

Too many emergencies, not enough preventive measures

Jesús A. Núñez Villaverde and Francisco Rey Marcos

Co-directors of the Institute of Studies on Conflict and Humanitarian Action (IECAH).

Ten years later¹ it is still as relevant as then to turn our attention to emergencies. We must admit that, on the one hand, catastrophes associated to (more or less) natural phenomena and violent conflicts in different parts of the planet have multiplied. Some emergencies have already become frozen situations, which is evidence not only of the seriousness of structural problems but also of the lack of political will to find a real solution for them (instead of a mere temporary fix, which hardly conceals, for a limited time, their most striking features). Clinging to a short-term vision which, at best, can only serve to win some time till the problem returns with a vengeance, and mistakenly convinced that everything happening beyond our homes does not seriously affect our well-being and our safety, we become too easily uncritical observers of the catastrophes of our time: the unstoppable sequence of Sahel hunger crisis, the frequent relapses into violent conflicts which seemed solved, the brutal impact of pandemics unworthy of our advanced 21st century, the daily violation of the most fundamental rights of millions of people, or the effects of climate change, which gives full sense to the proposal of using the name of Anthropocene² to define the period we are living in.

Other emergencies have been added to this worrying list in recent times. Emergencies such as those arising from the crisis that broke out in 2007 — a bank crisis that developed into a systemic crisis—, from the alarming prominence that international jihadist terrorism has gradually gained, or from the outbreak of Ebola complicate even further the management of the well-being and safety programs for the over 7.000 million human beings making up the population of this small planet.

With the exception of those who can go for the option — all the same, suicidal — of casting themselves in their own protective bubble in the wrong belief that it would make them invulnerable, it is blatantly obvious for all that the general sense of insecurity has increased, not only in societies usually considered underdeveloped, but also in those judged to be more advanced. The inequality gap that exists between the scant privileged minority who feel integrated into their communities of reference and the vast majority of outcast/marginalised/discriminated people is, as the OCDE recently reminded us at the end of last year, the widest ever recorded. And we know very well that this gap is precisely the most powerful war-triggering factor. Inequality is, by far, the main cause for the possibility of all

¹ In 2005 the authors contributed a series of analytical essays to *Emergencias*, a publication of the same title produced by the MUSAC as a complement to the opening show at the Museum.

² The 2000 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Paul Crutzen, coined the term as a substitute of the traditional term of Holocene, with the intention of underlining the negative impact of human activity on the sustainability of terrestrial ecosystems.

human beings enjoying a decent and dignified life being so remote. It is also responsible for the permanent situation of vulnerability among the dispossessed and, in consequence, it is the major factor influencing some of them to consider violence as the main instrument to satisfy their basic needs and obtain a minimum of security both in front of states that, in many cases, are the greatest violators of their fundamental rights, and in front of non-state actors who seek to thrive by fishing out in the world's mixed waters.

Far too often, we see violent processes arising as a result of the inattention to this unfair and inhuman level of inequality. Although it is the so-called fragile States that are hit hardest by these violent conflicts, they have nonetheless enough potential to extend their damaging effects to a regional and global scale. Nowadays, no one can consider themselves safe, hiding behind more or less secure national borders. We live in a global village and that means understanding that what happens in any corner of the world — whether a local conflict as the one besieging Sudan or the Central African Republic, or a threat as the one posed by jihadist terrorism in Syria and Iraq — affects all of us equally.

The same applies for disasters and emergencies caused by natural threats. The annual number of catastrophes has stabilised gradually, with an important increase of catastrophes due to hydrometeorological events, related to climate change. Evidence leaves little doubt about the contribution of global warming to the genesis and exacerbation of natural disasters. To these should be added geological phenomena (such as earthquakes) or disasters caused by biological threats (such as the increase of Ebola cases, together with other pandemics or epidemics), as well as others arising from accelerated urban planning processes, improper land-use planning, and inadequate use of land and natural resources — all the above coupled with the rise in exposure to those threats. In short, as Ulrich Beck argues, we live in high-risk societies and should, therefore, recognise this fact and prepare for it.

Building peace and reducing risks: everybody's is on board

However, it is also true that, as we already said one decade ago, in spite of these grim aspects of the international landscape, there is an uninterrupted emergence of new approaches and proposals which aim at making a better world — a fairer, safer, more sustainable world. These are the lights at the end of the tunnel we are going through, which seek to inform, raise awareness and mobilise the citizens, with the ultimate intention of changing individual behaviour patterns and putting pressure on the actors in control of the helm of millions of people's lives.

As it could not have been otherwise, the art world (and in particular the MUSAC, for a second time in its first ten years of existence) considers itself an active partner in this common task.

Given the enormous human, physical, economic and technological capital at its disposal, the United Nations should be the most significant player in addressing these problems, following the recommendation made one decade ago by the then Secretary-General of the organisation, Kofi Annan, in his report *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*.

Unfortunately, the legitimate representative of the international community has not been able to set the clock ticking — updating its structure and decision-making processes to adapt them to current times —, nor has it more real capacity now than the one granted by a group of UN member states that, especially those now enjoying privileges inherited from the II World War, seem more interested in maintaining a *status quo* that is clearly advantageous for them than in supporting an activism for the benefit of all.

This demonstrates that in the global scenario — characterised by the prevalence of a neo-liberal economic approach and an emerging multipolarity in which the United States still occupies a leading position, but where there exists a group of emergent actors fighting to be equally recognised as world leaders — there is no decided impulse towards the eradication of double standards, which breed radical reactions. Neither do we see any will to activate the necessary political, socio-cultural and diplomatic instruments in order to effectively reduce the mentioned inequality gap and attend to the structural causes leading to conflicts and disasters of growing scale. The vital key is to understand that there is no shortage of mechanisms or instruments, but of political will to put them at the service of the common good with an approach that places human security at the forefront of its agenda.

Thus, in the area of peace building and prevention of violent conflicts, the approval of the principle of responsibility to protect by the UN General Assembly (2005) can only tentatively be described as a hopeful step forward of the past decade. After a promising start, the potential of change in the initially called 'Arab Spring' seems to be boiling down to nothing, with Tunisia as the only example of a political transition that has prevented the disaster that now characterises Libya, Egypt and Yemen — the other countries that managed to get rid of their respective dictators. In stark contrast with Arab societies' thirst for change, the present regional agenda is dominated by jihadist terrorism, the genocidal resistance of the Syrian regime and the threat of the definitive collapse of countries like Iraq or Lebanon. However, in none of these cases have Western governments shown decided support for the democratic transformation of clearly improvable regimes, entrenched as they are in the defence of a misconceived idea of stability.

For its part, in the area of disaster risk reduction, the international community seems to have been more active in recent years, and in this respect, for instance, the approval of the so-called Hyogo Framework for Action, *Building the resilience of nations and communities to disaster* (HFA, 2005), is worth mentioning. The fact that the HFA was adopted by 168 states is a telling illustration of the change of perspective before an increasingly worrying reality. The strengthening of the communities' resilience (a word that has been recently adopted by the Real Academia Española dictionary) becomes the backbone of disaster risk reduction and prevention policies, a task where not only humanitarian or civil protection organisations, but everybody is involved. Therefore, the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which will be held on March 2015 in Sendai City (Japan) will constitute an excellent opportunity to consolidate the advances that, at least from a theoretical perspective, have been made.

Responses *in extremis*

By mid-2014, for the first time in history, the United Nations simultaneously declared four countries 'category 3 emergencies'— the most serious emergencies, those with the greatest humanitarian impact and lowest response, in proportional terms, from the international community. The Central African Republic, South Sudan, Syria and, once again, Iraq are the four contexts to which UN agencies have tried to draw international public attention and, above all, the attention of the leaders of the most powerful countries. Results have been scarce and in none of the four cases has it been possible, even within the humanitarian logic, to mobilise the funds requested through the various pleas for international help.

Sometimes people have the impression that the response to the great emergencies of the past decade — such as the tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean Coast (2004), the Haiti earthquake (2010), or the current food and hunger crisis in the Horn of Africa or in the Sahel — has been massive and has helped, at least, to alleviate the most pressing needs of the affected populations and locations. It is true that in some emergencies with high media profiles, there have even been coordination and leadership issues due to the enormous presence of all kind of institutions wanting to offer collaboration and resources, without always being prepared to do so. However, in more complex emergencies — of a multidimensional nature — we encounter the opposite situation, since in these cases political will falters and there are very few humanitarian actors with real operative capacity. Indeed, in 2014, Médecins Sans Frontières published a report under the provocative title of *Where is everyone?* to make it clear that in level 3 emergencies such as the ones depicted above, or in others such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Niger, there is limited political will to respond adequately and very few humanitarian agencies with field presence that are capable of providing effective assistance and protection to the victims.

Under this light, it comes as no surprise to note that international humanitarian response — including CAD-OCDE donor's contributions, contributions from other non-CAD donors and private voluntary donations — fell for the second consecutive year in 2012, after reaching its peak in 2010 (in response to the floods in Pakistan and the earthquake in Haiti). Mostly, the drop came from lower CAD-OCDE donor's contributions, with a decrease from 9.620 million euros to 8.584. Latest provisional data for 2013 indicate a slight upturn due to the crisis in Syria.

As a result of all that, many UN appeals remain underfunded. The proportion of unmet needs within the UN CAP [Consolidated Appeals Process] appeal was the highest in the decade, at 37.3%. It seems that international organisations, as well as most national governments have made themselves comfortable in a marked complacency, as reflected by these past two years' numbers. There is no sign of the necessary political will to take firm action against the many crisis affecting different regions of the world.

In conclusion, the international system seems to have reached its ceiling and still presents important shortages which are dramatically evidenced by these scenarios. This explains why

responses are selective, which results in the appearance of forgotten crisis — as a consequence of lack of response to daily dramas that are unable to spark the necessary collective effort. Why they are reactive — even if the main effort should always focus on prevention, on anticipating the outbreak of violence or the catastrophe. Why they are 'one off' responses, attempting only to remedy the most visible effects of the problem — without addressing its root causes and refusing to understand that only sustained efforts can transform unjust structures and offer training in non-violent means of conflict resolution. And, finally, it explains why they are insufficiently multidimensional — too often opting to allow military means take centre stage.

There is still a lot of work ahead to change minds and hearts. And, within that common effort, the voice of the artists committed to their times plays a fundamental role.

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