

It is for such sad reasons why we chose to put an emphasis on more fundamental aspects of humanitarian aid as the overriding topic of this congress, namely the humanitarian imperative and the humanitarian principles as the core tenets for all our practical actions.

It is because of their very essentiality that this frame has to be stressed again and again and defended if necessary.

To continue to fulfil our humanitarian mandate and provide help where it is needed, the humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – must remain our steadfast foundation and must never be compromised by political, economical, social or other developments.

But let's jump back to the practical dimension, however.



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What we observe in the humanitarian hands-on work, is that the humanitarian imperative and the humanitarian principles are being increasingly questioned, humanitarian space is shrinking, and sadly, that humanitarian aid is far too often even criminalized.

Let me continue with another fact:

As regards the humanitarian imperative – to help those who need help – we can observe that, when we met here in the very same formidable premises of the University of Vienna in 2019, already 153 million people were in need of humanitarian aid. Back then we all agreed that this was a rather disgraceful figure.

Four years later, this number has more than doubled: The United Nations estimate that 339 million people worldwide are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

In a way, it also means that the relevance of this event doubled – at least.

Sadly, what didn't double in the last four years, is the level of assistance we provide to people in need – and this, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a tragedy because this means that millions of people are being left behind. But the lives of these people can improve, if funding and resources are allocated based on need, not geo-political interest, and the media headlines of the day.

Focusing on the gap between our ideals and the practical reality is crucial, particularly for us gathered here today. We find ourselves in the midst of decision-making processes that demand tough choices and prioritization, especially when allocating resources for humanitarian aid vis-à-vis other commendable causes. In essence, this is what democracy is about.

Against this background, political debates must make sure that we do not forget that those in need of humanitarian assistance must receive humanitarian

assistance. It is the very first principle of humanitarian work that can't be stressed enough.

While recognizing that ideals cannot be achieved overnight or without acknowledging the complexities involved, it is also my duty as the Director of Global Responsibility to keep firmly and proudly championing our shared ideals in advocating for the principles that underpin our work.

Therefore, I invite each and every one of you to join me in approaching political decision makers and - vice-versa - to engage with civil society.

The host organisations of this congress stand ready to partner in this process, particularly with the Austrian government. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

2023 also marks the 30th anniversary of the World Conference of Human Rights held here in Vienna. Against this background, let us remember that all human life is of equal value no matter where. And let us also remember that humanitarian aid is not an act of charity - it is a fundamental aspect of upholding human rights.

Thank you very much.



## Opening Lukas Wank



**Lukas Wank**  
*Director, Global Responsibility:  
Platform for Development and  
Humanitarian Aid*

Lukas Wank is the director of Global Responsibility, an Austrian Platform with 33 member organisations working in development cooperation, humanitarian aid, development education and policy work.

Before taking this post, he was the deputy director of the Austrian Centre for Peace (ACP) in Stadtschlaing.

Between 2018 and 2021, he already worked for Global Responsibility as a Policy Officer. His postings include political advisor, conflict analyst as well as policy officer

for the Austrian Ministry of Defence. Lukas Wank has led a humanitarian operation in Libya and also served as a political advisor to the commander of the CSDP operation EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Previously, Lukas Wank founded the think-and-do tank Shabka and was as its director until 2020. Shabka, part of civil society, focuses on foreign and security as well as development policy.

Lukas Wank is also a Marshall Memorial Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Washington D.C., a NEXT Fellow at the Aspen Institute Germany in Berlin as well as an Advisory Board Member of the Vienna International Institute for Peace. He is a graduate of the University of Vienna and SOAS University of London.

# Welcome

## Leonore Gewessler

**Dear Commissioner,  
dear organisers of the Congress, dear Mr. Wank,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude for having me here today at the 6th edition of the Humanitarian Congress Vienna.

Also, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, dear Mr. Wank, on your new role as Director of Global Responsibility. I wish you all the best in this vitally important position.

This Congress comes very timely, as the world is facing an unprecedented crisis—one that is rooted in both humanitarian issues and climate change. These two issues are deeply interconnected, and it is imperative to take action on different fronts to ensure a sustainable and just future for all.

Already today, there are millions of people across the world who are displaced and vulnerable. Conflict, poverty, and inequality have driven many to flee their homes in search of safety, stability and basic human needs.

As a global society, we have a clear obligation to respond to these crises not only with empathy and compassion but action as well. We must prioritize the needs of those who are most vulnerable and work to create a world in which everyone has access to basic human rights, including food, a healthy environment, shelter, and healthcare.

However, we cannot address the humanitarian crisis without also addressing the underlying causes of these issues.

The climate crisis is one of the defining challenges of the twenty-first century. And if we don't act fast—

it will reinforce global inequalities and humanitarian crises. Its impacts are already felt vividly all around the world.

In Austria average temperatures have already increased over 2 degrees Celsius. And all around the globe extreme weather events and natural disasters are becoming more and more frequent.

To name some examples: Last summer, Pakistan experienced huge floods which lead to millions of people losing their home just after suffering through prolonged droughts.

Small island states are quite literally faced with the threat of vanishing from the face of the earth due to sea levels rising. And we have been witnessing huge wildfires – be it in Greece, Australia or most recently in Canada.

This is of course triggering more issues – be it the spread of diseases, malnutrition, property damage or poverty.

More than 3.3 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change.

And in the last ten years, human mortality from floods, droughts and storms was 15 times higher in highly vulnerable regions, compared to regions with very low vulnerability.

The potential of the climate crisis to further destabilize communities, countries and entire regions cannot be neglected, as instabilities in one part of the world can have severe global consequences due to our globalised systems of today. The dreadful war in Ukraine caused by Russia shows that clearly on another level. Conflicts or forced migration caused by the effects of the climate crises might become more common.



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I know, all that sounds like doomsday is right around the corner. The fact is though, for many people across the globe this is already their reality.

But fortunately there is still time to steer the wheel in the right direction – towards Climate Action. The IPCC report showed us that it is not too late to act. Therefore, it is crucial that we act now, take responsibility to become and stay active on different fronts.

We have to take bold action to mitigate climate change. It is essential that we reduce our emissions, invest in renewable energies and energy efficiency, keep up the momentum on the transition to a climate neutral economy.

At the same time we have to acknowledge that mitigation actions alone are not sufficient to deal with the immediate impacts of a changing climate.

While countries in the global north have been responsible for a major share of greenhouse gas emissions, the global south is affected by the climate crisis disproportionately.

Especially the poorest parts of the global population are being hit particularly hard and at the same time have little capacity to address the climate crisis. Therefore it is imperative to support the most vulnerable in any regard to achieve the global climate goals.

Investing in climate adaptation measures as well as actions to respond to loss and damage needs to be enhanced, to help communities coping with the effects of extreme weather events. We also need to prioritize the needs of frontline communities, who are often disproportionately affected by climate change.

As you might be aware in the run-up to COP27 last year in Egypt, Austria has therefore increased its contribution to climate financing by EUR 220 million

for the years 2023 – 2026, of which at least EUR 50 million will be made available to respond to loss and damage.

Our approach of supporting the most vulnerable is threefold:

- First, by supporting Climate funds, like the Adaptation Fund or Green Climate Fund.
- Secondly, by supporting International organisations, for example the World Food Programme or the initiative on Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems.
- And, last but not least, by directly funding certain bilateral projects with local partner organisations to support action on the ground for the most vulnerable communities

No doubt, the climate crisis is a major issue. However, addressing the humanitarian crisis we also have to talk about its root causes – inequality, poverty, and conflict.

It demands a holistic approach and a bold and systemic response. This means prioritizing development policies that support the needs of the most vulnerable as well as investing in social safety nets that can help to protect people from the worst impacts of crisis.

And it also means supporting efforts to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, investing in diplomacy and mediation efforts, and prioritizing the needs of marginalized groups in conflict resolution processes.

We need a global response. We need to use the Sustainable Development Goals as our compass that guides us all, on every level of power and responsibility – in politics, the economy and society as well. We need to work together across borders and

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boundaries to find solutions that work for everyone. This means investing in international institutions and strengthening our partnerships with other countries, civil society organizations, and international organizations like the United Nations.

And last but not least, we also need to take a long-term view on these issues. The problems that we face today are unfortunately the result of years of neglect and inaction.

Often, these decisions were a result of irresponsibility and greed, damaging the poor and vulnerable. It is now on us to take brave actions and try to make the right decisions.

As I am certain, we all want what's best for future generations, a more just and sustainable world and future. Hence, it is of utmost importance that we start taking action now, here and today.

This call for action leaves me wishing you a successful congress. I want to thank each and every one of you for coming here today to discuss and to keep working on the Non-Negotiable: The Humanitarian Must-haves!

Thank you.



**Leonore Gewessler**  
*Federal Minister for Climate Action,  
Environment, Energy, Mobility,  
Innovation and Technology, Austria*

Born on 15 September 1977 in Graz; attended primary school in Sankt Marein bei Graz; attended WIKU BRG Graz Sandgasse commercial secondary school; completed a bachelor's degree (BA) in political science at the University of Vienna

### Political functions

- Deputy Chairwoman of the Green Parliamentary Group – Parliamentary Group of the Green Members of the National Council, the Federal Council and the European Parliament 22 October 2019 – 6 January 2020

- Member of the Advisory Council of the “Grüne Bildungswerkstatt” education foundation

### Career

- since 7 January 2020: Federal Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology
- 23 October 2019 – 7 January 2020: Member of the National Council (27 legislative period), Greens
- 2014–2019: Executive Director, Global 2000 environmental protection organisation
- 2008–2014: Director, Green European Foundation asbl, Brussels, Belgium
- 2006–2008: Management, Office of the Neubau District Administration, City of Vienna

# Keynote Speech

## Janez Lenarčič

**Federal minister Gewessler, Director Wank,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Let me start with the following. I very much like the term 'global responsibility' because that's what humanitarian aid is. It's not a charity – it's a global responsibility that has to be shared equitably. We'll talk about this a bit later.

We meet at a time of unprecedented humanitarian needs globally. Nearly 340 million people are in need of humanitarian aid. To put this in perspective, there are only two countries in the world that have more people: India and China. Meaning this figure would be the third biggest country if it were a country.

And the population of this non-country is growing. In the last year, the number of people in need around the world has risen by 17%. The equivalent of five times the population of Austria.

Of course, when you face such an unprecedented situation you need to think about unprecedented action. We must do something about this situation. And that's why I like the motto of this congress. What are these must-haves?

Of course, fundamentally this is about the imperative to deliver effective and efficient humanitarian response everywhere it is needed. And some of those 'must-haves' that I would like to offer for your consideration today are the following:

First of all, there has to be respect for International Humanitarian Law and access for humanitarian aid. Second, there has to be something that would reduce humanitarian need – at least in the mid-term.

Because humanitarian aid is not a solution to humanitarian crisis. You need to look into the root causes and offer solutions that address. And you

cannot do that with humanitarian aid that is emergency aid aimed at saving lives and alleviating suffering.

And third, we have to close the gap between the growing needs and not-so-growing resources.

I'll talk about humanitarian law first.

The protection of civilians and of civilian infrastructure, even in a war, is an international legal obligation of all involved. Even wars have rules. But increasingly, these rules have been violated. As you can see on a daily basis in Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Most recently, you could see the unprecedented dimension of violations of humanitarian law through the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam in Ukraine. This has resulted in thousands of homes being destroyed, thousands of hectares of agricultural land destroyed, sources of portable water destroyed and so on.

And why is this a problem? Well, International Humanitarian Law violations directly increase humanitarian needs. As I just illustrated with the example of south Ukraine. Europe, of course, is one of the staunchest advocates and supporters of International Humanitarian Law. And we need to ensure that others respect it too.

Around the world, we see tactics such as sexual violence and starvation as a weapon of war. You can see this in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Haiti. Armed groups there have targeted food systems and supply routes.

This trend is simply unacceptable. We must do everything possible to ensure IHL is respected and followed. It would be great to hear what ideas you might have in order to make this a reality.





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Second: I already mentioned that with humanitarian aid we are not going to solve the crisis. When aid is necessary, it is absolutely essential for the survival of people affected. But in order to solve the problem, you need more than just aid. Who else needs to be on the ground and work on the root causes?

If the cause of humanitarian crisis is conflict, then you need diplomats, politicians and all those who can sit down, negotiate and stop a conflict. If the root causes of humanitarian crisis are weather-related events like drought or floods, or social reasons like abject poverty, you need development partners to come into that area and work on those root causes and offer solutions. This is called the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, as you know.

We need to improve our cooperation on the nexus because otherwise we will see an increased number of what we already have all over the world. The so-called protracted crises, forgotten crises, have been with us for years and years. And nobody is looking at them except some humanitarian workers. And fewer and fewer donors who still provide humanitarian assistance.

But this situation, as I said – providing humanitarian assistance year after year – is not ideal. We need to strengthen this nexus.

However, as long as these crises are with us, providing humanitarian assistance to affected people is an absolute imperative. And for that we need funding. This brings me to the final point of my introduction: how to address the funding gap.

There are several ways we do this. One of them is to reduce the needs through the nexus, which we have already discussed.

Another way is to use your funding in a more effective and efficient manner. For instance, instead of bringing food from one part of the world to

another, you give people in the affected area cash cards so they can buy food themselves.

It's cheaper, more efficient, more effective and gives the affected people more dignity. Because, as I'm sure you'll agree, if you go to a shop or a market with your cash and decide yourself what to buy for you and your family it's more dignified than standing in line with a dish.

But the simplest way of decreasing the funding gap is to increase the funding. And here there are some good examples. We have been urging EU Member States to do better: because in the European Union, the Commission and five Member States account for over 90 % of European humanitarian aid.

We have been discussing this with the Member States and I'm glad to report we now have some improvement. Most recently, last year France entered the group of top 10 humanitarian donors in the world. Which is remarkable, as France was traditionally doing less than it could.

And last December, Spain adopted a law committing itself by 2030 to the well-known target of allocating 0.7 % of Gross National Income to official development assistance and at least 10% of this to humanitarian aid.

This has inspired the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union to work on Council conclusions that were just adopted a few weeks ago, committing all 27 EU Member States to that same goal. It's a voluntary target – but it is a target. And now we can work with all EU Member States to achieve this target.

And this brings me to Austria. Austria has made remarkable progress in the span of just a few years. Back in 2018, the Austrian humanitarian budget was 25 million US dollars. Last year, it was well above 100 million US dollars. More than four times larger.

This is remarkable. →

## Keynote Speech Janez Lenarčič

However, if we recall the target we just discussed, 0.7 % of GNI for ODA, of which 10 % is for humanitarian aid – well, there is still room for further improvement. I will leave it to you to calculate the difference.

Let me conclude with the following: we need more commitment from more donors to work on fixing the problem of the funding gap. There are countries out there who could and should do more. I would particularly single out a special category of countries – and although this isn't diplomatic, I feel obliged to do it. I am speaking about Permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Why am I singling these countries out? Because over 80 % of humanitarian crises around the world are a direct consequence of conflict. War. Inter-ethnic conflict. Violence. Who is responsible for this? Of

course, those involved in the first place. But also, the UN Security Council. Which, according to the UN Security Charter, bears 'primary responsibility for international peace and stability'.

And there are five countries that occupy seats in that eminent body permanently. Only three of them appear among the ten top humanitarian donors. That leaves two countries who are doing either very little or nothing. One of these countries is actually increasing humanitarian needs globally through its aggressive behaviour.

This is what I wanted to share with you. I am very much looking forward to the outcome of this congress. I thank you again for inviting me. I wish you a very interesting discussion.

Thank you.



**Janez Lenarčič**  
*Commissioner for  
Crisis Management,  
European Commission*

Mr. Janez Lenarčič is currently serving as Commissioner for Crisis Management in the European Commission, which took up the mandate in December 2019. In this capacity, he is responsible for EU civil protection as well as humanitarian aid, with an overall focus on ensuring that European Commission has the tools and the capacity to respond swiftly and efficiently whenever the EU is called upon, whether in Europe or elsewhere in the world. Prior to this assignment, he has served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the EU in Brussels from 2016. Before and as of 2014, he held the Secretary of State position in the cabinet of the Slovenian Prime Minister. His previous experience also entails the position of Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw from 2008 to 2014.

He also served as Secretary of State for European Affairs, including representing Slovenia during the Lisbon Treaty negotiations in 2007 and later representing the Slovenian EU Council Presidency to the European Parliament in 2008. In 2002 and 2003 he held the position of State Secretary in the cabinet of the Slovenian Prime Minister, after which he started to serve as Slovenian ambassador to the OSCE. In 2005, he was also Chairman of the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna. In 2000 he started serving as adviser to the foreign minister and the following year he became the diplomatic adviser to the then Slovenian Prime Minister. Between 1994 and 1999 he was posted to Slovenia's Permanent Representation to UN in New York, where he also served as the alternate representative of Slovenia on the UN Security Council.

Mr. Lenarčič is the recipient of France's highest award as Officier de la Legion d'Honneur. Next to his native Slovenian his languages are English, French and Serbian. Mr. Lenarčič holds a degree in international law from Ljubljana University.

# Forgotten Crises, Forgotten Suffering

## Reem Mussa

Just over 10 years after the devastating shipwrecks off Lampedusa, Italy in which 400 people were drowned, on June 14th, there was another shipwreck, this time off the coast of Pylos, Greece, in which as many as 600 people are feared to have drowned. Frontex drones detected the overcrowded vessel the day before, informed the Greek and Italian authorities and no rescue was immediately launched and deaths were not prevented.

Countless questions remain unanswered. I wish I could say that this shipwreck was an isolated incident, a unpreventable tragedy, however, this is not the case.

This is pattern of death and suffering that plays out on a daily basis at Europe's borders.

This has been the deadliest 6 months at Europe's sea and land borders since the last 6 years, whilst the majority of deaths happen at sea, at less viable EU land borders such as those with Belarus, more than 40 people have died and 300 missing over the past 2 years.

Violence along migration routes has become the norm. MSF in various regions including in European and North Africa, Southern Africa, Central and Northern America regions, find that violence along migration routes is often perpetrated by State authorities, some reports estimate that 40%-70%, this violence often occurs at sites of detention, at borders or during push-backs, however, can also be found urban settings and further away from borders.

For migrants who are deported or pushed-back to countries such as Libya, Niger and Mexico, they are often trapped in a cycle of exploitation, precarity and abuse. MSF study in Mexico in 2019, found that out of 80 patients returned to Mexico from USA, up to 70% were at risk or experienced kidnapping after deportation. In Niger, returned migrants are often

left stranded at the border in the desert without assistance or protection.

MSF has worked in various forms of detention and containment settings for over 20 years. For example, in detention centers in Libya, men, women and children are detained in overcrowded cells with little light and ventilation and often lack access to adequate health assistance, water or food. Similarly, in containment sites, such as EU-funded hotspots on the Greek Islands or Australia's off-shoring policy to Nauru. MSF has documented the severe mental health deterioration among refugees and asylum seekers.

This is not suffering that is forgotten but suffering that is contrusted and ignored.

States continue to double down on this harmful approach, in Europe, states reduced state-led search and rescue capacity and blocked humanitarian assistance at sea and within Europe. Just last week, the EU passed massive reforms to asylum rules, which will make it more difficult for people to access protection, reinforces deterrence and systematic de-facto detention at EU borders as we see on the Greek Islands, that will most probably lead in more pushbacks, deaths at sea and more criminalisation of migrants and those that seek to provide them with assistance.

According to a study by PICUM, more than 250 people have faced criminal charges for providing assistance to migrants across the EU. Many more have been detained, intimidated and investigated. This is a threat not just to humanitarian principles but to civil society, the rule of law and our fundamental values.



## Forgotten Crises, Forgotten Suffering Reem Mussa

The world faces unprecedented displacement crises that will continue to be fuelled the global challenges we faces, UNHCR estimates that 110 million people are displaced around the world. This represents more than 1 out of 75 people in the world. More than 90 % remain in low and middle income countries and more than half of them are IDPs.

Meanwhile, the international humanitarian system is not equipped to support refugees, UNHCR reported at the end of last year that they have a funding gap of more than 65 % funding gap for the joint refugee responses in over 12 critical contexts. This will disproportionately impact many crises that are no longer in the headlines, such as Burkino Faso, DRC, South Sudan, Chad or Uganda, Yeman, displaced Syrians in Lebanon, who are now being pushed to return to Syria, displaced Venzeualans or Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

For example, in Bangladesh, Rohingya, who live in the world's largest refugee camps in Cox's Bazar are completely confined and contained in the camp, they cannot leave, they cannot work and are almost completely dependent on assistance. Due to funding gap, the WFP has reduced food rations for the third time this year from a value of \$12 USD to \$8 USD per person per day, putting people at increased risk of malnutrition, greater risk to infectious diseases and health complications.

Here too we face questions of impartiality, as the authorities seek to contain Rohingya in camps, deny them of legal status and rights, and return them to Myanmar, meanwhile the international community fails to find a solution.

Without coming together to address this often forgotten and ignored suffering, and the policies which cause harm- we risk turning our back on our values, on humanitarian principles and on humanity itself.



### Reem Mussa

*Humanitarian Advisor and Coordinator of Forced Migration Team, Médecins Sans Frontières*

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER & PANELLIST**

*Forgotten Crises – Forgotten Suffering*

Reem Mussa is a Humanitarian Advisor and the Coordinator of the Forced Migration Team at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) based in Brussels. Her area of expertise includes

forced migration and the humanitarian impact of asylum and migration policies. She provides support to MSF operations in terms of analysis, positioning and advocacy strategies.

In addition to working at MSF, Reem is currently teaching a course on Humanitarianism and Migration at Sciences Po in Paris. She is a member of the Lancet Migration European Hub, as co-chair of the Borders and Health working group, and a Board Member of Racial Justice Center in Sydney.

## Panel Intervention: Forgotten Crises, Forgotten Suffering Bram Frouws

**Thank you very much, and thanks for the invitation to be part of this panel today.**

Let me start with saying I'm really sorry I cannot be there with you in person today, as I was very much looking forward to.

Not least because this is a very important discussion on the issue of forgotten crisis.

As my focus is on migration, I would of course like to discuss the notion of forgotten crisis in relation to migration and raise a couple of points for reflection and discussion.

Maybe to start with a main observation.

When it comes to migration, like with anything else, whether it gets a lot of attention, or might be forgotten, really depends where it's happening, or in the case of migration: where it's going to.

When it's about migration towards Europe, migration is far from a forgotten crisis. You could even argue it's the opposite of forgotten. It's overpublicised, it's vivid, it's overrepresented. And already called a crisis, especially by media and politicians, before you could even reasonably argue it is a crisis.

But the further you get away from Europe, that is where often the real crisis takes place.

The crisis of migration is not when refugees and migrants arrive in Europe, usually in totally manageable numbers. The crisis is further away, also for those who may be heading towards Europe.

Think about Afghans, who are killed at the border with Iran.

Think about the thousands of migrants ending up in detention centres, for example in Libya.

Think about the deaths during the Sahara crossings, in the Sahel.

In 2016, for the first time we published numbers and estimates, concluding that a lot more people die during these kind of overland crossings, as compared to the Mediterranean crossing. But that's not what we focus on.

There's an out of sight, out of mind dynamic – or maybe should I say tactic? - at play here. The further you push these migration movements away from your borders – which tends to be the direction of a lot of migration policy making - the more likely you MAKE it a crisis, but also the more likely you make it a FORGOTTEN crisis.

Even more forgotten are the migration dynamics that are not heading towards Europe, or the United States at all.

Think about Mayotte - where the sea route from the Comores is one of the most deadly migration routes globally,

Think about what we call the Southern Route from the Horn of Africa towards Southern Africa, where migrants may also die while in transit, and are met with a lot of violence and xenophobia in South Africa.

Now another aspect I would really like to zoom in on here, in the context of forgotten crisis, is the situation of migrants and refugees in countries in conflict. They are among one of the most forgotten groups. Right now, think of the millions of refugees and migrants who were already in Sudan when the recent fighting started, like the many Eritreans.

Or the Eritrean refugees in camps in Tigray, when the war started there.

Or migrants and refugees in Libya. →

## Panel Intervention: *Forgotten Crises, Forgotten Suffering* Bram Frouws

But a key example I would really want to draw attention to is Yemen. For more than a decade, an average of 8,000 migrants, mainly from Ethiopia, have been crossing from the Horn to Yemen, mainly to reach Saudi Arabia.

Their situation seems to be getting worse and worse. They experience an endless cycle of violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking, slavery and killings all along this route, at every step of the way.

On a scale probably only comparable to Libya, with one striking difference in the case of the Saudi-Yemen border, where migrants are deliberately, killed directly by Saudi Arabian state officials.

Yet, they are even more forgotten than migrants in Libya, presumably because it's far away from Europe, and the final destination of these migrants is not in Europe.

This case of migrants in Yemen is really a forgotten crisis, within a forgotten crisis. As Yemen itself is already a forgotten crisis.

Before I stop, I would likely to also reflect a little bit on the word crisis in relation to migration.

What I just described, the situation of migrants in Yemen, or Libya, yes, that's a crisis, for the migrants themselves. But this word crisis is used also used too easily in relation to migration. And we have to be careful there.

It creates a sense that things are out of control. Linked to this is the use of big numbers. We've seen a lot of statements and advocacy around reaching more than 100 million displaced people last year. Without good explainers that the majority are IDPs. And that less than a third are refugees who crossed a border.

And then we see a minister in the UK using this figure and saying there might be 100 million refugees coming to the UK.

So that's how this kind of advocacy backfires.

Or take climate change and migration. When it's about people who might be displaced by climate change, it's always the highest side of a massive margin that will end up in media headlines. And with an automatic assumption they will primarily move from south to north.

It all creates a fear of migration and a sense of helplessness. It feeds into a crisis narrative, where that's unhelpful, might backfire and might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. And the result is even more forgotten crisis, where there's a real migration crisis.

Now my focus area is migration. So of course here I'm talking about how migrants and refugees tend to be forgotten. But: there's also clearly a mobility bias.

We focus a lot on people who are moving, especially those moving cross-border. But we also know that in almost every conflict and crisis situation. The most vulnerable are those who are not able to move.

This is true in conflict situations, but also in the case of movement due to climate change effects. So that's not about migration, but gets us back to forgotten humanitarian crises more generally.

And that's probably a good moment for me to stop, and hand it back to anyone else with a broader perspective.

But just before I stop some last reflections on the guiding questions of what can be done about this issue of forgotten migration crisis.

On migrants in countries in crisis, there's actually a good initiative, but it's bit of forgotten initiative, which is called the migrants in countries in crisis initiative. Or MICIC. Which provides guidelines, examples of good practices, so that's something that should be activated whenever a crisis erupts in which migrants get caught. →

## Panel Intervention: *Forgotten Crises, Forgotten Suffering* Bram Frouws

We, also as humanitarians, have to be careful, in our own advocacy, to not feed into a crisis narrative where it's not needed or might backfire. And also, to keep on raising awareness on forgotten crisis.

Our colleagues from NRC have this annual overview of neglected crisis, which is a good initiative. Finally: to a large extent, these crises are not so much forgotten by decision makers. Yes, maybe they are by the general public. But the decision makers are generally well aware.

The problem is, how to mobilise the right attention and funding to adequately respond, which is also very much a political issue. An issue of political will.

That defines what becomes a crisis, what doesn't, and what becomes a forgotten or neglected crisis and what doesn't.

To end with something the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Johansson said a few months ago: the refugee flows from Ukraine are maybe not even a crisis.

A few hundred thousand refugees and migrants from further away, are quickly called a migration crisis. Million of refugees from Ukraine, and it's not a crisis. The difference is the political will to respond in a certain way.

And I'll leave it at that, thank you.



### **Bram Frouws**

*Director, Mixed Migration Centre (MMC)*

**PANELLIST** *Forgotten Crises – Forgotten Suffering*

Bram Frouws is the Founding Director of the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), currently based in the Netherlands. Between 2017 and 2021 he was based in Geneva, initially as Policy and Research Coordinator on mixed migration, after which he was appointed to establish MMC in 2018.

Before moving to Geneva, Bram was living and working in the Horn of Africa for 5 years, where since early 2016 he was heading the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS) for East Africa & Yemen in Nairobi. Before that he was working with the RMMS as Migration Specialist and Senior Research Associate. He also worked as a Consultant

on mobile populations for UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa as part of the 2014 polio response, and worked on migration research projects for IOM Kenya, the Internationale Organisation für Migration (ILO), the European Commission, the Danish Refugee Council Myanmar, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies. Before moving to the Horn of Africa he worked for 5 years as a policy researcher on integration, migration and labour market issues with Panteia, a Netherlands-based consultancy firm.

He has authored a range of research publications (reports, papers, articles) on various migration issues, including migration trends and dynamics, irregular migration, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, migration and development and immigration detention.

Bram tweets from @bramfrouws

# Starvation as a Method of Warfare

## Alex de Waal

I feel at home in this Hall and this Congress.

Let me explain.

One of the reasons I was enthusiastic to attend this Congress was that exactly one hundred years ago, my grandmother received her doctorate in law at this University, in this very Hall. She was among the first women to be admitted to the faculty of law in 1919, and the fifth woman to become a Doctor of Law. Her name was Elizabeth Ephrussi. She lived just across the Ringstrasse.

She was also a member of a remarkable circle of intellectuals, across many disciplines, that met in university seminars and private seminars.

The issues they debated are relevant to the topic of this congress. How was this new country of Austria, the remnant of a great empire, to survive? How could it be economically viable? Would it be reduced to penury and the mass emigration of the skilled?

Among the reasons for the collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian war effort in 1918 was Britain's use of starvation blockade. Starvation was used not only to defeat the central powers but also to impose on them the punitive terms of the Treaty of Paris.

In the fall of 1919, ninety percent of children in Vienna were malnourished. The Americans sent humanitarian relief, but they didn't resolve the bigger questions debated in the seminars in and around this University.

Across Europe, the legacies of starvation included bitterness, extremism, and xenophobia.

The Ephrussis were victims of this, forced to leave in 1938, and stripped of their citizenship. It was just a few years ago, with the newly passed restitution law, that my father, my brothers and I, and our children,

could have Austrian citizenship restored. This morning, for the first time, I entered this country as a citizen.

Let us not take eighty years to re-learn those lessons.

Communism, Fascist ultra-nationalism, territorial aggrandizement—all were driven in part by the fear of state collapse and mass starvation.

This was the context in which, during World War Two, hunger was used as a weapon on an even vaster scale.

After that war, there was a far-reaching redrafting of international law. But starvation was not designated an international crime.

There's a simple explanation for this, which is that those drafting the law codes—the Americans, the British and the French—preferred it that way.

The American blockade of Japan in 1945 was candidly named 'Operation Starvation'. A few years later, a British also called a campaign in Malaya 'Operation Starvation.' French counter-insurgency in Algeria was a textbook for how to create famine. Some decades on, at the Rome Conference to draft the statute for the International Criminal Court, the Americans took the lead in ensuring that blockade and economic sanctions were not prohibited.

There's a connection here, simple once pointed out. The world's most economically powerful countries want to use their preferred instruments of economic statecraft, which can also be weapons of economic warfare. They resist any encroachment on the privilege of imposing maritime or air blockade, or financial sanctions.





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The war crime of starvation is narrowly defined. It's applicable to ground combat, formulated as the destruction, removal or rendering useless of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, and the obstruction of humanitarian relief as provided for under the Geneva Conventions.

Nonetheless there have been important efforts to improve the relevant bodies of law—international humanitarian law, international criminal law, and international law as fashioned by the UN Security Council, notably in resolution 2417 of 2018 on armed conflict and hunger. Our normative vocabulary is sharper now than at any time in history.

But when it comes to translating that normative progress into action, the gap is not only wide, but may be widening.

Today, squaring the moral and legal condemnation of starvation crimes with actual state practice requires some intellectual sleight of hand.

We see this in the responses to Ukraine and to the Horn of Africa.

In weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in his rush to condemn Russia, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken made tantalizing references to the possible illegality of Russia's blockade of the port of Odessa. Such references quickly vanished from official statements, probably because to have stretched the law that far, would also have impinged upon America's own financial blockade.

There's no question that in the siege of Mariupol and other cities, Russian forces committed the war crime of starvation.

But Russia's blockade of the Black Sea ports was intended to stop food getting out of Ukraine, not in. In that respect it was a blockade without precedent. It was intended to damage the Ukrainian economy, which it did. It also did Russia no favours with

regard to its standing with African and Middle Eastern countries that relied on those grain imports, which is one reason why Russia was ready to accept the Turkish-UN 'Black Sea Grain Initiative.'

The real causes of hunger were lost in the debate that unfolded.

If we follow the narrative of speeches on this issue by Secretary Blinken, or UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, we see a particular pattern.

They refer to the complex causes and nature of food crisis. They mention conflict and violations of international humanitarian law; they mention the inability of the poor to obtain sufficient income to buy the food they need; and they mention disruptions to food supply.

And their practicable recommendations focus on the last element: getting food on ships.

Yes, food supplies and relief assistance are important, but they are only part of the bigger picture. We are asking too much of those who deliver food and medicine.

Let me turn to the Horn of Africa.

In Africa, it's conventional to refer to drought. Yes, there is drought. But the vast majority of those reduced to starvation are in that condition because of government and military action.

We can catalogue the starvation crimes perpetrated each of the countries of the Horn: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, and across the sea in Yemen.

It is a long and dismal list. Over the last few years, every kind of starvation crime has been inflicted.

The list begins with the war crime of starvation—destroying or rendering useless food, medicine, water, agriculture.



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I would add, preventing maternal care for young children, or indeed the care that women and girls can provide for themselves. Rape and fear of sexual violence can prevent a woman from providing for herself and her children. The physical and psychological injuries of sexual violence, and the social stigma, can prevent a woman from being able to obtain what is necessary for her and her family to survive.

If we ever needed a reminder than famines are man-made—gendered language deliberate—this is it.

It includes pillage.

It includes forcible displacement, ethnic cleansing.

It includes siege and blockade, shutting off essential services.

It includes blocking, stealing or manipulating humanitarian relief.

All of the above may be inflicted deliberately and systematically, or recklessly in pursuit of another objective. They may be pursued for tactical military reasons, as part of systematic and widespread campaign—a crime against humanity—or as a crime constitutive of genocide.

An ancillary crime is information blackout or manipulation of reporting and humanitarian data, so that the crime is perpetrated in darkness.

This catalogue of miseries poses the question, why are we seeing a resurgence of starvation as a weapon?

Let me venture two reasons.

One is that all these countries are facing state collapse.

In this regard I can do no better than to refer to Ethiopia's national security white paper of 2002. That paper made the argument that the strategic priority for national security was the conquest of poverty. Only that would allow the country to protect itself from the turmoil of a global political and economic

order that would buffet a small, poor economy. If that were not achieved, (I quote), 'national disintegration cannot be ruled out.' And in such a context, government policy would become (again I quote) 'jingoism on an empty belly.'

Ethiopia was the most robust state and economically promising country of the region. It had the most effective food security strategy. It was shedding its old stigma of being 'the land of famine.' Today it is heading towards disintegration, hunger and jingoism.

Other countries were much less well-positioned. Sudan is currently experiencing state collapse at a terrifying speed, alongside nationwide food crisis. And in Khartoum, a middle-class famine associated with the collapse of the banking system and essential services.

In such a context, the conduct of politics is purely Machiavellian—it is the pursuit of power, regardless of how ordinary people fare, regardless of norms.

When economies are stagnant or shrinking, the material logic of politics is zero sum. To gain, someone else must lose.

Organizing a governing coalition, sustaining an army becomes extractive and predatory.

The key point is that hunger and economic contraction generates a type of politics, that in turn generates further hunger and decline in economic welfare for citizens.

This is what has happened in Sudan.

A kleptocracy is bad; an insolvent kleptocracy is worse. The mobsters shoot it out, and they turn on those least able to protect themselves.

As in Europe a hundred years ago, the experience of, or the fear of, mass starvation feeds grievance, extremism, and a cycle that generates more starvation crimes.



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The second reason for the proliferation of starvation crimes is that there is a crisis of confidence in the norm-based multilateral system.

The military-political leaders think they can get away with it.

This was shockingly illustrated by Ethiopia, by the ending of the two year brutal war between the Ethiopian government and its allies and the regional government of Tigray.

Last October, the Tigrayans were in a corner. They were losing the war. They realized that the Ethiopian government and its allies were set on military conquest at all costs—and the human and material costs were exceptionally high. They realized that this would lead to mass atrocity and mass starvation. And they realized that the international community was not going to object. So they abandoned their political demands and sued for peace to save their people.

The lesson: starvation can work.

Let me turn to Sudan.

When the war erupted in Khartoum two months ago, it was immediately clear that it entailed hunger on a vast scale. Not only in the city, but in the collapse of the national economy.

Resolution 2417 requires the UN Secretary General to swiftly inform the Security Council where armed conflict threatens to cause widespread food insecurity. That wasn't invoked over two years of war and starvation in Ethiopia. It hasn't been invoked in Sudan. Instead we have a low level set of efforts to get a ceasefire and humanitarian access.

Only in South Sudan, where starvation crimes are almost routine, is there any kind of international process to expose them.

What is to be done?

Some years ago, many of us were hopeful that sharpening the law would help stop starvation crimes. International policies would shift to expose the crime and its perpetrators, and those perpetrators would be shamed.

We hoped for international prosecutions, though didn't expect those to happen quickly. And we didn't expect more than one or two culprits to be in the dock—trials would be important for clarifying the law and for communicating the international intolerance of starvation crimes.

We hoped for a more energetic United Nations, using the provisions of resolution 2417. We hoped for those same principles to be speedily adopted by the African Union.

None of this has happened. In fact, instead of norm building, we are witnessing a new politics of indifference. Resolution 2417 looks like the high-water mark of a normative tide that is now receding.

It is precisely when norms and laws stand in opposition to the interests of great powers that they are most important.

It is precisely because these principles are under threat that we should stand up for them, clearly and consistently, and without equivocation.

But we also need to appreciate that our chances of success depend crucially on two other things. These are big things: stopping this avalanche of state collapse, and repairing the norm-based multilateral order.

These are questions that resonate from the European experience a century ago, from the debates in this university at that time.

These are very big asks. But the stakes could hardly be higher.

## Starvation as a Method of Warfare Alex de Waal



### Alex de Waal

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**KEYNOTE SPEAKER AND  
PANELLIST** *Starvation as a Method*

*of Warfare – As Old as War Itself, Outlawed but Deadly  
Popular and Creatively Used*

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He has worked on the Horn of Africa, and on conflict, food

security and related issues since the 1980s as a researcher and practitioner. He served as a senior advisor to the African Union High Level Panel on Sudan and South Sudan. He was listed among Foreign Policy's 100 most influential international intellectuals in 2008 and Atlantic's 29 'brave thinkers' in 2009.

De Waal's recent books include: *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power* (Polity 2015), *Mass Starvation: The history and future of famine* (Polity 2018), and *New Pandemics, Old Politics: 200 years of the war on disease and its alternatives* (Polity 2021).