Our world today faces multiple overwhelming humanitarian crises, including conflicts and disasters. UN agencies, governments and other aid agencies have been unable to mount adequate responses. In order to address the crises, the commitment and contribution of each individual living on this planet is required. Resolution cannot happen without restoring our collective humanity. Toward the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in May 2016, much valuable input was obtained from the people on the front lines of humanitarian crises: aid workers, disaster victims and refugees. It was reflected in its outcome document titled “Agenda for Humanity.”

This exhibition reflects those discussions and encourages viewers to think about what they can do at the individual, community, and even global levels.
Multiple crises

CONFLICT

Affected by disasters

102 million people

Displaced by violence + conflict

59.5 million people

19.5 million refugees

1.8 million asylum seekers

38.2 million internally displaced persons

The World Bank estimates that 1.5 billion people live in countries trapped in repeated cycles of violent conflict. The economic impact of such violent conflict is also growing, with estimates that conflicts annually cost $14.3 trillion, some 13 percent of the world's GDP.

In each of the past seven years, an estimated average of 26.4 million people have become newly displaced by sudden-onset disasters, such as floods and cyclones. Other people have left their homes due to the slow onset of climate change, including a rise in the sea level and the number of droughts. The various impacts of climate change are predicted to exacerbate this trend dramatically, with experts estimating that a 4°C warming could lead to a rise in sea levels, displacing millions of people from their homes.

Experts are increasingly certain that temperature variations will result in ever more intense and frequent extreme weather events, as well as changes in the patterns of disease. These events will likely lead to an alteration in ecosystems, disruption of food production and water supply, damage to infrastructure and to settlements, and a rise in morbidity and mortality rates.

According to The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), there is no such thing as “natural disasters,” only natural hazards. Disasters often follow natural hazards.
Over the past 65 years, some 335 new infectious diseases have appeared among humans, causing local outbreaks, wider epidemics, or even pandemics that have caused many deaths, as well as serious social and economic disruption across national borders.

Many of these “new” diseases are actually new versions of existing illnesses that are resistant to existing antibiotics. We cannot deny the possibility of an incurable disease spreading throughout the world in the future.

In recent years, natural hazards have often been compounded by interactions with industrial infrastructure, including chemical factories and even nuclear power plants. Our world is not yet prepared to respond to such disasters—and their humanitarian impacts.

Toward a fundamental change

This requires a fundamental change in the humanitarian enterprise, from one driven by the impulses of charity to one drawing on the imperative of solidarity.

Vulnerability has become increasingly globalized and contagious. Risks faced by people living in one part of the world are now intertwined with those in every other part of the planet.

“If one of us is vulnerable, ultimately we are all vulnerable.”

Synthesis document

We have to bear in mind that disasters can happen anytime, anywhere.
Multiple crises

THE “REAL” CRISIS

There is another type of crisis people are confronting in today’s world. This is the crisis of helplessness and powerlessness that afflicts so many people.

When people feel threatened, one impulse may be to withdraw into the comfort of cultural familiarity or national identity, rather than reaching out in solidarity. This is another, less visible face to the humanitarian challenge.

To make matters worse, in contrast to globalization at various levels, some people are consumed by anxiety and cling to their national or ethnic identity. Such a mentality prevents the society as a whole from tackling humanitarian crises appropriately, and even causes new crises to occur.

If we stop addressing humanitarian problems, they will stay as they are or become even worse. We can label such a mentality of powerlessness the “real” crisis.

We stand at a critical point.
Humanitarian action should be driven by people’s voices and choices. To enable protection and assistance based on the expressed needs of the affected people, humanitarians at all levels must engage in dialogue and include those affected in decision-making.

Through such dialogue three major agreements on humanitarian affairs have been made since 2015.

**AGENDA FOR HUMANITY**

This five-point plan outlines the changes that are needed to alleviate suffering, reduce risk and lessen vulnerability on a global scale. Humanity—people’s safety, dignity and the right to thrive—is placed at the heart of global decision-making.

1. **DIGNITY**
2. **SAFETY**
3. **RESILIENCE**
4. **PARTNERSHIPS**
5. **FINANCE**

**SENDAI FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly following the 2015 Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR).

4 priorities
- Priorities 1: Understanding disaster risk
- Priorities 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk
- Priorities 3: Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience
- Priorities 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction

**NEW YORK DECLARATION FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS**

The declaration, launched at the UN Summit in September 2016, contains bold commitments both to address the issues we face now and to prepare the world for future challenges. The next step is to adopt a global compact on refugees in 2018.
Through the SDGs, states have pledged to “leave no one behind” and to work together to achieve a “world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive.” Some of the targets are specifically related to disasters and conflicts.

Diverse sectors including the private sector and civil society are key players. Their vigilance and support will help achieve the goals.

For promoting SDGs, Earth Charter International and SGI have created a mobile app called “Mapting.” You can post photos and comments which depict your own activity for achieving any target of SDGs.

Through the SDGs, states have pledged to “leave no one behind” and to work together to achieve a “world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive.” Some of the targets are specifically related to disasters and conflicts.

Diverse sectors including the private sector and civil society are key players. Their vigilance and support will help achieve the goals.

For promoting SDGs, Earth Charter International and SGI have created a mobile app called “Mapting.” You can post photos and comments which depict your own activity for achieving any target of SDGs.
The number and diversity of activists involved in humanitarian action are growing. Global power dynamics are also changing.

Collaboration among: • UN Agencies • Governments • NGOs • Red Cross & Crescent movements • Private sector • Citizens

The four fundamental principles of humanitarian action

HUMANITY NEUTRALITY IMPARTIALITY INDEPENDENCE

Many grassroots activists are involved, contributing to resolving humanitarian problems. They are profiled on the following panels.
UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security

In October 2000, this groundbreaking resolution was adopted, highlighting the great untapped potential women can bring to processes of mediation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.

“1325 belongs to humanity: it is owned by us all — it is for the benefit of all ... When women are marginalized, there is little chance for our world to get peace in the real sense!”

Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, who greatly contributed to the resolution’s adoption in 2000, as President of the UN Security Council

Activists with humanity

WOMEN

“Women are among the first responders in disasters and while in conflict areas they ensure their families can access basic services, stay in school, and remain safe.”

Synthesis document

Leymah Gbowee mobilized women across ethnic and religious dividing lines to bring an end to the war in Liberia. The women continued their tireless protesting, two months of it outside the building in Ghana where the government and rebel factions were supposedly negotiating peace. She instructed the women to link arms and encircle the building, and not let the men out until a deal had been reached. After the war, she launched a new project promoting a conversation about the relationship between the security sector and women in local communities, as a means of stopping the conflict. She says, “What the impact of conflict shows is a reflection of the interactions between the genders in peacetime.”

Leymah Gbowee,
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

In observance of International Women’s Day, a peaceful march against gender-based violence in Liberia in 2007
As the outbreak spread in 2014, draconian measures were undertaken by governments and other aid agencies that went contrary to cultural values and religious practices. This resulted in denial of the disease and also hostility towards those who were seeking to contain it. Many of those with Ebola chose to remain with their families, and burials were undertaken in secret. As a consequence, the disease continued to spread.

Once they became involved, faith leaders played a transformational role. They used religious references to interpret biomedical advice on the control and prevention of Ebola, which were delivered by the faith leaders with compassion and in a way that provided hope and encouragement.

Through faith leaders accompanying the burials and conducting modified religious practices, the affected communities began to comply with the urgent need for medically safe yet dignified rituals.

By preaching acceptance of Ebola, as well as that of the workers and survivors, faith leaders helped rid the community of stigma and prejudice, and the rate at which the disease was spreading began to lessen.

Faith leaders became key members of the community, allowing them to form meaningful relationships and networks based on trust and respect. Also, their role in community leadership enabled them to shape opinion and behavior.

Source: Keeping the Faith: The Role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response
Displaced people are often considered to be a threat or a burden in a host society. In reality, however, the great majority of displaced people have a strong desire to become a contributing part of their host society, feel strong empathy with newly displaced people, and proactively engage in supporting others in need.

“Political refugees and disaster refugees are the same in having lost too much. We may be the ones who can best understand the affected people’s feelings.”

A refugee in Japan originally from Myanmar

When a severe earthquake and tsunami hit northeastern Japan in 2011, some refugees rushed to the devastated area in order to help the affected people. This outpouring of support was something most Japanese people had never expected.

Once a Refugee, Now a Helping Hand

Three people who fled the war in the Balkans, and are currently helping refugees and migrants crossing into Croatia.

“I feel that I am here to help these people who flee today. Today, both Serbs and Croats live again together, like before the war. I wish the same will happen to the people who are fleeing now.”

Zoran Markovic, Police Commander

“Many people still remember the war here and because of that they have more empathy and they want to help.”

Lana Mayer, German teacher

“It brings images back of me, my family and when we had to flee Vukovar. It is very emotional, but it gives me strength to help the refugees. My entire life is now devoted to helping people.”

Zorica Grgic, Head of Croatian Red Cross

We must remember that they are our fellow human beings.

Source: UNHCR TRACKS – The UN Refugee Agency
Activists with humanity

LOCAL COMMUNITY

The resources and outreach that aid agencies can provide in an emergency have limitations. The resilience of the local community can make all the difference.

Close relationships within a local community can help bring out our humanity.

“Part of the learning process involves getting the community together on common issues—to deliberate, reflect and identify solutions together.” Leader of SEEDS

Source: SGI Quarterly “A Resilient Future”, October 2014
Activists with humanity

CHILDREN & YOUTH

Young men and women around the world already play major roles in humanitarian action: as first responders, volunteers, caregivers to their families, even as breadwinners. They can be agents of change, able to contribute to preparedness and response.

They can help others in need in a unique, energetic, and passionate way.

Many young volunteers have helped provide services to refugees and migrants arriving in Europe.

Nejmeh, 14 years old, teaches the children in a Syrian refugee camp, conveying what she learned only a couple of years ago.

Youth members of a brass band from Soka Gakkai Japan organized concerts in a shelter to encourage evacuees.

In 2011, the Children’s Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted through consultations with more than 600 children in 21 countries.
Technology is rapidly developing in today’s world. At times, it can be abused to promote violence or crime. On the other hand, technology can help people awaken their humanity and challenge adversity.

Before and during Kenya’s 2007–8 post-election violence, mobile phones were used by those promoting violence to spread rumors, hate speech, fear-mongering and calls for revenge attacks and for the organization of weapons distribution.

Sisi ni Amani Kenya, or SNA-K (“We Are Peace Kenya” in Swahili), analyzed how information had influenced behavior towards violence and, in response, built an SMS platform promoting peace to which community members could subscribe and enter important demographic information, such as their location, language preference, age and gender. SNA-K’s team of local peace activists was then able to target messages to thousands of subscribers, relevant to their demographics.

Throughout the 2013 election period, SNA-K sent more than 680,000 messages to quell rumors, as well as mitigate tensions and violence. 92 percent believed that the messages had a positive impact on preventing violence in their area.

“The messages made me relax even in the midst of the violence that was happening ... I knew things would be OK in the end after reading the message.”

Comment in survey conducted after the 2013 election
It starts from one individual, one community

PUT PEOPLE AT THE CENTER

Support Local Coping Capacities

“It is best to support local coping strategies and community structures, increase self-reliance, and build on local capacities. To do this, humanitarian action must be designed in partnership with communities, in culturally appropriate ways, and be grounded in local knowledge. "

“Responses to humanitarian crises must have a bedrock focus on the dignity of each individual.”

Daisaku Ikeda, President of Soka Gakkai International

Putting people at the center requires a shift in power. This means that affected people must have greater access to information and greater involvement in decision-making, and be empowered to hold humanitarian activists, including governments, accountable for meeting their needs and upholding their safety, rights, and dignity.

As individuals, we can ...

- Join or create a local community association involving the most vulnerable
- Make use of local knowledge
- Identify local risks and create a strategy for addressing them
- Check whether vulnerable groups or affected people’s voices are reflected in our government’s policies
It starts from one individual, one community

**PREPARATION & PREVENTION**

Technology cannot prevent major natural hazards, but it can help reduce their impact. Early warning systems have dramatically reduced deaths around the world.

Integration of emergency preparedness in education curricula is effective for fostering a culture of prevention and rapid response.

**MIRACLE IN KAMAISHI**

(northeastern Japan)

When a violent earthquake struck in 2011, children who had been educated in the traditional practice of every person fleeing to higher ground independently did so without hesitation, knowing that their family members would do so also. The survival rates for children where this traditional wisdom had been transmitted to the younger generations were much higher than in other communities.

**DISASTER EDUCATION IN MYANMAR**

In 1970, Cyclone Bhola killed nearly half a million people in Bangladesh and India. Since then, disaster education has been promoted throughout the region. When Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar in 2008, experts estimate that the damage would have been even greater without education.

**As individuals, we can ...**

- Confirm the location of evacuation centers and practice getting to them
- Attend evacuation drills and relevant seminars
- Keep preserved food, water and other emergency supplies in a secure place in the home
It starts from one individual, one community

INFORMATION AS AID

“Information as Aid” has emerged as an important priority in recent emergencies. Refugees’ smartphones are vital during evacuation. Information can function as a crucial source of empowerment and resilient recovery.

INFORMATION SHARING IN THE COMMUNITY

Along the southern coasts of India, community-level village knowledge centers have been set up that provide short message service (SMS) information on weather and wave patterns to fishermen, cautioning them on any possible natural threats. In Myanmar and Pakistan, where access to the most vulnerable communities is limited by poor connectivity, mobile-knowledge resource centers mounted on lorries and boats reach out to local communities, especially children, providing learning opportunities on disaster risk reduction.

HANDMADE “WALL PAPERS” IN AN EMERGENCY

“If we can’t make a contribution amid a tragedy like this, our newspaper cannot justify its existence!” (Koichi Omi, Ishinomaki Hibi Shimbun) After surviving the severe earthquake and tsunami in 2011, Koichi Omi decided to create “Wall Papers” using pens and rolls of paper. Some issues were posted at evacuation shelters and convenience stores every day for more than a month, and they served as a precious source of information regarding relief supplies, available services, and support provided by volunteer workers.

As individuals, we can ...
DIVERSE ACTIVISTS’ COLLABORATION

Collaboration among diverse activists and community sectors is important in handling humanitarian crises. This effort, however, should not be limited to those who are currently engaged in relevant activities. If a new entity, or a new individual, joins the activists’ circle, innovation will be accelerated.

The transition from an emergency relief phase to a development phase should be as seamless as possible, and this can be best realized through the sharing of information and skills among various types of agencies.

INTERFAITH COLLABORATION FOR EMERGENCIES

The Humanitarian Forum Indonesia is a network of humanitarian activity organizations comprising five Islamic NGOs, seven Christian NGOs, one Catholic NGO, and one secular NGO. Such diversity enables the forum to smoothly deliver aid to affected communities embracing different religious faiths. Furthermore, the organization has built a collaborative relationship with local governments and the military. Now the network is assisting local communities to rebuild following natural disasters.

As individuals, we can ...

- Identify what is lacking in our community’s coping strategies and capacities
- Push our national and local government to promote collaborative responses with nearby countries and cities
- Break down a stereotypical view and innovatively think of resources that can be provided in an emergency from our own workplace, local community association, or family
Humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political solutions in addressing the causes of suffering and bringing about an end to conflicts. Nonetheless, in the absence of political action, humanitarian relief is a lifeline to millions of women, men, and children around the world whose lives have been disrupted by war.

Refugees may face prolonged detention in inhumane conditions, experiencing xenophobia, social exclusion, and family separation.

“Migrants bring a catalytic element to societies, encourage innovation, and they sometimes have a better work ethic than the native population.”
William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration

In addition to relief and support activities, our daily attitudes make a difference in terms of a society’s resilience. Tackling the root causes of conflicts will prevent them from reoccurring.

It is crucial to find solutions that address the root cause of people’s suffering.

Being open to diversity will make it easier to accept displaced people.

As individuals, we can …

- Learn about our government’s policies for addressing humanitarian crises
- Encourage policies that deal with the root causes of conflict
- Get involved with the “Together” campaign promoted by the UN
- Engage in face-to-face exchange with refugees

Germans opening their doors to refugees arriving in Europe. Two Syrian refugees living with a German couple and their children in their Berlin flat.

“Recognize displaced people as socioeconomic assets and contributors, rather than ‘responsibilities’.”
Agenda for Humanity
We all want to live in a world where no person dies who could be saved; no-one goes hungry, is victimized by conflict, or left behind; where no-one is in despair because we lacked motivation, the political will or the financial resources to support them.

What is needed is a renewed affirmation of a global commitment to humanity.

Each individual’s actions and awareness can make a difference. Each person, whatever their path in life or their current condition, has the capacity to illuminate the place where they find themselves right now.

The way problems manifest is always different, so there’s no easy answer. If we approach the challenges in front of us with courage, we will be able to bring forth wisdom from within.

Co-organizers:

**Asian Disaster Reduction & Response Network (ADRRN)**
ADRRN is a network consisting of 34 national NGOs from 16 countries across the Asia-Pacific region. The network members promote DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) activities and engage local communities.

**Soka Gakkai International (SGI)**
The SGI is a lay Buddhist organization. The SGI is engaged in the promotion of peace through activities such as DRR that correspond with the compassionate spirit of the Lotus Sutra in the contemporary world.

References:
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030
- New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants