A history of the humanitarian system

Western origins and foundations

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Acronyms

AFRO	African Regional Office
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
AMRO	American Regional Office (see also PAHO)
ARA	American Relief Administration
ARAECF	American Relief Administration European Children's Fund
ARC	American Red Cross
ARTIC	Appropriate Re-construction Training and Information Centre
AU	African Union (originally Organisation of African Unity)
BELRA	British Empire Leprosy Relief Association
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CENDEP	Centre for Development and Emergency Practice
CERF	Central Emergency Revolving Fund
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
COBSRA	Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad
CRB	Commission for the Relief of Belgium
CRED	Centre for the Research and Epidemiology of Disasters
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DA	Danish Friends of Armenians
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRC	Disaster Research Center
EC	European Community
EMRO	Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
EU	European Union
EURO	European Regional Office
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FAR	Rwandan Armed Forces
FIC	Famine Inquiry Commission
FNLA	National Liberation Front of Angola
FRELIMO	Liberation Front of Mozambique
FTS	Financial Tracking System
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HCR	High Commissioner for Refugees (of the League of Nations)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICISS	International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDI	International Disaster Institute
IDP	internally displaced person
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
IHB	International Health Board (of the Rockefeller Foundation)
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRFED	Institut international de recherche et de formation en vue du développement harmonisé
IRO	International Refugee Organisation
IRU	International Relief Union
IVS	International Voluntary Services
IVS-GB	International Voluntary Service
JCRA	Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad
LNHO	League of Nations Health Organisation
LRCS	League of Red Cross Societies
LRW	Lutheran World Relief
LTG	London Technical Group
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MEP	Malaria Eradication Programme
MOPR	International Red Aid
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
OAU	Organisation of African Unity (now African Union)
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
PAHO	Pan American Health Organisation (see also AMRO)
PL	Public Law
POC	Protection of Civilians
POW	prisoner of war
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front

RSC	Refugee Studies Centre
SAIMR	South African Institute for Medical Research
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
SCI	Service Civil International
SEARO	South-East Asia Regional Office
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
UCMA	Universities' Mission to Central Africa
UN	United Nations (originally United Nations Organisation)
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator
UNEPRO	United Nations East Pakistan Relief Organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (now United Nations Children's Fund)
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
UNIHP	United Nations Intellectual History Project
UNKRA	United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force
UNROD	United Nations Relief Operations Dacca
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCS	Vietnam Christian Service
WASH	water supply, sanitation and hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIR	Workers International Relief

Chapter 1
An introduction to humanitarian history

While the humanitarian gesture – the will to alleviate the suffering of others – is centuries old and genuinely global, the development of the international humanitarian system as we know it today can be located both geographically and temporally. Its origins are in the Western and especially European experience of war and natural disaster, yet it is now active across the world in a range of operations: responding to needs in situations of conflict or natural disasters, supporting displaced populations in acute and protracted crises, risk reduction and preparedness, early recovery, livelihoods support, conflict resolution and peace-building. Over time, the efforts of the most prominent international actors – states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement – have coalesced into a loosely connected 'system', with links on the level of finances, operations, personnel and values (ALNAP, 2012: 15).[1] They work in collaboration, complementarity or competition with other providers of humanitarian assistance, such as affected communities themselves, diaspora groups, religious organisations, national actors, militaries and the private sector.

1.1 History and humanitarian action

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the international humanitarian architecture has been confronted by challenges to both its composition and its presumed universality. Civil wars in Sri Lanka and Syria have highlighted the lack of consistent political solutions to situations of extreme violence and restricted humanitarian access, while highly destructive natural disasters such as the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 have raised questions about the effectiveness of international assistance. Long-term instability and conflict persist in Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Afghanistan despite national and international efforts to bring peace and stability to these troubled states. In these and other contexts, the humanitarian system has been confronted with actors with little interest in its work. The criminalisation of non-state actors designated by certain governments as terrorist groups has erected additional barriers between affected populations and international humanitarian actors.

At such a juncture, a renewed regard for the history of the humanitarian system offers the prospect of a more balanced reflection upon its future. At the core of HPG's project on 'A Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action' is the belief that a better understanding of the past will help ensure a humanitarian system that is more self-aware, clearer about its identity and better prepared for engagement with the world in which it operates. The benefits of a greater historical perspective within the international humanitarian system can be understood in three mutually reinforcing ways.

First, a fuller awareness of the challenges that humanitarian action has faced in the past – the mistakes made, as well as the successes – will aid reflection upon the challenges facing practitioners today, and help in the development of more appropriate practical responses. This is the element that bears the closest relationship to 'lessons learned' evaluations, though at a greater remove and on a more systemic level. Second, greater attention to the past will generate a more informed critical perspective on processes of operational and organisational change and the evolution of new norms. By shedding light on the factors that have encouraged or inhibited changes in practice and in the normative frameworks that make practice possible, historical analysis can inform reflection upon the changes that may take place now and in the future. Third, a stronger engagement with history will help those that make up the system to more accurately perceive its origins and identity in a broader global perspective.[2] In being more aware of its own past and recognising the specificity of that experience, the international sector will have a sounder basis from which to engage with those who were shaped by a different set of historical experiences (Davey, 2012a).

The idea of using history to shed light upon the present has already found support within the humanitarian community. It is evident in a recent claim by Valerie Amos, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who stated that 'to shape our future, we must understand our past' (OCHA, 2012: iii). Or, as Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell (2009: 13) put it: 'understanding the history of humanitarian action helps understand why it is the way it is today, and helps identify how it can, and maybe should, change in the future'. It should be clear that this is not history as prediction, but as preparation. The study of the past is not an answer to the difficulties of reflecting and operating today, but it is a resource that should not be neglected when forming analyses and directing responses. Towards this end, others have called for practitioners to 'become as familiar as possible with the mistakes made and the lessons learned from past disaster-response efforts, both domestic and international' (Waldman and Noji, 2008: 461).

1 See also the definition of the 'formal international humanitarian system' given by Hugo Slim (2006: 19): 'the mainly Western-funded humanitarian system which works closely within or in coordination with the international authority of the United Nations and Red Cross movements'.

2 This study is part of a wider project entitled 'A Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action', which includes a series of regional studies designed to offset the tendency to focus on Western experiences. See http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg.

Yet policy-related debates rarely extend their historical frameworks beyond a decade or two. As Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss (2008: 29–30) emphasise, 'many contemporary accounts convey the impression that humanitarianism began with the end of the Cold War, failing to demonstrate much historical memory and thus restricting any capacity for meaningful comparisons across periods'. A case in point is the study by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cited above, in which Amos made her call for a greater attention to history, yet which began its historical analysis with the 1990s. Amongst practitioners, the emphasis on rapid action has meant that thinking about the past is often considered a luxury (Slim, 1994: 189). The high rate of turnover in personnel, while not unique to the humanitarian system, has also contributed to the tendency to overlook past experiences. Changes in knowledge transfer techniques, improvements in professionalisation and training and the development of beneficiary-led accountability mechanisms may have offset some of the worst effects of this rapid churn. However, the lack of historical, institutional and operational memory is a persistent problem.

In recognition of this fact, some humanitarian actors have begun to encourage historical research. The UN launched its Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) in 1999, producing analytical works and an oral history library. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have instigated research projects to encourage the analysis of past policy and its evolution, and have gone some way to opening their archives to researchers. The Rift Valley Institute has promoted an increased historical consciousness through its Sudan Open Archive, which brings together aid and peace-process literature, along with scholarly studies on and from Sudan and South Sudan. Numerous NGOs have been the subject of official and unofficial 'biographies' (albeit these studies have often been constrained by a lack of independence or treat their subject in isolation, focusing on internal documentation or organisational issues).[3] To this work can be added a growing body of academic literature on humanitarian action. In the 1980s, pioneering publications traced the evolution of international humanitarian frameworks (Kent, 1987; Macalister-Smith, 1985; Rufin, 1986). More recently, work on issues such as conflict response, natural disasters, refugees and displacement and humanitarian intervention has greatly added to our understanding of significant actors and moments.[4] Full-length, wide-reaching and rigorous histories, nonetheless, remain scarce.[5] Many of the large-scale works focus on political questions and the practical or operational history of humanitarian action – a history, so to speak, of the sectors featured in the Sphere Handbook – largely remains to be written. Crucially, more work needs to be done to integrate historical perspectives into discussions of policy and practice.

1.2 Working Paper methodology and outline

This Working Paper provides an introduction to the history of the international humanitarian system, in large part a Western history and in particular a European and North American one. This is not meant to suggest that the history of humanitarian action is exclusively Western – far from it – but it is intended to provide a basis for reflection on the origins and nature of the formal international system as one part of a broader humanitarian landscape. This Working Paper provides a foundation from which HPG's 'Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action' project as a whole will build an account of the history of humanitarian action that is more inclusive of the evolution of humanitarian action in other areas and regions. The Working Paper therefore focuses on the Western history in order to facilitate the construction of a more inclusive narrative that can be truly global.

The definition of the term 'humanitarian' adopted for the purposes of this account is a broad one. As analysed in a related HPG Working Paper, although the term dates from the nineteenth century, 'a historical investigation of the term "humanitarian" is made problematic by the fact that it was only in the last decade of the twentieth century that it came into wide and frequent circulation' (Davies, 2012: 1). In effect, the understanding of 'humanitarian' that became dominant in the 1990s has sought to define 'humanitarianism' as 'the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger of harm' (Barnett, 2005: 724; 733). In contrast, this Working Paper eschews restrictive definitions, preferring an approach that allows for the great variety of forms that the humanitarian gesture has taken.

The account given here can only be selective and limited. Its aim is to introduce, to a non-specialist audience, some of the academic research that has been produced on the history of the international system and indicate key issues raised by this work. As one facet of a larger, global history of humanitarian action, it is hoped that this paper will encourage greater historical perspective and self-awareness in policy and practice-oriented debates, as well as identifying further avenues for future investigation. A chronology of significant dates is provided as an Annex, and the bibliography has been divided into categories in order to serve as a guide for further reading.

A note on the structure: this first chapter has outlined the aims of the 'Global History' project and the Working Paper itself, placing them within a brief review of existing studies on humanitarian history. The conclusion returns to the question of why history is important and what kind of history might

3 See for example Black, 1992 and 1996; Moorehead, 1998; Shaw, 2009 and 2011; Vallaeys, 2004.

4 See for example Collingham, 2011; Shephard, 2010; Caron and Leben, 2001; Mauch and Pfister, 2009; Gatrell, 2005 and 2013; Skran and Daughtry, 2007; Simms and Trim, 2011; Wheeler, 2000.

5 Two notable recent additions to scholarship are Michael Barnett's *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (2011) and Philippe Ryfman's *Une histoire de l'humanitaire* (2008).

best serve the humanitarian sector. Chapter 2 provides a broad narrative of humanitarian action in the twentieth century and its foundations. It does not aim to be fully comprehensive, or to advance an entirely original interpretation of this narrative, but rather provide an accessible introduction to major humanitarian actors, events and developments over time. It is followed by three chapters that focus on key issues or moments in the emergence of the international humanitarian system. Their topics have been selected for the light they can shed on common assumptions about the humanitarian system, crucial junctures or the way the system has constructed its own self-image.

Chapter 3 examines food aid practices in the first half of the twentieth century, including famine relief in colonial territories. This topic has been chosen as a counterbalance to analyses that focus on the creation and expansion of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and above all the World Food Programme (WFP) in the period after the Second World War. For Edward Clay (2003: 707), expert on food aid, WFP is 'unquestionably a success story within the UN system'. However, the fact that WFP, like the post-war FAO, has been so dominated by donor interests in the form of market protection and surplus disposal has obscured the links made during the first half of the century between food relief and the idea of an international food distribution system. The 'gradual shift in the stated objectives of food aid', from rehabilitation and mutual defence in post-war Europe, to development, to relief, has been the dominant trajectory of the second half of the twentieth century (*ibid.*: 699). Chapter 3 therefore indicates some examples of pre-1950 emergency food relief and its relationship with other forms of internationalism in the period.

Chapter 4 explores the impact of decolonisation and wars of liberation upon humanitarian norms during the Cold War. It shows the humanitarian system facing an earlier critical juncture as international forums adjusted to the presence of the approximately 70 countries that gained independence between 1945 and 1975. Key elements of the normative framework already in place were 'rejected by the developing countries, which had not taken part in the 1949 diplomatic conference and resented being bound by rules in whose drafting they had had no say' (Bugnion, 2000: 44). The chapter shows how these dynamics affected two key areas of international norms, international humanitarian law (IHL) and refugee law, and the key actors most associated with them, the ICRC and UNHCR respectively. It also draws attention to the historical context for the development agenda, highlighting its links with colonialism as well as post-colonial politics. It therefore explores a crucial period in the geographical expansion and normative transformation of the international aid system.

Chapter 5 documents moves towards the articulation of a knowledge community related to humanitarian action, and the ways in which the system generates and shares knowledge. While it indicates the existence of important knowledge-sharing practices in the 1920s and 1950s, it argues that an intensification of these processes occured following the traumatic experience of the East Pakistan Crisis (1971). To illustrate, it takes the case of the post-disaster shelter and housing sector, which despite the historical importance of seismology and other related studies has not to date received the same level of historical attention as other areas of humanitarian practice such as public health.

Chapter 2 Humanitarian history: an overview

Various ways of dividing the history of humanitarian action into chronological periods have been proposed. Barnett has suggested three 'ages of humanitarianism', reflecting his emphasis on the ideological incarnations that the humanitarian sentiment has taken over time. Barnett identifies 'an imperial humanitarianism, from the early nineteenth century through World War II; a neo-humanitarianism from World War II through the end of the Cold War; and a liberal humanitarianism, from the end of the Cold War to the present' (Barnett, 2011: 29). In a similar vein, Walker and Maxwell (2009) view the world wars as marking distinct changes in the story of the humanitarian sector; they characterise the period of the Cold War as one of 'mercy and manipulation' and the 1990s as the period of the 'globalization of humanitarianism'. Focusing on disaster relief, Randolph Kent (1987: 36) sees the Second World War as a turning point, arguing that 'it was only in the midst of World War II that governments began to fully appreciate the need for greater international intervention in the plight of disaster-stricken people'. This mirrors the chronology proposed by the influential historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994), who divided up the 'short twentieth century' into two major eras, 1914–45 and 1946–89. French accounts of humanitarianism, in contrast, have often emphasised the importance of the Cold War period and specifically the Biafra/Nigeria Civil War (1967–70) in promoting emergency relief (Ryfman, 2008: 19; Aeberhard, 1994; Davey, 2012).

This Working Paper suggests a slightly different characterisation of modern humanitarian history. Four main periods have been identified: from the mid-nineteenth century until the end of the First World War in 1918, when nineteenth-century conceptions drove humanitarian action; the 'Wilsonian' period of the interwar years and the Second World War, when international government was born and then reasserted; the Cold War period, when humanitarian actors turned more concertedly towards the non-Western world and the development paradigm emerged; and the post-Cold War period, when geopolitical changes again reshaped the terrain within which humanitarians worked.[6]

2.1 From the beginnings of the system until the First World War

In a broad cultural, political, philosophical and practical sense, 'humanitarian' action can be traced through hundreds of years of history, across the globe. Two of the most widely cited forces – though it would be inaccurate to think of them as entirely distinct categories – are religious belief and the articulation of laws of war. Christian ideas of charity have been particularly important in Europe and North America, and scholarship has emphasised the importance of charitable gestures in other religions, including notably the tradition of *zakat* in Islam, one of several ways in which Islamic duty involves assisting others (Ghandour, 2002; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan, 2003; Krafess, 2005). Laws of war or limits on the acceptable conduct of war were adopted in ancient Greece and Rome; articulated in *The Art of War* ascribed to Sun Tzu in Warring States China; promoted by Saladin in the Middle East in the 1100s; taught to Swedish soldiers by Gustavus Adolphus in the 1600s; and recognised in the tenets of Hinduism, Islam and Judaism (Sinha, 2005; Cockayne, 2002; Solomon, 2005).

These precedents notwithstanding, a history of the modern humanitarian system can, for most intents and purposes, identify its conceptual, operational and institutional roots in the nineteenth century. A series of factors, especially in mid-century, is commonly understood to have contributed to the flourishing of humanitarian initiatives at this time, of which the creation of the ICRC in 1863 remains the most powerful example. The technologies of the industrialising nations increased the human costs of conflict, and improvements in transport and communications technology made the world a smaller place; the founders of the ICRC, for instance, were highly conscious that 'the very instantaneousness of communications' had helped foster humanitarian efforts. In the words of one of their early publications: 'Those who remain at their hearths follow, step by step, so to speak, those who are fighting against the enemy; day by day they receive intelligence of them, and when blood has been flowing, they learn the news almost before it has been stanched, or has time to become cold' (Moynier and Appia, 1870: 51). With information about war travelling more quickly, governments had greater incentive to minimise its impact upon soldiers so as to contain discontent at home. As David Forsythe (2005: 16) notes, 'armed conflict was becoming less and less a chivalrous jousting contest for the few, and more and more a mass slaughter. Dunant was not the only one who noticed'.

Across the nineteenth century, military medicine saw a series of innovations such as the practice of triage, instituted by Baron Dominique Jean Larrey during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15), and the refinement of medical transportation and evacuation, including notably during the American Civil War (1861–65) (Haller, 1992). During the Crimean War (1854–65), Florence Nightingale and her nursing team drastically reduced

6 As this Working Paper focuses its analysis on the twentieth century, it will not discuss the consequences of the attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001. This shift is more than adequately explored by studies of the humanitarian system that do not adopt a historical approach.

the mortality rates of British soldiers; Nightingale was also one of the first to advocate for what would now be called 'evidence-based action'. In a slightly different vein, the St John Ambulance association (established in 1887) was part of the flourishing of humanitarian ideas in the nineteenth century. These initiatives were local, or national, in the sense that they focused on the treatment of nationals from their own countries, even though they often involved working abroad. They were distinct from the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement by virtue of the Red Cross' emphasis on standing, international legal agreements, which provided a framework for action on behalf of citizens of other countries as well as fellow nationals. In this, the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field (1864), in which the ICRC had a direct hand, had more in common with the Hague Conventions (1899 and 1907), which likewise aimed to minimise the impact of war by placing rules upon the conduct of hostilities.

Other areas of international cooperation of relevance to the history of humanitarian action also took institutional form at this time.[7] The first International Sanitary Conferences were held in the 1850s, and international medical conferences became a regular fixture; an international Health, Maritime and Quarantine Board was established in 1881 in Alexandria, later becoming the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) (Roemer, 1994: 406–08). Natural disaster response was another generator of international as well as domestic efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the mid-1800s, regulations for assistance practice began to be codified through laws for emergency communications, disease control and vessels in distress (IFRC, 2007: 25). In the United States, the end of the Civil War (1861–65) allowed the American Red Cross (ARC) to direct its attention towards a series of hazards including floods in 1889 and a hurricane in 1900. When a major earthquake struck San Francisco on 18 April 1906, more than 28,000 buildings were destroyed and some 36,000 people left homeless (Hutchinson, 2000: 10). The following year a large earthquake and subsequent fire in the Jamaican capital Kingston virtually flattened the city, leaving some 1,000 of its inhabitants dead and causing around £1.6 million-worth of damage. In 1908, another earthquake, this time in Italy, left more than 75,000 dead and approximately half a million people homeless. In all three cases, international assistance was a major part of the response; in the aftermath of the Kingston earthquake, for example, British, US and French naval ships provided immediate assistance and medical care, and relief and reconstruction funds flowed in from around the Empire (HMSO, 1907). In the wake of these disasters, the first International Congress of Lifesaving and First Aid in the Event of Accidents was held in Frankfurt in 1908.

7 The roots of modern European disaster medicine are in fact extremely deep, and have been traced back to the Middle Ages and the Black Death pandemic, which led to the establishment of public health boards in towns around Europe (Dara et al., 2005: S2).

Imperial expansion also provided a context for efforts to ameliorate the suffering of others, through public works, epidemiology and other 'improvements' in the colonies. Although territorial conquest began in the sixteenth century and imperialist ambition arguably peaked in the nineteenth, colonial structures of power continued until decolonisation in the second half of the twentieth century. Colonial practices represent a point of overlap between state, secular and religious versions of humanitarian action, with missionaries forming an integral part of the colonial project, even if not always perfectly aligned with colonial policies (Barnett and Weiss, 2008: 22). As a recent call for further study pointed out:

> *It is not a simple matter of resemblance – how contemporary humanitarian action appears to echo the patterns and ambitions of earlier imperial 'projects' – but that the two phenomena are ultimately bound together in a series of mutually constituting histories, in which the ideas and practices associated with imperial politics and administration have both been shaped by and have in themselves informed developing notions of humanitarianism* (Skinner and Lester, 2013: 731).

From the nineteenth century until decolonisation, the colonial field served as a laboratory for the techniques of later humanitarian action, including famine relief, the provision of cash assistance to the needy and colonial medicine and health services. Like emergency relief on European soil, the first beneficiaries of medicine in the colonies were Europeans. The first task of missionary doctors was to address the sharp attrition rates of mission members due to disease; between 1860 and 1917, 17.5% of members of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UCMA) died and a further 18.8% had to be transferred home due to illness (Jennings, 2008: 42). Treatments were later extended to indigenous populations, and the proselytising aspect of missionary activity was often subsumed into medical work in the conviction that the benefits of medical science would by themselves promote conversion (see for example Bjørnlund, 2008). The provision of health services to indigenous populations was also a response to the need to protect colonial workforces from disease. The link between colonial health and colonial labour was exemplified by the South African Institute for Medical Research (SAIMR), which was founded in 1913 and funded by the Chamber of Mines to carry out research on diseases that affected mine labourers (Farley, 1988: 194).

Colonial practices have an important yet complex relationship with contemporary humanitarian action. In India, the Famine Codes established by the colonial state defined famine and proposed ways of measuring it, as well as providing guidelines to govern prevention and response. These codes, developed in the early 1880s after a series of devastating crises, were influenced by Victorian ideas about the 'deserving poor' in that they sought to limit relief as much as possible to those who were deemed 'really destitute' and therefore morally deserving

of assistance (Kalpagam, 2000: 433). There were however significant differences in attitudes towards beneficiaries in the colonies as compared to at home: 'while the British were committed to the maintenance of the eligible poor in England, they refused to consider this as a possibility in normal times in India, preferring to rely upon the private charitable institutions and practices of the people over whom they ruled' (Brennan, 1984: 93). Cash and food relief rates in the Famine Codes were set at roughly 75% of the prevailing labour rate, so as not to provide a disincentive to those who could find work. The emphasis was on emergency relief, which was to be planned and systematised, but would not constitute general assistance. The principles of the Indian Famine Codes were influential in other parts of the British colonial empire, including Sudan (see De Waal, 1989), and remained so for decades.

Humanitarian action in the early twentieth century thus encompassed, as early histories of humanitarianism indicated, a broad range of activities (Carlton, 1906; Parmelee, 1915). Yet often – and increasingly so as nationalist tensions rose prior to 1914 – war, and the mitigation of its human impacts, was at the forefront. The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement was a leading forum for international humanitarian cooperation, thanks to its work during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and other late-nineteenth-century conflicts. Beyond Western Europe and North America, the Ottoman Red Crescent Society (founded in 1868) and the Japanese National Society (founded in 1877) provided relief in conflicts such as the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) (see Checkland, 1994).

Despite this growing expertise, the vast extent of the humanitarian challenges posed by the First World War was almost entirely unexpected. The personal and material resources available to the ICRC at the beginning of the war bore no relation to the enormity of the work it would accomplish between 1914 and 1918 in assisting the huge numbers of prisoners of war (POWs) captured during the conflict – even at the peak of the war, the Committee employed only 41 delegates (Forsythe, 2005: 33). Although the ICRC was never directly appointed the task of caring for POWs (Moorehead, 1998: 187), it assisted communications between POWs and their families, campaigned for the repatriation of gravely wounded or ill soldiers, helped unite families and facilitated the work of the National Societies. Likewise, while it has never formally been appointed as the watchdog for observance of the Geneva Convention and laws of war, this rapidly became part of the ICRC's wartime role.

In providing prisoner assistance, the ICRC cooperated with the Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as Jewish and Muslim associations. Delegates from neutral countries carried out camp inspections, as did Church bodies such as the Mission Catholique Suisse. In addition, Red Cross Societies from the Nordic countries provided relief to POW camps in Siberia and supported the repatriation of prisoners from Russia after the war. Gerald Davis (1993: 32) argues that the Swedish and Danish National Societies in particular were able to exploit their 'double neutrality' to gain access to prisoners and other victims of war in Russian-held territories. The ICRC was also able to negotiate access to non-international armed conflicts in this period, including the Finnish Civil War (1918) and the Hungarian Revolution led by Béla Kun (1919) (see Freymond, 1969).

2.2 The Wilsonian period and Second World War reforms

Humanitarian needs in the early interwar years often derived from the Great War – food security issues, disease (including the influenza epidemic of 1918–19), mass displacement and issues around statelessness caused notably by the withdrawal of citizenship from those who had left Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. In the 1930s, the Depression brought widespread poverty but also prompted welfare regimes such as the US New Deal. Refugee crises remained prominent, as the repressive policies of the Nazi regime in Germany contributed to the flight of minority groups, above all Jews, into other European countries. Beyond Europe, greater realisation of the challenges facing colonial populations contributed to more systematic and scientific approaches to issues such as nutrition and public health. Eventually, however, the turmoil of the Second World War resonated throughout the colonial territories as well as in the metropolitan centres. In Europe alone – not counting the war in the Pacific, for instance – over 34m people died (Roberts, 1996: 581). While many accounts see the Second World War as the beginning of a new age for humanitarian action, it can also be regarded as being in continuity with the major reforms that took place in the aftermath of the First World War. The institutional developments of the interwar period foreshadowed those of the 1940s by heralding the emergence of a new, modern and international humanitarianism which – unlike previous efforts – was 'envisioned by its participants and protagonists as a permanent, transnational, institutional, and secular regime for understanding and addressing the root causes of human suffering' (Watenpaugh, 2010: 1319).

The first swathe of humanitarian reforms came with the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which regulated the end of the First World War and instigated the creation of international organisations to address humanitarian issues. The League of Nations, established through Part I of the Treaty of Versailles, was a central part of US President Woodrow Wilson's vision of international reform and the first permanent international organisation whose mission was to maintain world peace. As well as the goal of preventing war through collective security (via disarmament, negotiation and arbitration), the League's Covenant and related treaties covered issues including labour conditions, the treatment of indigenous inhabitants in colonial territories and the protection of minorities and displaced people in Europe (see Pedersen, 2007).

One of the most important reforms of the interwar period was the League's creation of the post of High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) under Dr Fridtjof Nansen, a well-known Norwegian polar explorer and scientist. Initially, the High Commissioner's mandate was limited to Russian refugees and his office's role to coordination rather than actual operations. However, through a combination of diplomacy, the respect in which he was held and close collaboration with private and voluntary organisations, Nansen was able to expand the activities of his office and to negotiate official international recognition of a travel document known as the 'Nansen passport', as well as measures in relation to the education and employment of refugees. Nansen was also involved in efforts on behalf of survivors of the Armenian genocide through the League's Rescue Movement. On his death in 1930 the League of Nations created the Nansen International Office for Refugees as an autonomous body, and the Office played a central role in the development of a draft 1933 treaty on refugees' rights. These marked 'the emergence of a regime' for the relief and protection of refugees (Skran, 1995).

The same pattern of international organisation and institution-building was evident elsewhere during this period. In the field of health, to which the League of Nations also contributed strongly, historians have identified the interwar period as marking 'the transition from treaties and conventions between nation states to the establishment of a brave new world of international organisations, designed to promote health and welfare' (Weindling, 1995: 2). International disease management, shaken by the influenza pandemic in which approximately 50m people died worldwide (Taubenberger and Morens, 2006: 15), was overhauled during the 1926 International Sanitary Convention (Sealey, 2011). International coordination and institutionalisation of humanitarian practice continued through the creation of the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS) in 1919, the forerunner of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC). There were also ideological variants: in 1922, the Communist International created Workers International Relief (WIR) to channel relief donations for international Communist parties and union organisations into the newly consolidated Soviet Union. WIR was followed the next year by International Red Aid (MOPR, from the Russian acronym), which established national chapters around Europe (Schilde, Hering and Walde, 2003; Ryfman, 2008: 46–47).

The devastation of the First World War also prompted the birth of what would become 'the first recognisable trans-national humanitarian NGO' (Walker and Maxwell, 2009: 25), the Save the Children Fund (SCF). SCF, formed in Britain in 1919, insisted that all children, including the children of former enemies, were eligible for relief (Freeman, 1965). As more national SCF sections were established in different countries, its leader Eglantyne Jebb oversaw the formation of the International Save the Children Union in Geneva in 1920, with the British SCF and the Swedish Rädda Barnen as its leading members. In the early 1920s, the Save the Children Union under Jebb's leadership developed a Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which the League adopted in 1924. This was an example of the prominent role that women played in relief work in the interwar years (Mahood, 2009). It was also part of the pattern of institutional organisation, 'a cultural reconfiguration of civil mentalities that had been organised around ideas of national sovereignty towards something closer to a global civil society of shared rights and responsibilities' (Trentmann and Just, 2006: 7).

Humanitarian efforts were also directed outside of Europe in this period. This reflected colonial expansion, as well as the existence of conflict in East Asia, particularly China, and proto anti-colonial conflicts such as the Rif War in Morocco (1921–26). The assumptions of imperialism and colonialism often influenced how humanitarian action was conceived, in the imperial holdings in particular. This was exemplified by Karen Jeppe, a Danish relief worker and missionary who worked amongst Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Although officially affiliated with Danish Protestant missionaries, Jeppe chose to work with the secular Danish Friends of Armenians (DA), and was eventually appointed League of Nations Commissioner for the Protection of Women and Children in the Middle East (Bjornlund, 2008).[8] If Jeppe, a colonial missionary who worked with secular organisations and campaigned for Armenian self-determination, embodied some of the contradictions inherent in imperial relief, similar tensions could be seen in the work of NGOs such as SCF. This organisation, while officially independent of government and international in mindset, nonetheless perpetuated British imperial attitudes and rule through its promotion of 'enlightened relief' in the colonial world (Baughan, 2012).

By the mid-1930s, a series of political and geopolitical developments had had a significant impact on the context of humanitarian operations. Economic depression had resulted in a reduction of both the resources devoted to humanitarian action and the will for international relief operations, although domestically speaking it encouraged more state welfare, particularly in the United States with Theodore Roosevelt's New Deal. The rise of Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism, exploiting economic inequality, nationalism and general popular discontent, increased tensions and hostility in Europe and beyond. The League of Nations was unable to cope with the intensifying aggression of the Axis powers, had little success in sanctioning its own members and was greatly weakened by the withdrawal of Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan in the lead-up to the Second World War. It operated on a skeleton structure during the war – the outbreak of conflict standing as proof of the League's ineffectiveness – and held its final meeting in 1946.

8 Following the defeat of Germany during the First World War, territories that had been administered from Berlin were placed under the tutelage of the League and designated member states under a system of 'mandates'. The attendant reduction of national sovereignty facilitated more interventionist stances on the part of the global powers (Watenpaugh, 2010).

This period was also a difficult one for the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. While the ICRC successfully negotiated access to nominally civil conflicts, notably the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) (see Bartels, 2009), it did not denounce the indiscriminate use of mustard gas by Italian forces following Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, and notoriously failed to speak out against Nazi atrocities. As Ian Smillie writes, 'where the Holocaust is concerned, history and hindsight have been hard on the Red Cross' (Smillie, 2012). Despite rounds of drafts and negotiations, the International Conference had been unable to build consensus on the issue of protection of civilians (Bugnion, 1994: 140–44). Because the pre-war Geneva Conventions did not cover civilians subjected to brutality by their own governments, the ICRC had no mandate to intervene on behalf of the Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, political prisoners and others who were being gathered into the Third Reich's concentration and (later) extermination camps. Immediately after the war, the ICRC was accused of having failed to denounce the camps and was also criticised for doing nothing to mitigate the harsh punishment meted out to Soviet prisoners held by Germany; the Soviet Union lobbied unsuccessfully for the ICRC to be dissolved and its functions transferred to the LRCS (Bugnion, 2000: 43). In the 1980s the ICRC opened its archives to the historian Jean-Claude Favez, whose work showed that the decision not to issue a public appeal against abuses by the Third Reich was robustly debated within the ICRC, to the point that the text of such an appeal was drafted before the decision against this option was taken in October 1942.

Many of those involved in relief operations during the Second World War had also worked during the First World War and in the interwar period, and were influenced by the New Deal's practical programmes as well as the wide-ranging research programmes carried out by the League of Nations and others. The desire to learn from past experience was conscious and explicit, and affected the way humanitarian action was conceived by the Allies – the original 'United Nations' – during and after the Second World War.[9] It was applied to the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), founded in 1943 with the objective of providing aid, rehabilitation and resettlement assistance. For four years, before its closure in 1947, UNRRA was the world's preeminent humanitarian organisation.

The UN itself was officially established at a conference in San Francisco in April 1945. Fifty countries endorsed its 111-article Charter, which was ratified by the five Permanent Members of the Security Council on 24 October 1945. These institutional developments were accompanied by a series of normative changes, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its simple statement on the most basic of all human rights: 'Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person' (Article 3). Although there has been a tendency to see the Declaration as a reaction to the Holocaust, it has also been placed in a broader perspective, both chronologically and geographically, that favours its interpretation as 'an amalgam of competing or converging universalisms – imperial and anticolonial, "Eastern" and "Western", old and new' (Amril and Sluga, 2008: 256; see for example Anderson, 2006; Carozza, 2003).

These post-war rights frameworks represented 'the beginning of a period of unprecedented international concern for the protection of human rights' (Clapham, 2007: 42). On 9 December 1948 – one day before the Universal Declaration was passed – the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In 1949 the four additional Geneva Conventions expanded and strengthened existing IHL. Among the most significant additions was the extension of the law to include non-international armed conflicts and the protection of civilian populations. Within the UN, institutional reforms distributed UNRRA's assets and personnel between new specialised agencies: the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Health Organisation and the International Refugee Organisation (IRO, replaced by UNHCR in 1951).

Other agencies were mandated to act in specific crises. One example was the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA), which established a dedicated fund for South Korea in light of the 1945 partition of the country and the Korean War (1950–53). UNKRA was built upon – or subsumed into – a longer-standing US programme of aid intended to stabilise and protect South Korea from the communist North. The United States consistently spent over $200m a year on aid to South Korea, with $380m going in the peak year of 1957 (Ekbladh, 2004: 18). UNKRA was an example of what Kent (1987: 38) describes as 'relief that was conceptually limited in terms of time, geography and approach' (it lasted only five years beyond the war, in operation from 1950–58). It was also a good example of the intersection between official assistance and strategic interest as Cold War tensions intensified: as Barnett puts it, 'the willingness of states to become more involved in the organization and delivery of relief owed not only to a newfound passion for compassion but also to a belief that their political, economic, and strategic interests were at stake' (Barnett, 2011: 107).

In contrast with the short-lived UNKRA, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), established in 1949 in response to the plight of Palestinian refugees fleeing the newly-created state of Israel, is still in existence over 60 years after its creation. Like UNKRA, UNRWA began as a special fund thanks to US momentum. Its work was understood to fall into two phases: immediate relief to sustain refugees, and educational and economic assistance to facilitate their integration into host countries (see Bocco,

9 The term 'United Nations' was officially used from 1942 onwards to describe the coalition of Allies fighting the Axis powers. It was later transferred to the United Nations Organisation.

2009). The scale and duration of UNRWA's operations – with staff numbers in the tens of thousands, responsible for approximately 4,700,000 registered refugees, dozens of camps and hundreds of schools – have led to it being described as a surrogate state (Bocco, 2009: 234).[10]

The post-war period also saw major developments in the structure and mechanisms of international assistance, notably around food aid. In essence, international coordination and regulation according to universal need gave way to a system driven by surplus production and Cold War imperatives (see Jachertz and Nützenadel, 2011). The first herald of this was the Marshall Plan (1947–51), through which the United States gave financial aid to help rebuild European states (see Clay, 1995). By the late 1950s, American aid represented nearly one-third of the total world wheat trade (Trentmann, 2006: 35). According to Frank Trentmann, 'instead of the New Internationalist vision of global coordination and of boosting local knowledge and centres of production, the logic of food aid was to turn food producing developing countries into importers of American wheat surpluses' (*ibid.*). In 1954 the United States introduced Public Law (PL) 480 'Food for Peace', which enabled US food aid to be used for international development and relief purposes. In the same year, FAO developed its 'Principles of Surplus Disposal', an agreed framework for the use of surplus agricultural production to support recovery and development abroad (see Shaw, 2011). In 1961, US President John F. Kennedy established the Food for Peace office and proposed the trialling of a multilateral mechanism for managing food aid in emergencies and development contexts. Operating under FAO, the 'World Food Programme' trial was approved by the UN General Assembly in 1961.

2.3 Engagement in the global South during the Cold War

Humanitarian needs during the Cold War were perceived more explicitly through the lens of global poverty and inequality. This was the period when the development discourse came to prominence and leaders of less developed countries made the claim that the suffering caused by 'underdevelopment' was as great as relief and reconstruction needs in Europe, and as deserving of international attention.

The immediate post-war years continued the expansion of humanitarian action that had occurred during the Second World War. This pattern had already been seen, under different geopolitical circumstances, following the First World War. After the Second World War, however, the proliferation of agencies was especially striking: in addition to organisations established during the war, nearly 200 NGOs were created between 1945 and 1949, most of them formed in the United States (Barnett, 2011: 112). Meanwhile, the main beneficiaries of humanitarian action shifted from being Europeans in need to all peoples in need, the world over. Of course, there were some significant constraints: people living under communist rule in China, the Soviet Union and Cuba were largely off-limits to international agencies more closely identified with the Western (capitalist) 'first world' than the Eastern (communist) 'second world'. It was the people of the so-called 'third world' that, in the post-colonial period, became the main focus of the humanitarian system. The period when the image of starving African children came to dominate Western conceptions of humanitarian aid, often disseminated by NGO fundraising campaigns, coincided with the emergence of the third-world nations as a geopolitical bloc, asserting their independence and equality for the first time.

The burgeoning humanitarian sector entered the 1950s with many elements recognisable in today's system already in place, if not quite in their current shape: international governance mechanisms, specialised agencies, NGOs, a language of rights, a legal framework, engagement in conflicts, natural disasters, epidemiology, food and nutrition and a global ambition for what was soon to be called 'development'. In 1948, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 198 (III), calling for extra efforts for the 'economic development of under-developed countries'. In 1952, the UN published a report linking development to global stability, and ten years later, in 1961, the UN declared the first Decade of Development.

The process of decolonisation structured the development agenda by creating a body of newly independent nations that, for the first time, had clout on the global stage. The effects of decolonisation were strongly felt in the United Nations. In the first ten years after its formation, the UN added 72 new states to its original membership. By 1955, of the 122 members 87 were developing countries (or 'less developed countries' as they were then known). Many of these states participated in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), founded in 1961 to create a forum and negotiating position for countries that did not identify with either of the two major superpower blocs (see Willetts, 1978). The impact this had upon the workings of the UN, and in particular the General Assembly, can be gauged from a highly-regarded account of the organisation published in 1979 by British politician Evan Luard. In his foreword, Luard outlined some of the complaints being made against the UN, including the claim that 'it has become little more than a debating chamber, dominated by very small nations, where hotheads angrily abuse each other, and where nothing effective ever gets done' (Luard, 1979: vii). He went on to outline some of the geopolitical changes that had impacted upon the UN:

> *the influx of new members, many of them very small, the role of great power diplomacy in diminishing its role, the prevalence of internal rather than external conflict in the modern world, the inadequate peace-keeping capacity, the disordered state of the finances,*

10 The same has been said of UNHCR in the Middle East. See Slaughter and Crisp, 2008; Kagan, 2011.

> *the poor morale of international civil servants, the chronic political conflicts, once mainly between East and West and now mainly between rich and poor.*

The decolonisation process also had a profound impact on the development of NGOs. The skills, material and money wielded by Northern organisations were called upon to supplement those of the newly established Southern governments, many of whom were struggling with inadequate resources and infrastructure after the rapid withdrawal of the colonial powers. While official international politics were constrained by the rivalry of the superpowers, 'NGOs expanded as a non-state or petty sovereign power within the liminal space between the West, the Soviet bloc and independent Third World states emerging from colonization' (Duffield, 2007: 52). As a result, the Cold War has often been regarded as a fertile period for humanitarian action by private or voluntary groups: in 1960, Oxfam's annual budget went over the £1m mark for the first time; by the end of the decade, 289 major new NGOs had been created (*ibid.*: 46; Kent, 1987: 46). Ties between these non-governmental agencies and the Cold War policies and priorities of their home governments were often extremely close; in Vietnam, for instance, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was actively involved in delivering food aid to the US-allied Popular Forces militia. The 'thoroughgoing penetration of humanitarian activities by political agendas' was typical of most NGOs, including CRS, CARE, International Voluntary Services (IVS) and the Vietnam Christian Service (VCS) (Minear, 2012: 45–48).[11]

Although the Cold War paradigm structured much of the environment in which aid actors had to operate, not all situations conformed to the rigidity of the East–West division. One notable example, with major significance for humanitarian action, was the Nigeria/Biafra Civil War. Initially, the situation was treated as a civil conflict. The position of U Thant, the UN Secretary-General, was that the Biafran secession in May 1967 represented an internal issue for the Nigerian federal government – a position also advocated by Britain as the former colonial power. A proposed airlift into Biafra (a predominantly Christian region) was opposed by the Nigerian government, but as famine conditions intensified NGOs including Oxfam and CARE and a coalition of Church agencies under JointChurchAid began their own airlifts. Having made little headway in its own negotiations, in August 1968 the ICRC announced its intention to begin airlifting supplies into Biafra despite the lack of government authorisation. The ICRC airlift operated from September 1968 to June 1969, when an ICRC plane was shot down by a Nigerian government fighter. Thereafter, Biafra was solely dependent on supplies carried at night by unlit JointChurchAid flights and NGO-chartered aircraft. Of the 7,800 flights into Biafra, 5,310 were operated by JointChurchAid, which transported 66,000 tonnes of relief supplies (Stremlau, 1977: 244). For a time Uli airstrip in Biafra was the busiest airport in Africa, handling 50 or more flights each night. It was this crisis that demonstrated the ability of NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance in contexts where the UN and ICRC could not.

The Biafra war, all accounts agree, was of huge consequence: 'a formative experience in contemporary humanitarianism'; 'a test case and a turning point for international humanitarian assistance'; 'opening a new chapter in humanitarian action'; 'everyone is in agreement that modern humanitarian action was born in Biafra' (De Waal, 1997: 72; Macalister-Smith, 1985: 118; Barnett, 2011: 133; Maillard, 2008). It was crucial in the formation of at least two NGOs: Concern and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Concern (now Concern Worldwide) was formed in Ireland by Aengus Finucane. Finucane, the Catholic parish priest at Uli, had been deeply involved in managing the arrival of supplies at the airstrip. MSF was formed in 1971 with *témoignage* ('bearing witness') as a core principle, in opposition to the ICRC's traditional discretion (Vallaeys, 2004; Maillard, 2008; Desgrandchamps, 2011–12). It is also now accepted that the humanitarian effort was co-opted by the Biafran leadership in their campaign for international recognition, and provided resources for their war effort. Smillie (1995: 104) concludes that the relief effort was 'an act of unfortunate and profound folly' that prolonged the war and contributed to the deaths of thousands of people.

The East Pakistan crisis, if less symbolic now than Biafra, presented another major challenge to the humanitarian system. In November 1970, a severe cyclone and storm surge hit the coastal areas of the Ganges delta in what was then East Pakistan, killing an estimated 300,000 people. The cyclone interrupted planned national elections, polls for which were held in December and January. The government's refusal to acknowledge the resounding success of the Bangladeshi nationalist Awami League led to widespread uprisings in East Pakistan, which were in turn repressed by West Pakistani forces. The perception that the authorities in West Pakistan had been slow to respond to the cyclone exacerbated tensions between the two halves of the country, with massacres of civilians by Pakistani authorities fuelling Bengali resistance, leading to a bitter civil war from March to December 1971. By the end of the year, an estimated 10m refugees from East Pakistan had sought safety across the border in India. Of these, approximately 7m were living in 825 camps, while the remainder were given shelter by friends and family (Loescher, 2001a: 156).

The scale of the refugee crisis encouraged U Thant to nominate UNHCR as the 'Focal Point' for the coordination of all UN assistance. At the time, this was an innovative approach, giving the High Commissioner powers distinct from those of his role as head of UNHCR, and can be seen as a kind of precursor to the post-2005 cluster system. Even so, relief efforts inside Bangladesh, the new name for East Pakistan as declared by the Awami League in March 1971, were hampered

11 IVS, founded in the United States in 1953, was an NGO with roots in Christian organisations. It was dismantled in 2002. It is not to be confused with the International Voluntary Service (IVS-GB), which is the British branch of Service Civil International (SCI).

by conflict and a lack of independence from Pakistani officials and the military. A contemporary study concluded that 'In retrospect, no relief at all might have been better' (Chen and Northrup, 1973: 272).

Beyond conflict response, understandings of humanitarian action evolved rapidly in the 1970s. One crucial area of action was in African food crises, especially when famine struck seven countries in the Sahel region (Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta/Burkina Faso) more or less at the same time as it took hold in Ethiopia. Like other humanitarian mobilisations of the period, the response to these food crises revealed the poor coordination of the growing humanitarian system and its difficult relationship with affected governments. These experiences led to the establishment of the FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System for Food and Agriculture in 1973. The following year the UN held a World Food Conference, which affirmed the importance of planning for food crises and cemented WFP's position of leadership in this field (Shaw, 2011: 56). Meanwhile, Amartya Sen's 'entitlement theory', which proposed that famine was caused not by an outright shortage of food but by the inability of certain population groups to procure or access food (Sen, 1981), prompted more sustained analysis of the ways that affected populations responded to food shortages, and how these responses might be read as signs of an impending food security crisis.

The 1980s saw another series of major crises, often involving protracted displacement and characterised by heavy media attention and the manipulation or 'instrumentalisation' of aid, whether by affected governments, armed groups or Western states (see Terry, 2002; Donini, 2012). One of the most glaring examples was the system of refugee camps in Honduras, effectively host to both left-wing and right-wing movements from Central America and subject to significant US intervention. Instrumentalisation was also a major issue along the Thai–Cambodian border, where some 200,000 refugees massed following the toppling of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime by the Vietnamese. It became clear that the camps were being used as a sanctuary by the Khmer Rouge to sustain their military campaign against the Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penh (Terry, 2002: 114–54). During the Ethiopian famine of 1984–85, the humanitarian operation was manipulated by the Ethiopian government, which used the food aid as part of a large programme of population resettlement from conflict-affected areas to less densely populated regions in the south of the country (see Clay, 1989). This crisis became perhaps the defining example of a media-driven humanitarian mobilisation, with massive sums raised through charity sales of records by Band Aid and internationally televised Live Aid concerts (see Vaux, 2001: 43–68).

Another major international mobilisation took place following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The conflict resulted in major flows of refugees into neighbouring countries. It was estimated that 3.5m Afghan refugees had sought refuge in Pakistan alone by the end of the decade (Loescher, 2001a: 62). Hundreds of refugee camps were established by the Pakistani government and UNHCR, many of which were militarised by the *mujahedeen* groups fighting Soviet occupation. In addition to billions of dollars in direct military support, Cold War tensions encouraged Western governments to support these groups indirectly through refugee networks, while for newly formed Islamic relief organisations the war represented a first terrain of transnational operations (Juul Petersen, 2011: 95–98). When the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, funding for refugees in neighbouring countries declined significantly, despite a civil war resulting in new waves of displacement and humanitarian needs.

2.4 From the fall of the Iron Curtain to the close of the century

From the mid-1980s, signs of strain within the Soviet bloc were beginning to show. The power of the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland was one such sign, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 another. By the end of 1991 the Soviet Republics and finally Russia itself had declared independence. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had ceased to exist. Initially, humanitarian action seemed to benefit from the easing of superpower tensions. Following a devastating earthquake in Soviet Armenia in early December 1988, for example, the Soviet government opened its borders to Western humanitarian workers for the first time since the famine of the 1920s. Another example of humanitarian cooperation in this period was Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), established in April 1989. OLS was based on the establishment of 'corridors of tranquillity' through which aid could be delivered after negotiations with the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). 'At the time,' Richard Barltrop writes (2011), 'the creation of OLS was a new and significant step, both for the UN and the SPLM/A. The UN had never before dealt directly with what would previously have been considered only a rebel movement, fighting against a sovereign African state.'

Hopes that the end of the Cold War would lead to a more satisfactory international environment proved shortlived. While the likelihood of a recurrence of the great setpiece battles that marked the two world wars receded, this did not mean that the 'age of wars' was at an end: 'the years after 1989 saw more military operations in more parts of Europe, Asia and Africa than anyone could remember, though not all of them were officially classified as wars: in Liberia, Angola, the Sudan and the Horn of Africa, in ex-Yugoslavia, in Moldova, in several countries of the Caucasus and Transcaucasus, in the ever-explosive Middle East, in ex-Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan' (Hobsbawm, 1994: 560). In 1993 there were 47 active conflicts, of which 43 were civil wars (MSF, 1997: 7). These conflicts became known as 'new wars' – not because everything about them was so very new, but because of their frequency and the intensification of certain key features,

including attacks on civilians, a breakdown of public authority or state legitimacy and their containment within a country's borders (see Newman, 2004).

For humanitarian actors, 'the race to find ... early indicators of emergent conflict [was] to the 1990s what the race for the magic formula of famine early warning indicators was to the 1970s and 1980s' (Slim, 1995: 114). They came to refer to the situations they confronted as 'complex emergencies'. This term may have been coined in Mozambique, where the UN was negotiating simultaneously with the government and with non-state actors, in this case the RENAMO movement, to allow the provision of assistance outside of its standard country agreements (Calhoun, 2008: 84). The central idea of the complex emergency, it has been argued, is that 'some emergencies have multiple causes, involve multiple local actors, and compel an international response' (*ibid.*). The idea of a system-wide response is therefore integral to their conception. Mark Duffield (1994: 3), writing when the term was only a few years old, provided a more assertive definition:

> *So-called complex emergencies are essentially political in nature: they are protracted political crises resulting from sectarian or predatory indigenous responses to socioeconomic stress and marginalisation. Unlike natural disasters, complex emergencies have a singular ability to erode or destroy the cultural, civil, political and economic integrity of established societies.*

Facing such crises, with greater collaboration possible following the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s the members of the Security Council showed a greater willingness to authorise military operations to halt or prevent the widespread suffering or death of civilians without the consent of the government concerned. Analysts at the time discerned that 'a new rule is emerging: There are circumstances in which the world community can, in defence of our common humanity, interfere in the national affairs of a sovereign nation state' (Soguk, 1999: 183; see also Wheeler, 2000: 289).

From 1948–88, the UN undertook only five peacekeeping missions; from 1989–94 it authorised 20 missions and increased the number of peacekeepers from 11,000 to 75,000. The UN also reformed its humanitarian apparatus. Following a review of capacity and coordination arrangements, on 19 December 1991 the General Assembly passed Resolution 46/182 on the 'Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations'. In addition to reinforcing the Office of the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), which became the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), the resolution placed the following key elements into a new architecture: the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator; the Humanitarian Coordinator system; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC); inter-agency needs assessments; the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP); the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF); and the Financial Tracking System (FTS). The resolution also made possible greater UN involvement in internal conflicts (Tsui and Myint-U, 2004). In so doing, it built upon Resolution 43/131 of 8 December 1988, passed in the aftermath of the Armenian earthquake, which affirmed the principle of access to victims (see Bettati, 1994). The 1990s also saw a large growth in the number and reach of humanitarian actors on multiple levels. NGOs became even more important players. This shift shows up in funding statistics: in 1976 no European Community (EC) emergency aid funding went through NGOs; by 1982–83 they were receiving 40% (Borton, 1993: 191). States also became more involved in relief, and agencies shifted their focus more towards relief and away from development assistance: WFP, for instance, cut its development projects from over half of its activity in 1989–90 to less than one-sixth by 2000 (Clay, 2003: 701).

The 1990s also witnessed a number of major crises and conflicts which contributed directly to significant changes in the humanitarian world, including the 1991 intervention in Iraq, authorised by the UN in the name of Kurds who had suffered repression at the hands of the Iraqi government; the conflict in the former Yugoslavia; civil war and famine in Somalia; and the Rwandan genocide and Great Lakes crisis (Walker and Maxwell, 2009: 60). Events in Somalia in particular have cast a long shadow over humanitarian action.[12] Following the overthrow of President Siad Barre in 1991, factional militia warfare and famine resulting from the loss of food production, a UN peacekeeping force to protect aid convoys was approved in April 1992. After two ramped-up UN deployments and the death of 24 Pakistani UN troops in June 1993, US forces launched an attack on the militia of the Somali National Alliance, losing 18 soldiers and two Blackhawk helicopters in the process. Gruesome footage of the body of a US soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by cheering Somalis had a traumatic effect on US public opinion: all US troops were withdrawn from Somalia by March 1994. 'The impact of this debacle,' it has been claimed, 'is difficult to over-estimate' (Walker and Maxwell, 2009: 66).

Experiences in Somalia had a direct effect on the international response to the Yugoslav conflict. As Yugoslavia splintered apart after 1991, a brutal policy of 'ethnic cleansing' was practised by Croatian and especially Serbian nationalists, with the population of Bosnia the principal victims. By 1993, the cost of aid to the Balkans was more than $1m per day, with UNHCR assisting 2.7m people inside Bosnia as well as 1.4m in other parts of the former Yugoslavia (Rieff, 2002: 136). 'Humanitarian action was the "filler" that was used to plug the policy gaps caused by the inability of the major powers to agree on political solutions to a profoundly political problem' (Kent, 2004: 856). Emblematically, the peacekeeping mission (UNPROFOR) was referred to by Bosnians as the UN 'Self-

12 This study does not discuss the history of humanitarian intervention – that is, military action to prevent or halt major or large-scale human rights abuses – despite its links with humanitarian action. For more on the history of humanitarian intervention, see Wheeler, 2000; Simms, 2011; Rodogno, 2012.

Protection Force'. UNPROFOR's inability to provide meaningful protection for civilians was graphically demonstrated in July 1995, when a UN-designated 'safe area' in Srebrenica fell to Serb forces. The ensuing massacre of 8,000 men and boys prompted the US and other Western governments to order air strikes on Serb positions in August 1995.

The impact of Somalia upon the international community was again starkly apparent as tensions rose in Rwanda. On 6 April 1994 – barely a month after the US withdrawal from Somalia – a genocide orchestrated by extremists within the majority Hutu ethnic group against the minority Tutsi ethnic group and politically moderate Hutus began. The genocide had been preceded by decades of tension between the two groups that had generated previous atrocities, the mass flight or expulsion of many Tutsis in 1959 to neighbouring countries and, starting in 1990, conflict as the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) tried to fight its way back into Rwanda after 40 years of exile in Uganda. By July, an estimated 800,000 people had been killed by Hutu extremists and members of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), assisted by 'ordinary' Hutus incited to kill their neighbours. A multinational UN peacekeeping force, the UN Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR), had been deployed in October 1993 to help with the implementation of a power-sharing agreement. However, most of the UNAMIR force was withdrawn by the troop contributing nations shortly after the killing of ten Belgian peacekeepers on 7 April. Even when it became clear that a genocide directed against Tutsis and moderate Hutus was underway, there was reluctance within the UN Security Council to characterise the massacres as genocide in order to avoid invoking the obligation to intervene, as required by the 1948 Genocide Convention. With no international willingness to act decisively, the genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus was only brought to an end by the victory of the RPF in July 1994 and the mass movement of 1.8m Hutus into refugee camps in eastern Zaire.

By the end of 1994, there were over 2m refugees in the countries neighbouring Rwanda, and roughly 1.5m displaced internally; over half of the country's 7m-strong population had been directly affected by the crisis (UNHCR, 2000: 246). Humanitarian agencies working in camps in Goma, in Zaire close to the border, were poorly prepared and overwhelmed by the scale of needs, and an estimated 30,000 refugees died of cholera in Goma alone (Stockton, 1998: 352; Borton et al., 1996). Residents of the camps became 'more like hostages than refugees' as the FAR and Interahamwe militia used the camps as a recruiting ground, source of income and base for night raids into Rwanda (UNHCR, 2000: 258; see Terry, 2002). Military assaults by Rwandan-backed militia on the refugee camps in late 1996 and 1997 forced many refugees back into Rwanda, whilst others were pursued deep into Congo where they were killed or perished.

Experiences in the Great Lakes galvanised a spate of initiatives to improve accountability and standards. A group of bilateral donor organisations led the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, the first comprehensive evaluation of collective emergency operations, groundbreaking for its system-wide approach (Dabelstein, 1996: 287–88; see Eriksson et al., 1996). One of the most important of the subsequent initiatives was the Sphere Project, which in May 1998 resulted in a draft *Handbook of Minimum Standards* and a Humanitarian Charter. As Margie Buchanan-Smith wrote, although concerns about operations and principles in the early 1990s 'created an atmosphere conducive to the Sphere project, it was the scale and intensity of the humanitarian crisis in Rwanda in 1994 which determined the vigour, depth and direction of its study' (Buchanan-Smith, 2003: vi; see also Walker and Purdin, 2004).[13] The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations, launched in 1994, predated these initiatives, but was nonetheless galvanised by the attention to beneficiary accountability in the years after Rwanda (see Walker, 2005). The Great Lakes crisis thus directly and fundamentally shaped the conduct of humanitarian practitioners today.

It also had a powerful effect on the normative frameworks associated with, although not directly responsible for, humanitarian action. Several precepts of international humanitarian action, including the *droit d'ingérence* advocated by members of the French *sans-frontiériste* ('without borders') movement, presented a challenge to the Westphalian principle of state sovereignty. In the field of humanitarian intervention, NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the 'Responsibility to Protect' outlined by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) remain highly contested and controversial (see Weiss, 2007). The establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002, along with the international tribunals and special courts for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, Cambodia and Lebanon, is another expression of the principle of international engagement around human rights abuses against civilians.

Although protection of civilians (POC) had long been a concern of specialists in international law, human rights and refugee law, the experiences of Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda brought the protection agenda into the work of a much larger number of actors. While recognising that much protection work, like relief assistance, is accomplished by affected communities themselves, Elizabeth Ferris (2011) outlines three strands of modern protection work in the international humanitarian domain. The earliest legal work of the ICRC – the first Geneva Convention, in 1864 – involved the protection of combatants; since then, the remit of the ICRC and IHL has expanded to include protection of prisoners of war and POC.

13 Other initiatives of the period include the People in Aid project and its best practice code; the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), which took its momentum from the Joint Evaluation; and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP).

In tandem, refugee crises starting with the wars in Europe, the creation of UNHCR and the later recognition of the needs of internally displaced people (IDPs) gave rise to protection mechanisms for displaced people. The expanding human rights movement contributed to this pro-cess by addressing the protection of ethnic and racial minor-ities, children, women and gay and lesbian people through declarations of rights, UN resolutions and other forums. As a sign of the increasing adoption of protection work, all but one of the 11 international peacekeeping missions begun from 2001–11 included POC in their mandates (*ibid.*: 2).

During the twentieth century, global relationships between states provided a changing framework for the practice of international humanitarian action. The two world wars devastated Europe and contributed to the consolidation of the United States' position as an international power. Colonisation, which began decades before, arguably peaked during the interwar period, and became the subject of inter-governmental management with the League of Nations mandate system. After the Second World War, humanitarian action expanded into what was then called the 'third world', a label that reflected the process of decolonisation and the emergence of the former colonies and developing nations as a political bloc. Since the late Cold War, and especially since the decline of the 'second world' – the communist bloc – with the fall of the Soviet Union, the same group of countries has been designated the 'global South'. Although the relevance of this classification has been challenged by the rapid development of certain Southern nations and the complex fallout from the events of 9/11, the global South remains one of the defining terrains for humanitarian action in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 3
Early institutions for emergency food aid

In the twenty-first century, famine analysts have argued, 'major, *prolonged* famine anywhere is conceivable only in contexts of endemic warfare or blockade' (Ó Gráda, 2007: 31). Paradoxically, however, the prominence of emergency food aid has increased as the geographical reach of famine has receded, and food security crises remain a crucial context for humanitarian response. Many accounts of this process focus on the creation and expansion of FAO and WFP in the period after the Second World War, and take it for granted that the largest food aid operations have been undertaken by WFP, with the backing of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union (EU) (see for example Barrett and Maxwell, 2005).

In contrast, this chapter focuses on the period prior to 1950, when food relief was part of a process of increasing internationalisation. It begins by examining how the Commission for the Relief of Belgium and the American Relief Administration addressed the needs of civilians under occupation during and after the First World War. The next section extends the geographical remit from Europe to the colonial territories, looking at how subsistence crises in India, notably the Bengal famine of 1943, related to other food aid practices of the time. The third section considers the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and NGOs during the Second World War.[14]

3.1 The CRB and ARA during and after the First World War

The first half of the twentieth century saw several famines in Europe, largely as a result of the world wars. Amongst the many private initiatives that sprang up during the First World War, one has been singled out as particularly important, partly as a result of its sheer scale and partly for the way it 'set important and lasting precedents for the conception and organization of subsequent large scale humanitarian assistance operations' (Macalister-Smith, 1985: 12). This was the Commission for the Relief of Belgium (CRB), established in 1914 to address the food needs of Belgian and French civilians in territories occupied by Germany that were subject to a blockade by Allied forces.

The CRB originated in a request for outside assistance from one of the many local committees that had been set up in towns in occupied Belgium in an attempt to secure relief for the Belgian population. However, its grass-roots origins were soon greatly expanded by the diplomatic and logistical powers of its head, future US President Herbert Hoover. In mid-October 1914 Hoover issued an impassioned public appeal that, by speeding up negotiations through more traditional diplomatic channels, helped establish relief agreements: 'the American Government should, from reasons of pure humanity, insist that Germany take favorable action, or make shipments through American diplomats, whether Germany agrees or not'.[15] Belligerent governments on both sides recognised the Commission in late 1914, and the CRB was the only body to win assurances from the German military that food supplies destined for civilians would not be confiscated. Its ships were allowed to pass through the Allied blockade, it was able to establish contracts and treaties with warring governments and its representatives – who were all active in areas under military occupation – held special passports and were afforded freedom of travel and other immunities. In short, the CRB had secured exceptional levels of independence and authority, leading one British official to describe it as 'a piratical state organised for benevolence' (in Gay and Fisher, 1929: preface).

Although its focus was on civilians rather than soldiers, the CRB provides an illustrative counterpoint to the ICRC in this period. Several of the crucial mechanisms that allowed the CRB to operate in effect mirrored those that had been used to carve out the ICRC's international role. The recognition of the utility of the CRB's work, its neutrality and the adoption of an acknowledged banner to allow passage for CRB staff were all familiar from the provisions that had facilitated the aid work of the Red Cross. The CRB was a recognised actor on an international stage, 'answerable for the honest and efficient use of the resources placed at its disposal' within a complex web of accountability relationships in which its donors were also belligerents in the conflict whose effects it was attempting to assuage (Gay and Fisher, 1929: preface). The CRB was also a sign of the emergence of the United States as a global power. Hoover, who was also involved in relief efforts during the Second World War, can be seen as representing that strand of American humanitarianism that sees the role of government as enabling action by private voluntary organisations.[16]

From the outset, Hoover emphasised centralisation and independence. In a telegram to the US ambassador in London

14 Note that emergency food aid or food relief represents only one part of the broader international engagement with food security crises. Notably, government-to-government aid is not discussed in this chapter, although it informs the context for the developments featured.

15 Herbert Hoover, 'Statement to the American Press, urging immediate action for the rescue the Belgian people', 13 October 1914. Document 6 in *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*, ed. George I. Gay and H. H. Fisher. Available online at http://www.gwpda.org/wwi-www/CRB/CRB1-TC.htm#d6.

16 The authors are grateful to Edward Clay for drawing attention to this point.

in late October 1914, he insisted that 'it is impossible to handle the situation except with the strongest centralization and effective monopoly, and therefore the two organizations [the American-run relief commission based in London and its Belgian-based partner] will refuse to recognize any element except themselves alone'.[17] Throughout the war, the CRB conducted and disseminated detailed analyses of food imports, local food production and nutritional requirements. Its methods have been compared to Hoover's business techniques, using 'the same aggressive financing strategies, strict accounting methods, efficient administration, and even commercial principles' (Patenaude, 2002: 29). The CRB's success in 'organising for benevolence' is reflected in the official figures: between 1914 and 1919, the CRB provided relief for a population of 9m people, supported welfare services and attempted to revive selected economic sectors; it handled over 2,000 commodity cargoes totalling more than 5m tonnes, with a 1918 value exceeding $800m (Macalister-Smith, 1985: 11). This is the equivalent of approximately $12.25 billion today.[18]

The CRB was often assumed to be an official American organisation – not least by individual Americans who supported it – though the US government had no formal responsibility for it. In fact, following America's entry into the war in April 1917 Hoover had to compete with war mobilisation priorities, and in January 1918 admitted that 'I am now putting the American people on a practical rationing of many of the commodities most urgently needed in Europe, with a view to saving from our consumption a sufficiency to carry the Belgian Relief and to provide their essential foods'.[19] The price of Hoover's influence upon policy-makers (whom he was soon to join) was an increasing government stake in relief efforts.

The American Relief Administration (ARA) was formed in 1919. Like the CRB, its chief was Hoover and it received donations from private individuals. Unlike the CRB, however, the ARA was subject to US government control. In its first few years, the ARA either directly or through partner organisations delivered food worth more than $150m to children in 21 countries across Europe and the Middle East (Patenaude, 2002: 30). It also undertook reconstruction activities, contributing to communications repairs, the restoration of railways and river transport and industrial projects. While the CRB had been unable to gain access to Poland during the war, because of its inability to win German assurances that food provided for civilians would not be diverted by the military, the ARA worked in Poland after the Armistice. During the winter and spring of 1919–20 it brought in over 300,000 tonnes of US food supplies, including kosher meals for Jews, provided on credit to the new Polish government (Adams, 2009: 5).

The ARA also played a major role in relief efforts during famine in the newly declared Soviet Union in 1921–22. Political and ideological tensions during the famine ran extremely high, especially where US organisations were concerned. The Soviet authorities had hesitated before opening the country to aid, and specified that 'the Soviet government welcomes the help of all providing it does not involve political considerations' (cited in Kirimli, 2003: 38). Yet Hoover was quite explicit about American aims, writing in 1919 that 'of course, the prime objective of the United States in undertaking the fight against famine in Europe is to save the lives of starving people. The secondary object, however, and of hardly less importance, [is] to defeat Anarchy, which is the handmaiden of Hunger' (cited in Patenaude, 2007). Mostly undertaken through its affiliated charitable organisation the American Relief Administration European Children's Fund (ARAECF), the ARA's work was on a staggering scale. At its height, the organisation was feeding over 10.5m people a day and had more than 120,000 employees in the Soviet Union (Walker and Maxwell, 2009: 27). The ARA made extensive use of medical experts but also employed many demobilised military personnel, including in senior positions. Because of the sheer number of beneficiaries they were treating, assessments to identify the neediest children were only carried out in urban centres, using the Pelidisi system to determine undernourishment in children up to the age of 15 (Patenaude, 2002: 87).[20]

These practices reflected the way the First World War changed approaches to food aid, and particularly knowledge about nutrition. Mass and widespread food security crises, from one point of view, presented wartime and post-war scientists with 'a gigantic nutritional experiment' (Weindling, 1994: 204). Long-term food shortages, caused by the Great War and compounded by events such as the Russian Civil War (1917–22), the global influenza pandemic and later the Depression, remained a pressing concern in the following decades. As a result, prior to the Second World War a twofold shift relating to food aid took place: relief policies moved 'from the distribution of food aid to adopting more scientifically based programmes' and nutritional science underwent 'a shift from diet as being merely calculated to sustain life to that of promoting optimum health, and of a new standard for well being' (*ibid.*, 1994: 205). These developments also affected attitudes to food aid in the colonial territories.

17 Memorandum from Herbert Hoover to Ambassador Page on the problem of Belgian relief, 20 October 1914. Document 13 in Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*. Available online at http://www.gwpda.org/wwi-www/CRB/CRB1-TC.htm#d13.

18 Calculated by the US Bureau of Labor, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

19 Letter from Herbert Hoover to Emile Francqui, 24 January 1918. Document 508 in Gay and Fisher, *Public Relations of the Commission for Relief in Belgium*. Available online at http://www.gwpda.org/wwi-www/CRB/CRB2-12.htm#d508.

20 Developed by the Viennese doctor Clemens Pirquet, the Pelidisi system used as a measurement the cubic root of the tenfold weight of the body divided by the person's sitting height. The average for adults would be 100 and for children 94.5, below which point 'undernourishment' applied. The benchmark figure adopted in Austria was 94; in the Soviet Union the cut-off had to be reduced to 92 or lower in certain places, because of the scale of need (Patenaude, 2002: 87).

3.2 Colonial famine relief in Bengal and Indochina

Although India entered the twentieth century in the throes of a severe famine, it did not suffer the same experience again until the Second World War. The Bengal famine of 1943 became – like Biafra in the late 1960s – a 'paradigmatic case' (Ó Gráda, 2007: 10). Contemporary estimates suggested a death toll of 1.5–2m, from starvation and related diseases like malaria, cholera and smallpox. More recently, studies have placed the figure much higher, perhaps as many as 3m (Devereux, 2000). Another half a million were made destitute and hundreds of thousands more lost land, livestock and other capital assets as systems of rural patronage crucial to the survival of the poorest sections of Bengali society collapsed (Greenough, 1980).

Disputes persist about the balance of causes for the famine (see notably Tauger, 2003, in response to Sen, 1981), but it is clear that the situation was adversely affected by the Second World War. Rice prices rose as the conflict progressed: the wholesale price of rice went from Rs 9–10 per *maund* in November 1942 to more than Rs 100 by late 1943 (Bose, 1990: 716). Britain's 'denial policy', designed to prevent Japan from gaining control of Allied assets, saw the army impound tens of thousands of boats, destroying the livelihoods of many Bengali fishermen, and surplus stocks were moved inland. As a result, rates of destitution during the famine were higher among fishermen than in any other occupational group (Greenough, 1980: 222). In making the decision to cut both military and civilian shipping to India, Prime Minister Winston Churchill noted that 'there is no reason why all parts of the British Empire should not feel the pinch in the same way as the Mother Country has done' (cited in Collingham, 2011: 145). The British government turned down a Canadian offer of wheat for Bengal on the grounds that no shipping was available to transport it, and prevented the Indian authorities from requesting assistance from UNRRA, fearing negative publicity (*ibid.*: 151).

Even aside from such decisions, which seem to indicate the influence of colonial racism as well as military priorities, the actions of the colonial state were profoundly inadequate. The failings are starkly set out in the report of the Famine Inquiry Commission (FIC) appointed to investigate the response. There was little understanding of the severity of the famine, or how to best manage the food market. The Indian Famine Code, in place since the nineteenth century, was not invoked, on the grounds that there was not enough food available to meet its rationing requirements, and no famine was ever formally declared, depriving Bengal of the coordinating figure of the Famine Commissioner. The Bengal administration was both late and incoherent at all stages of the planning and implementation of the response.

Voluntary and charitable organisations were a substantial contributor to the relief response. More than 500 food kitchens, as well as shelters and orphanages, were established by private relief organisations in Calcutta (Kolkata) and in the countryside (Greenough, 1980: 230). Voluntary organisations involved in the response included the Ramakrishna Mission, Bharat Sewak Sangh, the Friends Ambulance Unit, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Marwari Relief Society and the Indian Red Cross. One agency, the Bengal Relief Committee set up by Hindu nationalist politician Shyama Prasad Mookerji, operated in 25 districts and in Calcutta, providing rice to at least 300,000 households a day at the height of the famine. Between July 1943 and May 1944 the Bengal Relief Committee disbursed Rs 1.2m for food and spent another Rs 1.6m on other forms of relief. The Bengal government supported the engagement of NGOs and civil society, although it insisted that they be subject to government supervision and control. Many of these private organisations focused their relief work on particular groups defined according to gender, class, communal affiliation or occupation; one Marwari organisation, for example, ran a scheme specifically to help impoverished Brahmin priests. The government was similarly partial, favouring government employees and industrial workers, to whom it provided rice at subsidised prices.

In the aftermath, reference to the patently inadequate response of the British authorities to the Bengal famine became part of the campaign for Indian independence. Even before the famine, Indian nationalists had been using malnutrition information to challenge the British justification for colonial rule on the basis of its supposed benefits to colonised people (Amrith, 2008: 1,024). After the famine, criticism of British colonial failings became even more acute. The writing of Jawaharlal Nehru typified the claim that the colonial state had lost its legitimacy: 'the tragedy of Bengal and the famines of Orissa, Malabar, and other places, are the final judgment on British rule in India' (Nehru, 1956: 511). From this perspective, the colonial state's refusal to feed the starving 'dramatically represented the bankruptcy of its legitimacy' (Amrith, 2008: 1,027).

A similar pattern was evident in French Indochina (present-day Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam). In contrast with the British approach in India, the French colonial state in Indochina had never established a system for famine prevention and response. Wartime inflationary conditions and Japanese military successes in Southeast Asia contributed to famine in Indochina, especially Tonkin, and in China (Bose, 1990: 703). Once France had fallen under German occupation in 1940, the French government in Indochina committed to supply its new ally in Tokyo with over a million tons of rice from the 1942–43 harvests; peasants in Tonkin were obliged to plant crops for military requirements rather than food, and some rice was even burned as fuel in French- and Japanese-run factories (Bose, 1990: 720). Such harsh treatment intensified pre-existing anti-colonialism in the Indochinese territories. Indeed, Van Nguyen-Marshall (2005: 237) argues that 'the history of Vietnam's decolonization and of the events leading up to Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence in August

1945 is inexplicable without reference to the devastation resulting from the famine that year'. In 1945, the Viet Minh national liberation movement began a strategy of grain seizures to address the food shortage, winning local support in the process. Huynh Kim Khanh (1986: 313) describes how its leadership recognised the famine's potential as 'a useful instrument to arouse hatred against the French and the Japanese, to give people a political consciousness, and to involve them practically in revolutionary politics'. The experience in Indochina, as in India, thus 'highlights the role of famine in undermining the legitimacy of the state and the pre-existing social structure' (Bose, 1990: 726–27).

The mid-century famines of colonial Asia highlight the complex relationship between colonialism, nationalism and forms of responsibility. In the 1920s and 1930s, nutrition analyses underway in post-war Europe were also applied to the colonies, leading for the first time to the perception of a global hunger problem (Trentmann, 2006: 14). The League of Nations was instrumental in the recognition of this, devoting the third volume of its 1933 *Report on Nutrition and Public Health* to the 'new problem' of undernourishment in the colonial world (Worboys, 1988: 213–14). Yet, as the cases of Bengal and Tonkin show, with global conflict taking a severe toll on colonial territories the inability of imperial powers to sufficiently care for their subjects provided a powerful critique of the colonial system.

3.3 UNRRA and NGOs during the Second World War

A concerted emphasis on planning, coordination and scientific expertise as the foundations of relief was one of the definitive features of Second World War-era humanitarian action. Conscious of the need to do better than its predecessors, the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration taught its staff that 'the absence of a plan after the Armistice in 1918 had crippled relief efforts, and that subsequent initiatives by Herbert Hoover and Fridtjof Nansen … had been marred by a lack of funding and political support' (Reinisch, 2008a: 378). In contrast, the efforts of UNRRA and other organisations active in the period were intended to be more rational and coordinated in order to confront the mass scale of needs during the 1940s, with UNRRA itself the embodiment of this approach.

UNRRA was established on 9 November 1943, after lengthy negotiations between the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union and China. Its inaugural meeting the following day was attended by delegates from 44 nations. They agreed that member nations would donate 1% of their national income, giving UNRRA a budget of roughly $2bn, of which the US would provide nearly two-thirds (Shephard, 2008: 411–12). The organisation would eventually establish 24 country missions (one of the largest was in China) and 17 regional shipping and procurement offices. UNRRA's peak year of operation was 1946, when its headquarters in Washington had a staff of 1,800; its European Regional Office in London a staff of 1,600; and its China office a staff of 1,300 (Woodbridge, 1950, cited in Macalister-Smith, 1985: 13). A separate displaced persons operation employed a staff of 5,000 (*ibid.*). In the three and a half years of its existence (from November 1943 to June 1947), it shipped over 9m tonnes of food and other supplies worth a total of $2.9bn, $1.23bn of which was accounted for in food aid.

The mid-century principles of organised relief that UNRRA came to embody were also important to NGOs. For instance, the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (COBSRA), founded in August 1942, was established to facilitate the exchange of information between NGOs and to coordinate their work. It was open to any British organisation specialised in 'relief of suffering or social recovery work in any parts of the world' but required that participating organisations have at least one sister organisation based outside the Commonwealth (Steinert, 2008: 423). Before any missions were undertaken, staff of COBSRA affiliates were offered training to prepare them for humanitarian work, including technical matters, language skills, context analysis and psychology (*ibid.*: 425). The approach shared by organisations like UNRRA and COBSRA was summed up by Francesca Wilson, a high-profile relief worker. It was, she wrote, 'an important advance on last time when no prior survey of needs was made and nation was allowed to compete with nation for food and necessities … we have at last become planning-minded' (Wilson, 1945: 5).

Despite this emphasis on needs and rational approaches, the principle of impartiality was rarely fully respected. Private and voluntary organisations provided aid, often on the basis of solidarity with a particular beneficiary group. In the United States, the National Catholic Welfare Council created CRS in 1941, and American Lutherans founded Lutheran World Relief (LWR) in 1945 (Egan, 1988). In the UK, the Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad (JCRA) was formed in 1943, focusing its efforts on Jewish victims of the conflict. As for UNRRA, the issue of eligibility was the subject of significant debate as the organisation, which worked in many different countries, sought to navigate between the political imperatives of its contributing states, its requirement that work be conducted at the request of affected governments and the desire to differentiate 'good' displaced people from 'bad' ones. The latter were defined in various ways by different actors, some emphasising collaboration with Axis powers, others citing the refusal of repatriation as a reason to consider some displaced people ineligible for aid (see Cohen, 2008; Reinisch, 2008a, 2008b; Steinert, 2008; Salvatici, 2011).

As in the aftermath of the First World War, in the 1940s national public health interests were cited as a rationale for international relief, particularly in relation to aid for 'enemy' populations. This argument was captured by UK Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin in 1945: 'While the Channel could be used to stop the German, it cannot stop germs' (cited in Steinert, 2008: 429). In another parallel with the First World

War period, recalling notably the approach taken by SCF in 1919, calls for aid to German civilians often focused upon the plight of children. Through Nordic as well as British programmes, feeding schoolchildren again became one of the most common forms of post-war aid (*ibid.*: 429, 432). Also reminiscent of the First World War was Herbert Hoover's attempt to renew the private cross-border relief he had directed with the CRB and ARA. During the Second World War, however, Hoover was unable to negotiate access with the same success as previously. Despite a brief period providing aid to Poland in 1939, after 1940 all of Hoover's efforts ran head-on into the British naval blockade, which almost nothing could convince Whitehall to revise or lift, even partially (George, 1992: 394–95). The only exception to the blockade, the provision of food aid to Greece in 1942, was subject to a strict insistence on neutrality achieved through the involvement of neutral Sweden (*ibid.*: 402; see also Mauzy, 2008).

British intransigence on the naval blockade led to the creation in 1942 of the Oxford Famine Relief Committee, now known as Oxfam. Originally a support group for the national Famine Relief Committee, the Oxford Committee had a crucial interest in Greece thanks to the involvement of Gilbert Murray, who had recently retired as Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford. In 1943, after several public campaigns about the famine in Greece, the Oxford Committee received a direct request for assistance from the President of the Greek Red Cross; it registered as an official charity and began appealing for funds, raising nearly £16,000 in its first few months (Black, 1992: 15–16). The Greek campaign was the only wartime success story of the Famine Relief Committee and its subsidiaries, as similar campaigns for assistance to Belgium and Poland, for example, came to nothing. As the conflict ended, the Oxford Committee continued to support relief efforts and eventually, in early 1949 in the context of the Arab–Israeli war the previous year, formally broadened the stated aims of its work to 'the relief of suffering arising as a result of wars or of other causes in any part of the world' (*ibid.*: 37). The expansion of its 'mandate' from European conflict to global suffering was typical of the trajectory of Western humanitarianism in this period, and provided the basis for Oxfam's work for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond.[21]

The 'humanitarian' institutions of the period before 1950 have had a mixed fate. Those that have lasted longest are the NGOs, notably Save the Children and the generation of organisations created during the Second World War, such as Oxfam and CARE. Others, such as the CRB and ARA, and sometimes by design, did not remain long after the crises that produced them. International organisations did not fare well, with many succumbing to the turmoil of the 1930s and 1940s; humanitarian action, too, became prey to these contradictory tendencies, as internationalist initiatives had to either compete or collude with national objectives and groups of various kinds became rivals for global leadership on humanitarian questions. Crucially, the landscape of international humanitarian action was being transformed by the process of decolonisation. The emergence of independent countries had an enormous impact on the normative frameworks structuring humanitarian action.

21 In 1963, under pressure from the British Charities Commission due to its development activities, Oxfam again modified the phrasing of its main objective: 'to relieve poverty, distress and suffering in any part of the world (including starvation, sickness or any physical disability or affliction) and primarily when arising from any public calamity (including famine, earthquake, pestilence, war or civil disturbance), or the immediate or continuing result of want of natural or artificial resources, or the means to develop them, and whether acting alone or in association with others' (Black, 1992: 91).

Chapter 4
Evolving norms during and after decolonisation

The process of decolonisation entailed a momentous transformation of global geopolitics and power relationships after the Second World War. The first countries to achieve independence, in the late stages of the Second World War or in its wake, were largely in Asia. Countries achieving independence during the 1945–55 period included the Philippines (1946), India and Pakistan (1947), Burma (1948), Sri Lanka (1948), Indonesia (1949), Egypt (1953), Cambodia (1953), Vietnam and Laos (both 1954). Many Latin American countries had achieved independence from Spain or Portugal in the nineteenth century. The continent's emblematic case in the post-war period was the Cuban Revolution (1959), which, while not strictly a colonial war, was considered an anti-imperialist struggle because of the close ties between the United States and the overthrown Batista regime. Decolonisation in Africa took place mostly in the early 1960s, for French and British colonies, and the 1970s, for Portugal's holdings in Southern Africa.

This chapter focuses on the impacts of this geopolitical change – the transformation of colonial territories into sovereign nations – on international humanitarian action and in particular its normative frameworks.[22] The first section considers how wars of liberation affected mechanisms of international humanitarian law, notably through the work of the ICRC. The second section explores the impact of decolonisation and wars of liberation on the legal frameworks for refugee assistance. Finally, the chapter discusses the political implications of development and human rights in a Cold War context.

4.1 Wars of liberation and international humanitarian law

With international norms evolving and decolonisation conflicts proliferating, wars of national liberation wrought major change upon the ICRC and also became a principal subject of contention for the organisation in its role as guardian of international humanitarian law. The international nature and global mandate of the ICRC, especially through its relationship with the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, meant that it had longer experience of engagement outside of Western Europe and North America than many other actors. It had been active in several internal conflicts prior to the decolonisation period. Moreover, the use of guerrilla warfare tactics (almost definitive in decolonisation conflicts) had been the subject of ICRC reflection since the nineteenth century, and had troubled jurists as far back as the sixteenth century (Hacker, 1978: 134–37). However, the political aspirations of the wars of liberation, and the geopolitical changes they produced, intensified the challenges that these conflicts presented to humanitarian actors and to the construction and observance of IHL.

The attempt to introduce the new category of 'wars of liberation' into international law, according to Antonio Cassese, began in the early 1950s. Although struggles against colonial domination occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the anti-colonial conflicts after the Second World War were 'remarkable, first, because they proliferated so rapidly and came to constitute a phenomenon of great magnitude and intensity, and, second, because "national liberation" was no longer merely a political concept, but was given a legal turn' (Cassese, 2008: 99). For liberation movements, Cassese argues, the aim to have wars of liberation recognised as international conflicts was motivated by three main factors. First, by positioning liberation movements as a potential interlocutor and accountable to the law, it elevated the standing and legitimacy of these movements. Second, it created an opportunity for these movements to oppose the treatment of their combatants as ordinary criminals. Finally, as these movements were likely to be the weaker party in the conflict and also reliant on the support of the local population, greater respect for IHL could decrease the impact of the conflict on their members and on the civilian population around them.

The ICRC began sustained reflection on the criteria for intervention in civil conflicts in the early 1950s. Four conditions were set: the events in question must reach a certain level of gravity and must involve acts of violence; they must have a certain duration (which excluded isolated rioting); the parties involved must have a certain degree of organisation; and the events must have created victims. It was also agreed that the ICRC would only act in situations where the relevant National Society was not willing and able to act effectively on behalf of victims; that the ICRC's first approach would always be to contact the National Society to gather information and offer assistance; and that it would not act without the consent of the authorities (Rey-Schyrr, 2007). In practice, however, if the colonial powers did not view anti-colonial movements in their territories as constituting war – and most did not – then the ICRC could do little to insist. Although Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions provided for access to non-international armed conflicts, it did not extend the full range of protections that applied during international conflicts and access for humanitarian organisations was often negotiated rather than provided for (Bartels, 2009: 64).

22 In contrast, according to an IFRC overview, international law relating to peacetime relief 'developed in a fragmented manner' from the 1930s onwards, through bilateral agreements, institutional mandates and specific provisions within various legal instruments (IFRC, 2007: 27).

The ICRC endeavoured with varying degrees of success to offer humanitarian assistance during wars of liberation and East–West proxy wars. Its contribution during the Indochinese War (1945–54) was limited, partly because of budget restrictions but also because it had chosen to prioritise relief work in Palestine during this period. The reluctance of the communist resistance movements to cooperate with the ICRC was exacerbated by the fact that it was dependent on the French occupying forces for communications and transport (Forsythe, 2005: 75). During the Korean War, it likewise found itself too closely identified with the agenda of a Western power, in this case the United States, which was fighting alongside South Korean and allied forces against the communist North. In effect, 'most communist governments gave it little or no cooperation during the Cold War, seeing the organization – not entirely incorrectly – as a bourgeois organization of the liberal West' (*ibid.*: 53). It was active during the Algerian War (1954–62), though had trouble navigating between the belligerents in this very brutal conflict (see Branche, 1999; Perret and Bugnion, 2011). As one expert on IHL and the ICRC puts it, 'respect for humanitarian law was indeed sorely lacking in the armed conflicts which were the direct consequences of the Cold War' (Bugnion, 2000: 43).

The issue of humanitarian provision during wars of liberation was also occupying the UN General Assembly (Hacker, 1978: 140). In 1968, Resolution 2396 on apartheid declared that 'freedom fighters should be treated as prisoners of war under international law'. In 1970, Resolution 2674 (XXV), introduced by Sudan – which had gained its independence 15 years before – sought to secure better protection for 'civilian populations and freedom fighters against colonial and foreign domination as well as against racist regimes'. Between 1968 and 1977, each regular session of the General Assembly passed at least one resolution relating to IHL, most often through the prism of 'respect for human rights in armed conflicts' (Bugnion, 2000: 45).

These internal, anti-colonial or anti-imperialist conflicts conditioned the drawn-out negotiations that eventually led to the two 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions, the first of which added wars of liberation to the category of international armed conflict, and the second of which elaborated on obligations during non-international armed conflict. It is now considered that the main humanitarian contribution of the Protocols was to improve protection for non-combatants, especially civilians, through Articles 35–67 of Protocol I and Articles 13–17 of Protocol II (Bugnion, 2000: 45). The ICRC prepared draft texts for the Protocols, as it had for the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to be debated in various forums prior to their passing into international law. However, the 1974–77 Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law that led to the adoption of the protocols was much more strongly shaped by the participation of Southern or non-aligned nations than had been the case for any previous conferences on IHL. Many of these countries favoured the 'internationalisation' of wars of liberation, which would legitimise the claims of national liberation movements against colonial powers or discriminatory regimes. It would be achieved through the revision of legal frameworks relating to conflict. This agenda was reflected in the successful campaign to have members of national liberation and anti-apartheid movements participate in the Diplomatic Conference (Hacker, 1978: 141).

The first session of the Diplomatic Conference has been described as 'one of the most bitter conferences which many of the people had ever attended' (Suter, 1984: 129). By far the most controversial question was precisely whether wars of liberation were internal or international conflicts. The ICRC's hope that the Diplomatic Conference would defer this issue and devote its attention to the regulation of these conflicts, as a separate issue from their status, was scuppered with the tabling of a clause declaring that Protocol I would apply to 'armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination'. This clause was indicative of the way in which 'many states saw Protocol I as a weapon in the strategic struggle against racism and imperialism, rather than as a strictly humanitarian document for the benefit of war victims' (Forsythe, 2005: 263; see also Suter, 1984: 145–46). In effect, by 1977 most countries had already obtained independence, and so these provisions remained largely symbolic. Tellingly, Israel and the United States refused to ratify the Protocol.

The remaining sessions of the Diplomatic Conference – one a year in 1975, 1976 and 1977 – were less combative. Ultimately, however, the conference remained dominated by the agenda of the Southern states. The ICRC's own summary of the Protocols acknowledged that 'most of the countries that became independent after 1945 "inherited" the Geneva Conventions from the former colonial powers – the adoption of the Protocols was also an occasion for them to contribute to developing the law' (ICRC, 2009). According to Perret and Bugnion (2011: 736), the 1977 Protocols reflected the learning that the ICRC had begun during the Algerian War. More critical analyses have interpreted the drafting of the Protocols as part of the declining influence of the ICRC in relation to the formulation of IHL: it was 'much more important in the development of the 1929 [Geneva Convention] on prisoners of war than it was in the development of the 1977 Protocols' (Forsythe, 2005: 264). This was reflective of the way the shift in global power undermined some elements of Western dominance in international norms.

4.2 UNHCR and global emergency and refugee frameworks

The Cold War saw a sharp rise in the number of people crossing international borders in search of refuge in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. By 1970, the total number of African refugees exceeded one million; by 1980, that figure had risen to an estimated 3.5m (Bascom, 1995: 197–98).

Often, the same states that generated refugee movements also hosted large numbers of refugees from other countries. Cold War hostilities meant that 'Western governments came to perceive assistance to refugees as a central part of their foreign policy towards newly independent states, thus using foreign aid as one of the principal tools in this East-West struggle for rivalry' (Loescher, 2001a: 10). On an operational level, this global situation proved both a challenge and an opportunity for UNHCR, which vastly expanded its resources, capacity, mandate and geographic scope. It also required the revision of the legal frameworks that supported UNHCR's work.

Over time, international refugee frameworks had viewed their work through different lenses. The agreement creating the Nansen passports for Russian refugees in 1922 had nothing to say about causes of displacement or the definition of 'refugee' status. This approach was repeated in the 1933 and 1938 Refugee Conventions, which also constructed the term 'refugee' according to ethnic group or country of origin (Skran, 1995: 72). The 1933 Convention hence referred to Russian, Armenian, Turkish, Assyrian, Assyro-Chaldean and Turkish refugees, while the 1938 law applied to 'refugees coming from Germany'.[23] Following the Second World War, definitions of refugees shifted from a focus on ethnicity to a focus on the reasons for flight. The 1951 Refugee Convention used a definition of refugee status based not on group characteristics but on individual experience. The Convention also placed a crucial time limit on this definition, which applied only to people displaced 'as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951', effectively limiting governments' obligations to respond and confining its context to the immediate post-war period.

The statute of UNHCR itself was less restrictive than the Convention. One of its refugee definitions omitted the clause limiting its responses to events before January 1951. Its Statute also contained provision for the High Commissioner's 'good offices' to be used at the behest of the General Assembly in situations of displacement outside of its mandate. This mechanism allowed UNHCR to assist Hungarian refugees fleeing Soviet military action against the popular uprising in Budapest in 1956. The Statute also provided a basis for assistance to Chinese refugees in Hong Kong in 1949–50, in a period during which 'the UNHCR barely touched the world outside Europe' (UNHCR, 2000: 6). The agency then expanded its reach into North Africa and beyond. The Algerian War of Independence was an important early example of UNHCR involvement in a major decolonisation crisis and the first time it had responded to an official request for assistance from a non-European government. The young Red Crescent Societies of Tunisia and Morocco, which had gained independence in 1954, were quickly overwhelmed by the thousands of Algerians fleeing the conflict, and the Tunisian government appealed directly to UNHCR for assistance (see Elie, 2007). Meanwhile, upheavals in the Congo and the Great Lakes region showed the need for refugee assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Remarkably, by the mid-1960s the majority of refugees being assisted by UNHCR were not covered by the UN Refugee Convention. To rectify this anomaly, the definition of refugee status was again revised, this time reflecting the global nature of the refugee problem. The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees removed the time limitation of 'events occurring before 1 January 1951'. Once drafted, it came into force remarkably quickly: instead of the traditional consultative process calling for the participation of all governments that had ratified the original treaty, only six states needed to accept the Protocol to bring it into force (UNHCR, 2000: 56). Moreover, the fact that states could adhere to the Protocol without ratifying the 1951 Convention opened it up to more signatories, including notably the United States.

In the years after the Protocol, UNHCR expanded its geographic reach, developing programmes of assistance for those outside its original 'refugee' mandate, including 'those displaced within the borders of their own countries, returnees (refugees or internally displaced people who have returned), asylum-seekers (whose formal status has not yet been assessed), stateless people, war-affected populations and others' (UNHCR, 2000: 3). In step with this expansion, due in large part to its own initiatives, 'UNHCR grew from a strictly nonoperational agency with no authority to appeal for funds to an institution with a long-range program emphasizing not only protection but, increasingly, material assistance' (Loescher, 2001b: 36). The massive number of refugee and IDP populations during the Cold War was a decisive factor in the consolidation of the agency's role in the international humanitarian system.

Alongside UNHCR, regional actors also engaged with refugee frameworks in this period. Notably, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) established a Refugee Convention in 1974.[24] Although the OAU Convention was drafted with the assistance of UNHCR and referred to the 1951 UN Convention as constituting 'the basic and universal instrument relating to the status of refugees', it expanded upon the UN definition of refugee status in one important respect. In addition to the previous definition, the OAU Refugee Convention declared that 'the term "refugee" shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality'. Its recognition that 'refugee problems are a source of friction among many Member States', and its assertion of 'a distinction between a refugee who seeks a peaceful and normal life and a person fleeing his

23 Assyrians are a distinct ethnic group whose origins lie in ancient Mesopotamia (now Iraq). Assyro-Chaldeans are ethnic Assyrian adherents of the Chaldean Catholic Church.

24 The OAU was established in Addis Ababa in 1963 by 32 signatory governments. It was disbanded in 2002 and replaced with the African Union (AU).

country for the sole purpose of fomenting subversion from outside', were also new in comparison to the UN documents and were arguably a departure from the more muted politics that characterised previous refugee statements.

4.3 Decolonisation, development and human right

While acute crises caused by conflict and natural hazards – what Mark Duffield would later describe as 'permanent emergency' – fuelled the humanitarian system's expansion during the Cold War, this period also saw the arrival of the 'development agenda'. Across a number of fronts, the notion took hold that technical assistance would assist the countries of the so-called 'third world' to catch up with the industrialised societies of Europe and North America. The leaders of Asia and Africa's newly independent nations recognised the need for rapid change; according to Kwame Nkrumah, the first leader of independent Ghana, 'What other territories have taken three hundred years or more to achieve, a once dependent territory must try to accomplish in a generation if it is to survive. Unless it is, as it were, "jet-propelled", it will lag behind and thus risk everything for which it has fought' (cited in Westad, 2005: 91). As Nkrumah's comment showed, post-colonial development was explicitly linked to the anti-colonial struggle.

Although the concept of development became a key part of the UN's international agenda from the late 1940s onwards, it has its roots in modernisation and assistance programmes and colonial development. After the United States took control of the Philippines from Spain in 1898, for instance, it undertook a series of programmes designed to remedy what was taken at the time to be Spanish neglect and Filipino ineptitude. The League of Nations and non-governmental actors were also active; for instance, in the 1920s, following a devastating famine in North China, the League and various NGOs were involved in development-style activities designed to encourage social and cultural change notably relating to agricultural practice (Ekbladh, 2010: 14–39). Technical assistance programmes, such as that of the UN's Technical Assistance Agency (1950–59), owed a debt to colonial management under the auspices of the League's mandate system as well as those of direct imperial rule (Webster, 2011: 250).

In imperial Britain, the Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald set up a Colonial Development Fund in 1929 to provide £1m a year in development spending. In 1940, the wartime coalition introduced the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, setting aside an annual £5m over ten years, later extended to £120m. Under the Overseas Resources Development Act, passed in February 1948, two new public organisations, the Colonial Development Corporation and the Overseas Food Corporation, were set up to oversee the government's development efforts. Together, these bodies enjoyed borrowing powers from the UK Treasury of over £150m. By the latter half of 1948, development plans worth nearly £200m had been approved, covering social services, communications, agriculture and industry.[25] Two years later, in 1950, the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic Development in South and South-East Asia was established to provide economic and technical aid to Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth states in Asia.

Other colonial governments were also engaging in ambitious investment projects. In 1946, France established a colonial development fund, known as FIDES, which by the second half of the 1950s had invested some $500m in France's colonial empire. In 1950, the Belgians unveiled a ten-year plan of public investment (Wilson, 1994: 149). Truly, as one contemporary observer put it, a 'crusade of colonial development' was under way (Hinden, 1949). Such efforts were, however, explicitly designed to contribute to metropolitan economies at a time of severe economic crisis; by 'colonial development', British Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones wrote in May 1947, 'I mean not only the promotion of services and utilities that are essential for the progress of the colonial peoples, but also the provision of enterprises which expand production and increase commodities required either in or outside the territory or both'.[26]

For the European powers, 'development' was intended as a means to improve domestic economic prospects, diminish the appeal of nationalist movements and bolster colonial control. For the United States, by contrast, the purpose of development assistance was geopolitical: a means of winning newly independent states to the West and fighting off Soviet and Chinese attempts to exert control over the newly independent states of the non-aligned world (see Latham, 2011; Gilman, 2003). In his inaugural address in January 1949, President Harry Truman proclaimed 'a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas'. Chastened by the communist victory in China later that year, and alarmed by energetic Soviet and Chinese wooing of non-aligned nations such as India and Burma, US planners under Truman and his successor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, developed extensive programmes of technical, economic and military assistance in an effort to influence political and economic change in the third world.

These programmes were maintained and expanded in the 1960s under Kennedy, who oversaw a rapid and significant increase in foreign aid. In its first year, Kennedy's administration increased economic assistance to developing countries by just under 25%; between 1960 and 1963, aid grew by a third. Meanwhile, parallel administrative changes overhauled and streamlined the institutional architecture of US overseas aid. The Peace Corps and Food for Peace programmes were set up in early 1961, and in November the various aid programmes

25 'Report of the Colonial Development Working Party', 11 October 1948, UK National Archives, PREM8/923.

26 'Development of Colonial Resources', draft memorandum by Creech Jones, May 1947, UK National Archives, CAB124/1083.

that had grown up in piecemeal fashion under Eisenhower were organised under a new 'super-agency', the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (Latham, 2000: 81). The 1960s, Kennedy told the UN in January 1961, would be the 'Decade of Development'.

From the 1950s until the late 1970s, as shown in Arturo Escobar's critical account, the issue of development dominated discussions of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Escobar, 1994). It permeated the work of international agencies. The shift from emergency relief to development is well illustrated by the experience of UNICEF. Originally created in 1946 to continue the work of UNRRA amongst war-affected children, as this type of need subsided in the early 1950s UNICEF decided to continue its work beyond Europe. This had not been the original aim, but it was made possible by the inclusion in UNICEF's founding resolution of a reference to its work 'for child health purposes generally' (UNICEF, 2006: 5). This clause had been proposed by Ludwik Rajchman, the organisation's founding father, to allow it to build a specialisation in disease control and prevention. However, when UNICEF's charter came up for review in 1950, developing nations lobbied the UN for the agency's work to be expanded: 'How, asked the delegate from Pakistan [Ahmed Shah Bokhari], could the task of international action for children be regarded as complete when so many millions of children in Asia, Africa and Latin America languished in sickness and hunger not because of war, but because of age-old poverty?' (Black, 1996: 8).

A series of studies has highlighted how a range of agencies including the World Bank, FAO, WHO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) pushed the development agenda in the post-war years. Created at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, the World Bank moved decisively into development only once its utility in its other aim, European reconstruction, was undermined by the Marshall Plan. This process was not straightforward or free from internal conflict, as it required the reorientation of the Bank's institutional model – to become less of a bank, in effect, and more of a development agency (see Alacevich, 2009). FAO too shifted its attention to the global problem of starvation, urging that 'the same sense of urgency' be shown as during the Second World War, because 'this is a war against starvation and we must have the weapons to fight it' (cited in Staples, 2006: 84). FAO's Freedom from Hunger Campaign, instigated in 1960, exemplified its development focus, combining analysis, action and people-to-people approaches to fundraising and bringing NGOs into closer cooperation with the organisation. Under the leadership of its creator, B. R. Sen, FAO Director-General between 1956 and 1967, the organisation was transformed and its budget increased by roughly 350% (Jachertz and Nützenadel, 2011: 114).[27]

27 Prior to taking up his position in FAO, Sen was a senior figure in the relief effort for the Bengal famine of 1943. His is one example of a common trajectory in which individuals moved between colonial administration and international governance (see a French example in Taithe and Lachenal, 2009).

Uptake of the development agenda by NGOs was not simply a product of government or UN activities, but was certainly related to it. Increased amounts of official funding fuelled NGOs' programmes to address poverty-related problems in the 'third world'. In one striking example, by the end of the 1960s Oxfam was spending less than 10% of its budget on disaster response: more than 50% was used on medical and welfare projects in areas unaffected by any emergency, and 40% went on agricultural development and technical training (Whitaker, 1983: 22). That this shift did not occur without tensions is clear from the organisation's 1964 conference, when Arthur Gaitskell, a veteran of development schemes in Sudan, argued that 'to respond to charity for those in blatant distress requires merely Yes or No … It is a sign-posted road. You follow it or you don't. To respond to an interest in world development is a very different matter. This is a jungle of uncertainties and confusing tracks' (cited in *ibid.*: 24). Although many would today contest Gaitskell's claims about the straightforwardness of relief work, this comment hints at the internal difficulties raised by the move into development as the debate crystallised tensions between radicals and conservatives within the organisation.

The shift into development work was also complicated, for many actors, by the relationship between development and rights in the Cold War context. Unlike earlier international documents that focused on minority rights, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights spoke of the human rights of the individual (Mazower, 2004). It addressed both civil and political rights (in Articles 1–21) and economic, social and cultural rights (Articles 22–28). The profile of human rights was maintained, indeed increased, throughout the peak of the Cold War period: 'interest in human rights was a distinctive feature of the intensely optimistic atmosphere that characterized much of the immediate post-colonial moment' (Burke, 2006: 951). However, the terrain of rights was influenced by the polarised geopolitical environment of East–West rivalry, epitomised by the splitting of the 1976 International Covenants on human rights into two documents – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Because of their commitment to development and desire to defend hard-won political power, newly independent nations tended to favour economic and social rights over civil and political rights. While, broadly speaking, Western European states and the United States tended towards civil and political rights, 'the West was willing to cede power to the smaller countries on human rights questions in exchange for solidarity in Cold War security matters elsewhere in the UN' (Burke, 2008: 278). This privileging of one set of rights over another, broadly understood as the promotion of collective development over individual freedoms, was evident in the final proclamation of the First UN International Conference on Human Rights, held in Tehran in 1968, which asserted that 'the full realisation of civil and political rights without the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is impossible', and that respect for

human rights was 'dependent upon sound and effective … economic and social development' (cited in *ibid.*: 288; see also Burke, 2010).

By the 1970s, this insistence upon economic and social rights had hardened into the promotion of a 'third generation' of rights (after the first two Eurocentric generations) based on solidarity and collectivism. They included the right to freedom from colonialism and the right to development. Adherence to civil and political rights was sometimes cast by the leaders of newly independent countries as an attempt to derail economic progress or force Western values upon cultures to which they were alien. Due to the assertion of cultural relativism and the ideological polarisation that affected rights debates, it was not until 1986 that the right to development, blending socio-economic and civil/political rights, became the subject of a UN declaration; it took until the Second UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 for the inalienable nature of this right to become the subject of official consensus (Sengupta, 2000). The influence of the 'rights-based approach' to humanitarianism has had a significant impact upon the way that principles are discussed and understood (Leader, 2000: 48), is not unrelated to this evolution of broader rights frameworks.

The transformation that the international aid architecture underwent as a result of the wars of liberation and the decolonisation process more generally was reflected across a range of areas. International and transnational actors had to adjust to speaking to – indeed, being influenced by – a new set of interlocutors. Normative frameworks were revised, not always without difficulty, and techniques and methodologies had to be reconsidered. Even so, some of the shortcomings of the international humanitarian system highlighted by decolonisation have remained a concern ever since. Despite recalibrations in the functioning of the United Nations, the international architecture of aid has been slow to adapt to the 'new' balance of North–South relations, and calls for reform have been ongoing for decades. Respect for the Geneva Conventions and other laws of war or human rights protections has never been consistent, and access during internal conflicts, for instance for the protection of detainees, remains difficult. Legal recognition of the category of 'wars of liberation' has not been echoed by the extension of IHL into other types of civil conflicts, with the result that there are few legal frameworks for the regulation of such conflicts and they remain dominated by the principle of respect for state sovereignty (Cassese, 2008: 126–27). The question of how human rights fit with humanitarianism, historically and in current practice, has not been fully resolved. Ongoing shortcomings in responses to protection challenges, seen starkly and with devastating consequences in the closing stages of the Sri Lankan civil war, speak to the complexity of this issue. The way that development efforts – which, as has been demonstrated, have their origins in a very specific historical context – relate to relief actions also remains problematic. Although an understanding of the historical context and in particular the period of rapid normative change during and after decolonisation may not provide the answers, it is an essential part of understanding dynamics currently at play.

Chapter 5
The emergence of a humanitarian knowledge community

It has been several decades since the formal international humanitarian system has been clearly identified as such. This study argues that, although its history goes much further back, the 1970s were a crucial period in the galvanisation of a humanitarian system and profession, with key institutions, analytical networks, government departments, forums for dialogue and eventually professional accreditation identifiable from this time onwards. Taken together, these various elements can be considered as marking the advent of a humanitarian knowledge community, a network of interconnected actors whose objectives and thinking, while never unanimous or uniform, began to coalesce into collective methods for improving humanitarian response.

This chapter traces the development of a humanitarian knowledge community at key moments across the twentieth century and especially, decisively, from the 1970s onwards. The idea of the 'knowledge community' is more accommodating than that of the 'epistemic community', the network of knowledge-based experts that Peter Haas has explored in relation to international policy (Haas, 1992).[28] The chapter does not seek to examine the question of the legitimacy or authenticity of expertise as such, but rather traces the channels by which knowledge has been shared and the institutional developments that have supported this aim. The first section discusses examples of knowledge and information in the 1920s and 1950s, each marked by the differing types of internationalism that followed the world wars. The second section analyses the rapid proliferation of new forums and bodies, notably aimed at greater coordination, research and institution-building, which occurred following the formative experiences of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The final section of the chapter uses the example of the post-disaster shelter and housing sector to highlight the gradual appearance of a humanitarian knowledge community by the 1980s.

5.1 Knowledge development and information sharing following the world wars

Although, as we shall see, the number of initiatives leading towards a humanitarian knowledge community in the 1970s is striking, they are conspicuous precisely for their number and not so much for their novelty. Indeed, there were significant precedents and precursors for the knowledge community that took shape in the final quarter of the twentieth century. They operated within and across different social groupings, some created for national purposes and some with an international audience in mind. They also reflected the thinking of the day, with shifting approaches to caring for others having an impact upon the type of information being shared, the way it was framed and the audience it addressed.

One of the most common methods used by humanitarian actors seeking to expand their networks of discussion was the issuing of a regular publication such as a newsletter or journal. Many of these began as members-only publications and gradually broadened their audiences. They often served the dual aims of advancing 'scientific' knowledge about humanitarian practice, while promoting a particular organisation's agenda and contributions or its fundraising activities. The ICRC's periodical, *The International Review of the Red Cross*, which began life in 1869 as the *Bulletin International des Sociétés de Secours aux Militaires Blessés*, has cultivated expertise in international law. The LRCS launched a journal in 1920, the *International Review of Public Health*, available in English, French, Spanish and Italian. Also in 1920, SCF began publishing *The World's Children*, a bi-monthly magazine that combined publicity materials with operational data such as nutrition analyses. Its attempt to raise awareness about child welfare issues won it the dubious honour of being described as the 'most melancholy magazine in existence' (*The Glasgow Bulletin*, cited in Baughan, 2012). These interwar publications reflected the internationalism of the period and the belief that rational progress could come through properly organised humanitarian action.

One of the most notable initiatives of the interwar period in light of the later, more articulated humanitarian knowledge community was the research and dissemination work of the International Relief Union (IRU). Founded in 1927 at the instigation of Giovanni Ciraolo, the President of the Italian Red Cross, the IRU is a significant example of a humanitarian forum that was international by design and internationalist in mentality. Ciraolo's original vision of the IRU (cited in Hutchinson, 2000: 24) was an organisation that would respond to

> *upheavals due to natural forces … the spread of dangerous epidemics; a disturbance of the social conditions … which unexpectedly cuts off the minimum supplies indispensable for normal existence; the consequences of war, in so far as they may have deprived a people of the resources or the power to meet, without assistance, the immediate needs of its collective life; [or] the threatened exhaustion of the race through the lack, in the hour of need, of the barest provision for the safety of its children.*

28 The full definition Haas (1992: 3) used was 'a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area'.

In reality, the 1927 Convention founding the IRU provided a far more restricted scope for its activities, which were to address 'misfortunes and disturbances due to *force majeure* (act of God), when they affect entire populations, when their consequences are such as to exceed the normal provisions of even a provident Government, and when they are of an exceptional character in the stricken countries' (cited in Hutchinson, 2001: 264). Although – with its operations severely underfunded and limited to situations of *force majeure* – the IRU had little practical impact, it made a significant contribution to knowledge-building and transfer.

The IRU's research activities, by focusing on natural disasters, reflected the organisation's constrained mandate. The aim to 'encourage the study of preventive measures against disasters' was part of its founding convention. Camille Gorgé (1938: 25), a member of the IRU Executive Committee, described the importance of this task in vivid terms:

> *If the river swollen by rains bursts its banks and spreads death and desolation, the Union will, if the disaster is sufficiently extensive, hasten to the relief of the victims with all the weight of its experiences and responsibilities. But it will not merely automatically repeat its action as often as the deadly whims of nature demand; it will, as in duty bound, endeavour to overcome once and for all the fury of the waters, if only by assisting the engineer with scientific studies or giving practical advice to the Governments concerned.*

Over the years, the IRU constructed an impressive research programme. One of its first pieces of work was a geographic map of the incidence of natural disasters across the world, with the aim of improving preparedness, refining strategies for relief and increasing protection (Gorgé, 1938: 41). It promoted this and other research through a journal entitled *Matériaux pour l'étude des calamités*, first published in 1924 under the joint aegis of the IRU, the Société de géographie de Genève, the ICRC and the LRCS. The editorial of the first issue appealed for 'international co-operation' in their project so that 'each calamity should be made the subject of world investigation dealing not only with past phenomena, but with those of the present day and, unfortunately, of the future' (Editorial Committee, 1924: 6).[29] The IRU also fostered national research committees, represented in a dozen countries by the late 1930s, all of which undertook research and released their own publications.[30] It held its First International Conference for Protection against Disasters in Paris in September 1937. The conference proceedings produced a volume of more than 500 pages, including a call for the creation of a permanent international scientific committee under IRU auspices, to coordinate the efforts of national study committees and convene events (*ibid.*: 42).

This structure within the IRU, involving national committees of experts, recognised the reality that countries accumulated knowledge based on their own experience of emergencies. The case of the US experience of natural disasters illustrates this point. The ARC's turn-of-the-century expertise in natural disaster response has already been mentioned. Following the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, which remains one of the largest urban disasters in US history (Strupp, 2006), various reports were compiled as an effort to share information about the response. The Californian state government issued its own report two years afterwards (Lawson et al., 1908). One of the most notable was the *San Francisco Relief Survey* (1913), a collective volume authored by both academics and humanitarian actors. It aimed to offer 'a book of ready reference for use on occasions of special emergency' (O'Connor et al., 1913: iii–iv). After heavy flooding of the Mississippi River in the 1920s and 1930s – for which an IRU offer of assistance was declined by the US government – researchers such as Gilbert F. White examined the effects of and responses to flooding (see White, 1942). One notable event was the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, which displaced a reported 700,000 people and had a significant impact on attitudes towards the role of the federal government in disaster response (Barry, 1998).

These research efforts took institutional form in the mid-twentieth century. In 1957, the American anthropological journal *Human Organization* published a special issue on 'Human Adaptation to Disaster'. The editors noted with approval the increase in disaster studies, even if 'the papers do not point to a "disasterology"' (Demerath and Wallace, 1957: 1); a bibliography included in the issue ran to ten pages (Rayner, 1957). In 1959 and 1961 the Disaster Research Group of the US National Academy of Sciences published inventories of research on the social scientific study of disasters (Disaster Research Group, 1961). The first university research centre devoted to the social scientific study of disasters dates from the same period: the Disaster Research Center (DRC) founded by Henry (E. L.) Quarantelli and Russell Dynes at Ohio State University in 1963. The picture that emerges from this rapid survey is of a rich country with a sophisticated research infrastructure whose experience of major natural disasters – including floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and droughts – contributed to its strong engagement with knowledge development and knowledge sharing processes.

Of course, knowledge sharing was not restricted to issues around natural disaster response (and the IRU itself had this restriction forced upon it). The discipline of refugee studies, often closely tied with situations of conflict, took form in the 1920s in light of the mass displacement of the First World War and its satellite conflicts. According to Claudena Skran and Carla N. Daughtry (2007: 17), most research works of

29 In June 1938, after 40 volumes, the journal was taken fully in hand by the IRU and became the *Revue pour l'étude des calamités*; in 1964 it was relaunched again as the *Revue de l'Union internationale de secours*.

30 They were Belgium, Bulgaria, Chile, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Switzerland. There had also been an Austrian committee, which fell victim to the Anschluss (Gorgé, 1938: 42).

this and the following decade focused on European and Middle Eastern refugees – that is, those being assisted by the League of Nations. During the Second World War, institutional developments (in government and the NGO sector) were often focused on humanitarian responses to conflict and the organised use of knowledge was one of the key precepts of their activities. Later, in the 1950s and 1960s, research centres relating to development studies were established. In France, the Institut international de recherche et de formation en vue du développement harmonisé (IRFED) was founded in 1958. In the UK, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) was founded in 1960 with an investment from the Ford Foundation; the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) was created in 1966. This period also saw the codification of humanitarian principles, with the ICRC's proclamation in Vienna of the seven Fundamental Principles (see Pictet, 1979). Many of the developments in knowledge-sharing with direct links to today's practice – mechanisms or institutions still in existence in one form or another – came about as a result of the experience of working in the late 1960s and early 1970s in what would now be termed complex emergencies.

5.2 Institutional innovation in operations, research and funding

The combined effect of traumatic experiences in Biafra, Bangladesh and the 1970 Peruvian earthquake (where international agencies and donors 'invaded' Peru and overwhelmed the Peruvian government) influenced a series of institutional innovations for emergency response (Kent, 1987). In Frederick Cuny's summary, 'the inadequacy of the response to meet the widespread needs in Bangladesh and the failure of voluntary agencies to perform well in many of the tasks asked of them, especially in nonmedical fields, led many relief workers to call for a reappraisal of the relief system' (Cuny: 1983: 20). Changes occurred on a variety of fronts, though they often shared the theme of improving coordination. Researchers analysed past experiences; governments and intergovernmental agencies, including UN bodies, created new institutions and departments for humanitarian response; NGOs established new networks to improve their own effectiveness.

The momentum generated by these crises saw the emergence of a suite of new disaster research groups. In 1971, a group of postgraduates in London University, who had worked in East Pakistan, Ethiopia and elsewhere, established the London Technical Group (LTG) to encourage the growth of disaster studies (Rivers, 1978). In a separate initiative, though with the LTG's advice, Michel Lechat established the Centre for the Research and Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) within the School of Public Health at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium in 1972. In 1976 the University of Colorado established the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center (now the Natural Hazards Center), and in 1978 Ian Davis and colleagues established a Disasters and Settlements Unit within the Department of Architecture at Oxford Polytechnic (now the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP) within Oxford Brookes University). In the same year, the LTG established the International Disaster Institute (IDI), which in 1991 was absorbed into ODI, leading to the formation of the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) in 1997. In 1982 the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) was established by Barbara Harrell-Bond at the University of Oxford.

What is remarkable about these centres, apart from the concentrated period of their creation, is the breadth of their disciplinary range and the variety of their professional interests, including anthropology, medicine, public health, nutrition, engineering, geology, architecture and political science. Most of these centres favoured multidisciplinary approaches, reflecting the multifaceted and interconnected nature of humanitarian action. They also created forums for exchanging information across different groups of researchers, notably through new journals devoted to humanitarian response. LTG launched the first journal devoted to relief practice – *Disasters: The International Journal of Disaster Studies and Practice* – in 1977, with John Seaman as its first editor. In 1983 the International Sociological Association launched *The International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, edited by Quarantelli.

Many of the major bilateral donor organisations in Europe and North America established dedicated emergency units during the 1970s (see Kent, 1987: 52–53). Again, the United States was something of a forerunner, having established the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in 1964. Switzerland's Directorate for Cooperation Assistance and Humanitarian Aid was established within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 1972. The UK's Overseas Development Administration established a Disaster Unit in 1974. In 1975 the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) established a Section for Emergency Relief Assistance. In the same year the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs established an Emergency and Humanitarian Aid Section. In 1978 the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) established an International Humanitarian Assistance Division and the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs established Section 301. Despite the prevalence of natural disasters in Australia, centralised coordination mechanisms were slower to develop there, with a 1984 study noting that 'data collection and vulnerability analysis are just commencing and the wider implications of economic loss and recurring threats to life have not yet been turned into successful mitigation measures at the national level' (Leivesley, 1984: 88).

A similar process of institution-building was underway within the UN agencies. In 1971 UNICEF established the Office of the Emergency Operations Coordinator. WHO established an Emergency Relief Operations Office in 1974. The following year, FAO created the Office for Special Relief Operations

(as a successor to the Office for Sahelian Operations) and WFP established an Emergency Unit. UNHCR established its Emergency Office in 1980. Concurrently, at a global, centralised level, plans had been underway for the creation of a new UN entity to serve as a focal point for disaster relief. In December 1971 the General Assembly approved the establishment of the Office of the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator.

UNDRO faced several obstacles from the outset. First, its mandate was poorly defined: while it had clear responsibility for relief coordination after 'natural' disasters, the meaning of several references to 'other disaster situations' was not clear and became particularly sensitive in cases of what would later be identified as complex emergencies (Macalister-Smith, 1980: 378). Second, it faced constant resourcing difficulties. Even with additions to the initial figures, UNDRO's annual allocation for assistance was only $200,000, with $20,000 the maximum that could be spent on any single disaster (Kent, 1987: 54). Third, although UNDRO established partnerships with other UN agencies, it faced difficulties in gaining acceptance from some UN agencies and member states. UNHCR, in an expansionist phase, put up some of the fiercest resistance (Loescher, 2001: 152). No fewer than 11 resolutions affirming the need to reinforce coordination were passed by 1990, suggesting that, despite official agreement on the issue, member states were reluctant to act on their commitments (Ryfman, 2008: 67). UNDRO's difficulties recalled those of the IRU in the 1930s – 'the instrument of co-operation has been forged and the machinery for mutual assistance is there; all that is lacking is the will to use it' (Gorgé, 1938: 9). After 20 years UNDRO was replaced by DHA as part of Resolution 46/182, adopted by the General Assembly in December 1991.

After East Pakistan there was also more explicit recognition amongst NGOs of the need to work together more effectively. One initiative was the creation in 1972 of the League of Red Cross Societies-Voluntary Agencies Steering Committee in Geneva (commonly referred to as the LICROSS/Volag Steering Committee and now known as the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)). This brought together the LRCS, CRS, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Oxfam and the Church World Service. Another innovation in this period was the creation of a Unit for Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination within the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), in 1977.[31] The unit had various aims, including the provision of basic relief supplies and technical assistance during aid efforts, disaster preparedness planning, training for field staff and 'problem-solving research' (Inside the Agencies, 1977a: 174).

The cumulative effect of these developments was felt in the 1980s. With governments investing in relief as well as development, NGOs and international agencies seeking coordination and dedicated researchers sharing findings, a knowledge community began to take shape. A series of major publications in the 1980s both reflected and reinforced this trend, including Amartya Sen's *Poverty and Famines* (1981), Frederick Cuny's *Disasters and Development* (1983), Peter Macalister-Smith's *International Humanitarian Assistance: Disaster Relief Actions in International Law and Organization* (1985), Barbara Harrell-Bond's *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (1986), Bernard Kouchner's *Charity Business* (1986), Jean-Christophe Rufin's *Le piège, quand l'aide humanitaire remplace la guerre* (1986) and Randolph Kent's *Anatomy of Disaster Relief: The International Network in Action* (1987). Many of these works remain influential today.

5.3 Knowledge formation: the example of the post-disaster shelter and housing sector

Although the need for shelter is regarded as a basic and fundamental condition for dignity as well as survival, the development of a shared body of knowledge and practice for shelter needs in situations of crisis was slow in coming. Despite countless examples of settlement crises during the twentieth century alone, on the cusp of the 1980s experts remained concerned that 'our knowledge of post-disaster housing is still in its infancy' (Davis, 1978: 106).

Early examples of major disasters point to the existence of shelter and housing operations well before the emergence of a knowledge community around these practices. An illustrative example is the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, which destroyed 250,000 homes, the response to which included the use of tents, barracks and cottages as temporary housing (Ashmore, 2011: 109). A major investigation by researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, published its findings in the two-volume *Report of the State Earthquake Investigation Commission* in the years after the earthquake (Lawson et al., 1908/1910). Their research led to a number of discoveries that have underpinned seismology since that time (Zoback, 2006). Another highly influential event in terms of the understanding of seismology and disaster response thinking was the 1908 earthquake in Messina, Italy, which stimulated numerous studies by Italian scholars and others and prompted plans for the IRU (see Pino et al., 2009).

The case of Japan indicates the existence of communities of disaster and specifically shelter-related expertise beyond these Western examples. The Committee for Investigating the Prevention of Earthquake Disasters, generally known as the Earthquake Investigation Committee, was appointed in 1892; from 1897, the committee published selected research in foreign languages in order to share its findings on topics such as empirical, geological and meteorological investigations and the testing of the earthquake resistance of different building materials and techniques. Japanese seismologists and the Japanese Red Cross Society were sent to San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. In 1923, the Great Kanto earthquake struck Tokyo and Yokohama, followed by major fires; nearly 142,000 people died and some 700,000 homes were destroyed

31 PAHO is also the American regional office of WHO.

(James, 2011; see also Schencking, 2008). The government issued an English translation of its own comprehensive report under the title *The Great Earthquake of 1923 in Japan* detailing the damage and responses (Imperial Japanese Government, 1926). However, the fact that this report was overlooked by several crucial later studies suggests that truly global knowledge sharing has at times been very partial.

It was not until the 1950s that more effective initiatives emerged to share learning across different stakeholders in the shelter and housing sector. The first World Conference on Earthquake Engineering was held in Berkeley, California, in 1956 – marking the fiftieth anniversary of the San Francisco earthquake. The conference had a global focus, with presentations on experiences and practices in Japan, Germany, Colombia, Chile, New Zealand, Turkey, Pakistan, Greece, Mexico, Italy and the United States.[32] The Second World Conference on Earthquake Engineering, held in Japan in 1960, included presentations from Soviet scientists on earthquake-resistant buildings in the Soviet Union, at a time when information-sharing between East and West was extremely rare.

As in the broader field of humanitarian response and coordination, attention on housing and shelter began to grow at the beginning of the 1970s.[33] In addition to the experience of mass displacement during the East Pakistan crisis, the shelter and housing sector was also strongly influenced by the experience of the Gediz earthquake in Turkey in 1970, which killed over 1,000 people (see Mitchell, 1976). Also important was the work done by Oxfam and World Neighbours in Guatemala following an earthquake there in 1976 (see Oxfam America, 1977). Contemporary studies – and experts since – acknowledge the Guatemala project as 'an innovation in post-disaster policies' because it 'did not attempt to build large quantities of houses; rather to teach the survivors ways of building their own safe houses, whilst still using traditional skills and materials' (Davis, 1978: 107; Ashmore, Leon and D'Urzo, 2010: 90). It was extensively evaluated and became extremely influential. Similarly oriented publications from outside the relief sector, such as the edited volume *Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process* (Turner and Fichter, 1972), also shaped the thinking of humanitarian practitioners.

These experiences contributed to institutional developments and practice-oriented knowledge-sharing efforts throughout the 1970s. In 1971, Cuny, a Texan construction engineer, established the Intertect Relief and Construction Corporation. Within the space of only a few years, Intertect's operational support and practical guides had had a significant impact on the sector (Davis, 1978: 106; see Cuny, 1971; Cuny, 1975). An advisory and training role was also developed by the Appropriate Re-construction Training and Information Centre (ARTIC), established by Oxfam, Intertect and the Salvation Army after the 1977 Andhra Pradesh cyclone and storm surge (Winchester, 1979). NGOs' technical guides, such as the first edition of Oxfam's guide to using plastic sheeting, issued in 1973, also began to circulate. Sharing of knowledge was encouraged through conferences such as a meeting on 'Disasters and Settlements – Towards an Understanding of the Key Issues', convened by Oxford Polytechnic in 1978. However, much like today, these events faced criticism for their exclusivity: 'why hold a conference devoted to the needs of the poor within the secure environment of western affluence; why not in Dacca or Manila?' (conference participants, cited in Davis, 1978: 114).

One prominent feature of 1970s shelter literature, not unconnected with this appeal, is its emphasis on beneficiary participation. Studies that adopted a long-term perspective were able to demonstrate that 'present-day problems might have been averted, or moderated, if [social and cultural] values had been considered before providing housing' (Hirschon and Thakurdesai, 1978: 249). This insight was derived from the case of refugees from Asia Minor who had settled in Greece in 1922: by 1978, roughly 86,000 people were living in 'temporary' accommodation provided decades before. Other studies of more recent housing solutions also highlighted the importance of understanding beneficiary priorities when addressing shelter needs (Mitchell, 1976: 313; see also Mackay, 1978: 152).

The language used by shelter experts in the late 1970s is strikingly reminiscent of more recent calls for beneficiary accountability. Ian Davis was a strong voice in this debate, declaring that 'methods will have to be established to tie expatriate interventions to be accountable to survivors. Currently they are accountable to the agency head office, or their donor public' (Davis, 1978: 111). Davis underlined the paramount importance of not imposing external values, whether through ignorance of local culture or a sense of superiority to it, and asserted that 'we need to devise ways where intervenors can become accountable to the survivors of disasters' (*ibid.*: 114). His point was reiterated and further explored by Everett Ressler (1978: 129) in a detailed article proposing that 'accountability to victims should be both an operational method and a programme philosophy'. Ressler criticised the common working methods of international humanitarian responders:

> *Victims have no voice in agency affairs and no vehicle for participating or expressing their views before their benefactors… Stereotypes and misconceptions continue to be major factors in post-disaster programming. The basis for most of these stereotypes and misconceptions in disasters can be found in the portrayal of victims as*

32 The full proceedings are available online, at http://www.iitk.ac.in/nicee/wcee/first_conf_California.

33 On the question of the causes of needs relating to shelter and housing, a review of Oxfam's shelter work during the 1970s noted that 'We are all aware of the needs of hundreds of millions of human beings, who live in appalling slums, where life is indeed a daily disaster situation *for which so little is being done* … We are hard pressed to find, with few exceptions, programmes working at slum improvement or the shelter problems of refugees' (Howard and Mister, 1979: 139). Italics in original.

> *'helpless' … Agencies have defined the accountability in the past viewing themselves as being primarily accountable to their source of funding, rather than to the beneficiaries* (*ibid.*: 129–30).

Ressler argued that accountability to beneficiaries required an emphasis on process rather than on predetermined final outcomes, and a re-examination of how priorities for reconstruction and programmes were determined.

The role played by shelter experts in preparing the UNDRO guidelines for shelter after disaster, published in 1982, allowed the principle of beneficiary accountability to be directly transported into UN agency standards. The very first principle asserted by the guidelines was that 'the primary resource in the provision of post-disaster shelter is the grass-roots motivation of survivors, their friends and families. Assisting groups can help, but they must avoid duplicating anything best undertaken by survivors themselves' (UNDRO, 1982: 3). The thirteenth principle was even more explicit: 'since the most effective relief and reconstruction policies result from the participation of survivors in determining and planning their own needs, the successful performance of assisting groups is dependent on their accountability to the recipients of their aid' (*ibid.*: 4). Although there are examples of beneficiary accountability being promoted by humanitarian workers in other sectors (Wisner, O'Keefe and Westgate, 1977; Taylor, 1979), the shelter sector appears to have been particularly precocious in this respect.

In 1990, the declaration of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction encouraged the expansion of the post-disaster shelter and housing sector. An increasing number of university centres, qualifications and publications became available, though the most critical breakthroughs in profile for the sector did not come until the following decade. One landmark was the creation of the Shelter Project in Cambridge in 2000 (now the Shelter Centre, based in Geneva). Events continued to play a catalytic role in focusing attention on shelter needs, particularly the Gujarat earthquake in 2001 and the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, which inspired the emphasis on 'building back better' also seen in responses to the Haiti earthquake of 2010.[34]

More broadly, beyond the shelter sector, the proliferation of aid agencies and increased donor attention in the 1990s encouraged competition and facilitated greater education and training. This was what Barnett describes as the emergence of a humanitarian 'field'. Although he somewhat overlooks the importance of the knowledge-sharing, institutional and identity-building developments in earlier phases, Barnett shows that, in the 1990s, humanitarian organisations were 'becoming bureaucratized, developing spheres of competence, and rules to standardize responses and to drive means-ends calculations. Professionalism followed, with demands for actors who had specific knowledge, vocational qualifications that derived from specialized training, and the ability to follow fixed doctrine' (Barnett, 2005: 729).

The gradual coalescing of a knowledge community in reaction to increased experience was an important phase in the history of the international system. Paradoxically, recognition of this opens up the possibility of considering research and knowledge developments in earlier periods: it becomes apparent that, prior to the Cold War, the issue was not so much a lack of experience and reflection as the dispersal of relevant analyses across different disciplines, schools or approaches. It has too often been assumed, in the absence of international coordination measures to gather these groups into one larger and more visible conversation, that they simply did not exist. The same assumption has often been made according to geographical or linguistic divisions – difficulties in accessing or understanding other cultures have inhibited a truly global sharing of knowledge on a large scale, although individual experts have always been able to bridge such divides. Some of the key figures in the shelter sector, for example, had strong links with researchers in countries such as Turkey, India and Iran, where extensive experience with earthquakes had fostered the development of expertise.

Despite the increased sharing of experience since the 1970s, this process has had limitations. On the one hand, it is not clear that the greater exchange of information has necessarily led to improved practice on the ground. The experience of UNDRO is a case in point. Its failings included the 'inability to actually direct other parts of the UN system in times of crisis', the reluctance of other agencies to relinquish their perceived independence and the 'problem of weak leadership'(Tsui and Myint-U, 2004: 3), issues that plagued DHA and later coordination efforts as well. Thus, while UNDRO's weaknesses harked back to those of the IRU in the 1930s, they continue to pose a challenge for the humanitarian system despite the increase in learning and professionalisation.

On the other hand, practitioner confidence in the growing body of scientific knowledge has sometimes had the effect of reinforcing patterns of power. This was neatly captured by a veteran of World Vision, who remembered that 'we used to read the new development manuals at night and then teach the villagers what we learned the next day' (cited in Barnett, 2011: 130). In this way, Western workers' training and education contributed to their sense that they were justified in intervening in the 'best interests' of those affected by conflict or disasters, and that 'science was on their side'. Making the humanitarian community more open to 'outsider' knowledge has been and remains a very challenging task.

34 Despite the developments outlined above, Ian Davis (Davis, 2011: 195) characterised the 29-year period from 1972 until the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 as being one of 'a low level of interest in shelter/reconstruction by the UN and most [of the] NGO sector'.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

This Working Paper has sought to provide an introduction to the emergence of the international humanitarian system. It has indicated how, as the formal system took shape from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the international dynamics surrounding humanitarian engagement changed. So too did the beneficiaries of aid efforts and the ways in which they were understood by other actors. Missionaries and other religiously motivated actors often viewed the needs of their beneficiaries through the lens of charitable duty or the expansion of the faith, though active evangelisation did not necessarily accompany their efforts. Forms of solidarity other than religious belief have also motivated humanitarian action, as seen for instance in the politically oriented work of International Red Aid in the interwar period and other left-leaning organisations since, such as Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). For organisations of this type, relief action has often been accompanied by the promotion of 'justice' for its beneficiaries. In contrast, organisations in the Red Cross/Red Crescent model have promoted impartiality as one of the cornerstones of humanitarianism.

While the emphasis on impartiality has facilitated ICRC engagement in conflict since its founding in the mid-nineteenth century, the range of beneficiaries that the organisation has attempted to reach has gradually expanded from sick and wounded soldiers to include prisoners of war as well as civilians of countries under occupation or otherwise caught up in conflict. The need to respond to natural disasters, conflict and issues around 'underdevelopment' provided the rationale for the expansion of international humanitarian efforts into the global South during and following decolonisation, when beneficiaries outside of Europe stepped into the spotlight in their own right, rather than as colonial subjects. Although their practices were often connected, the actions of states or civil society groups without a 'jurisdiction' in the newly independent nations should be distinguished from the role of formally international bodies or, in the previous era, imperial and colonial powers. This expansion presented a challenge to practices developed in Europe for European victims of conflict, and not necessarily suited to the new operating environments faced by NGOs and international agencies across the globe. The process of learning and adjustment has remained a major preoccupation for a system that is inherently self-critical, but which has also struggled to implement the lessons gleaned from previous experience.

Yet even a brief glance at the history of humanitarian action indicates that many of the difficulties that today's actors face have also confronted system actors in the past. This is true, for instance, of humanitarianism's ambiguous relationship with the media, which has been a constant since nineteenth-century technologies such as the telegraph and the steam engine shortened the distance between suffering abroad and public interest at home. In fact, the 'CNN effect' has been at work for many years, as the complaints of the IRU preparatory commission made clear in 1925:

> *public interest in disasters varies in different cases … due not so much to lack of sympathy as to lack of publicity. Some disasters seem more dramatic, more graphic, more photogenic. The Press is full of them, and the public is moved. Others, however, are regarded as of inferior journalistic value; the Press slurs them over, and the public pays them no attention* (IRU preparatory commission, cited in Hutchinson, 2001: 269).

The commission's proposal was to create a fund to enable a response even in the absence of publicity – a mechanism very much akin to the CERF, established nearly 70 years later. The lesson that history repeats itself, if not in exact replica at least in the recurrence of certain features, also applies to problems such as the political instrumentalisation of aid, impediments to coordination and leadership and issues around the appropriateness of aid and the dignity of its recipients.

But what can be done with this lesson once heeded? On one level, a greater awareness of past challenges – not only their existence, but also the factors that contributed to them – will help to test and refine thinking on present challenges. The direct application of previous experience is one very concrete reason why knowledge of the past should be an essential tool for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers. Yet, in another, perhaps paradoxical way, an awareness of the emergence and evolution of the formal humanitarian system may also help its stakeholders see beyond this system. By recognising it as the product of specific contexts and forces rather than an immutable and universal actor, historical analysis opens up the possibility of new ways of thinking about the future of humanitarian action.

One seeming weakness of historical analysis for practice and policymaking purposes is that it does not offer clear recommendations. And yet this is one of its great strengths. The study of history is about understanding, not about prediction. Historical study can, of course, be inaccurate or inconclusive and in this sense is as imperfect a tool as any other kind of analysis. In fact, the subjective nature of historical narrative – the fact that most accounts have difficulty fully reflecting the complexity of their subject, or may choose not to do so – means that it must be approached carefully. In this more assistance is needed from historians, whose work has greatly increased understanding of relief and

development aid, but which as a body of knowledge remains partial, uneven, poorly articulated as a discipline in its own right and too often confined to discussions between experts. While the pace of change is rapid in all of these respects, much remains to be done to bring a critical analysis to the history of humanitarian action in a way that is accessible and relevant to contemporary practice.

In order to do so, both historians and current humanitarian actors must tackle the key issues that have defined practice and thinking over time, and which shape responses today: issues such as the tension between professionalism and voluntarism; the role of faith, not only for 'faith-based actors' but in a range of communities implicated in humanitarian action; the relationship between state and non-state actors; the historical reality and evolution of debates around principles; or the effect and legacy of historical and cultural forces such as nationalism, colonialism, globalisation, extremism, reformism or progressivism for humanitarian operations. We must learn to think beyond our habitual concerns and link the past to the present in a way that improves outcomes for populations affected by natural disasters and conflicts and, more broadly, the way that the system interacts with affected populations.

As a foundational document and a survey of current understanding, it is not the aim of this Working Paper to provide a conclusive or definitive account. Instead, it offers reflection on some important areas of the history of the formal humanitarian system and an open invitation to interested parties – historians, policymakers and practitioners alike – to rethink this system history in ways that will help us move beyond it in the years to come. For this to be possible much more must be done to break out from the Western confines of the current narrative. While the emphasis on Western or Northern experiences reflects the reality of the system's formation and evolution, it also overlooks the richness and depth of humanitarian cultures, contributions and practices beyond Europe and North America. A historical account that incorporates perspectives from across the world into a global narrative, where the formal system is only one piece, not the beginning and end, is the aim of HPG's 'Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action' project.

This kind of history, despite its vast scale, must avoid simplifications and generalisations wherever possible. It is not sufficient, as the example of knowledge-sharing efforts show, to speak of 'international' and 'national' as distinct and discrete categories. Similarly, assumed divisions between 'religious' (or 'faith-based') and 'secular' actors must be examined and the relationship between 'Northern' and 'Southern' should not be considered one of opposition. It is essential to remember that humanitarian action in different regions across the globe did not evolve in isolation, but rather was influenced by developments in other regions and in turn shaped responses in other parts of the world. By identifying shared concerns as well as points of difference, it is hoped that this history across continents will create a firmer platform for the analysis and understanding of humanitarian action in the twenty-first century.

Annex
Selected chronology

	Events and geopolitical developments	Developments of the humanitarian system
1900–1914	• Colonial empire • Drought/famine in India (1899–1902) • Epidemics in India (1900) China (1909) and Uganda (1900–25) • Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) • San Francisco earthquake (1906) • Messina earthquake (1908) • Floods in China (1911)	• Development of National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies • Second Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea (1906) • First International Congress of Lifesaving and First Aid in the Event of Accidents (Frankfurt) (1908) • Albert Schweitzer's hospital at Lambaréné founded (1913)
1914–1918	• First World War (1914–18) • Armenian Genocide (1915–18) • Russian Civil War (1917–22) • Epidemics in India and China (1918) • Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (1918) • Finnish Civil War (1918)	• CRB established (1914) • ICRC correspondence service, tracing service, visits to POWs, repatriation work; ICRC adopts role of watchdog for observance of the Geneva Conventions and laws of war • CRB food aid programmes in Europe
1919–1930	• Global influenza pandemic (1918–20) • Versailles Peace Treaty (1919) • League of Nations founded (1919) • Epidemic in India (1920) • Famine in the Soviet Union (1921–22) • Great Kanto earthquake in Japan (1923) • Chinese Civil War (1927–50) • Famine in China (1928–30) • Great Depression (1929–45)	• LRCS formed (1919) • CRB superseded by ARA (1919) • SCF established (1919) • International Save the Children Union formed in Geneva (1920) • League's HCR established (1920) • 'Nansen passports' used for 'stateless' people • Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924) • IRU established (1927) • Third Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1929)
1930–1939	• German refugee crisis (1930s) • Flooding of the Yellow River in China (1931, 1938) • Famine in Ukraine (1932–33) • Italo-Ethiopian war (1935) • Spanish Civil War (1936–39) • Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45)	• Nansen International Office for Refugees created by League of Nations (1930) • Far-reaching health programmes in colonial territories (nutrition, disease, etc) (1930s) • International Conference of the Red Cross unable to achieve consensus on POC (1930s) • Relief mobilisation during Spanish Civil War (1936–39) • Nanking Safety Zone established (1937) • Creation of Norwegian People's Aid (1939)

Selected chronology (*continued*)

	Events and geopolitical developments	Developments of the humanitarian system
1939–1945	• Second World War (1939–45) • Massive destruction, displacement and economic disruption affecting most areas of the world but especially Europe, Asia and Pacific • British Colonial Development and Welfare Act (1940) • British naval blockade of continental Europe • Famine in Greece (1941–44) • Great Bengal Famine (1943) • Sétif Massacre in Algeria (1945) • United Nations established (1945)	• Use of 'Bengal famine mixture' in India • Developments in Europe for temporary shelter and reconstruction of damaged urban areas • Creation of Oxfam (the Oxford Famine Relief Committee) (1942) • COBSRA founded (1942) • UNRRA established by Allied nations (1943) • CARE packages (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere) (1945) • Adoption of UN Charter (1945)
1946–1959	• Cold War • Decolonisation process, largely in Asia: Indonesia (1945), the Philippines (1946), India and Pakistan (1947), Burma and Sri Lanka (1948), Egypt and Cambodia (1953), Vietnam and Laos (1954) • Indochinese War (1945–54) • Final meeting of League of Nations (1946) • Partition of India (1947) • Arab–Israeli conflict (1947–) • Berlin blockade and Allied airlift (1948–49) • Victory of communists in Chinese Civil War (1949) • Korean War (1950–53) • Algerian War (1954–62) • Vietnam War (1955–75) • Suez Crisis (1956) • Cuban Revolution (1959)	• Closure of of UNRRA (1947) • Creation of UN agencies: FAO, UNICEF, WHO and IRO, later to become UNHCR (1946–51) • UNKRA created (1950–58) • UNRWA established (1948) • Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by UN General Assembly (1948) • Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) • Fourth Geneva Conventions relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949) • Refugee Convention (1951) • PL 480 'Food for Peace' introduced by US government (1954)
1960–1969	• First UN Development Decade • Decolonisation continues, particularly in Africa: Madagascar, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Nigeria (1960), Rwanda and Algeria (1962) • Construction of Berlin Wall (1961) • Start of US involvement in Vietnam (1965) • Nigerian Civil War (1967–70) • Six Day Arab–Israeli war (1967) • Nigeria/Biafra Civil War (1967–70) • Famine and drought in the Sahel (1970s)	• Freedom from Hunger Campaign launched by FAO (1960) • US Peace Corps and Food for Peace programmes founded (1961) • 'World Food Programme' within FAO approved by UN General Assembly (1961) • USAID established (1961) • WFP established (1963) • UNDP founded (1965) • ICRC and NGO airlift in Biafra (1967–70) • First UN International Conference on Human Rights (1968)

Selected chronology (*continued*)

	Events and geopolitical developments	Developments of the humanitarian system
1970–1979	• Second UN Development Decade • Chimbote Earthquake in Peru (1970) • Gediz earthquake in Turkey (1970) • East Bengal Cyclone/Storm Surge (1970) • East Pakistan/Bangladesh crisis (1970–71) • Sahel drought and famine (1970s); Ethiopia (1973) • Floods and famine in Bangladesh (1974) • US withdrawal from Vietnam (1973) and fall of Saigon (1975) • Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia (1975–79) • Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979) • Iranian Revolution (1979)	• UNDRO established (1971) • Office of the Emergency Operations Coordinator created within UNICEF (1971) • MSF created (1971) • Creation of LICRA (1972) • Emergency Relief Operations Office launched within WHO (1974) • ICCPR and ICESCR entered into force (1976) • Emergency unit created within PAHO (1977) • Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions adopted, following international diplomatic conferences (1977)
1980–1989	• Iran–Iraq War (1980–88) • President Reagan's 'Star Wars' plan (1983) • African Food Crisis: famines in Mozambique (1984), Ethiopia (1984–85) and Sudan (1980s) • Armenian earthquake (1988) • Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan (1989) • Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989)	• Response to Cambodian famine and refugees (1980s) • Response to Afghan refugees and limited cross-border response within Afghanistan (1980s) • Amartya Sen's 'entitlement theory' (1981) • BandAid/Live Aid fundraising phenomena (1984) • MSF ejected from Ethiopia (1985) • Launch of OLS (1989) • Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted (1989) • OHCHR established (1989)
1990–2001	• First Gulf War (1990–91) • Break-up of the Soviet Union and independence for many former Soviet states (1991) • Break-up of Yugoslavia and associated conflicts (1991–95) • US-led intervention in Somalia (1993–94) • End of apartheid in South Africa (1994) • Great Lakes crisis (1994-96): Rwanda genocide (1994), first Congo War (1996) • Hurricane Mitch in Central America (1998) • Bahr-el-Ghazal Famine in South Sudan (1998) • The Rome Statute of the ICC adopted (1998) • NATO intervention in Kosovo (1999) • September 11 attacks in New York and Washington DC(2001) • US and NATO intervention in Afghanistan (2001) • Gujarat earthquake in India (2001)	• UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990) • UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on coordination of humanitarian assistance; creation of ERC and IASC (1991) • In Somalia, ICRC employs armed escorts to protect its convoys and vehicles for the first time in its history (1991) • International tribunals established for former Yugoslavia (1993) and Rwanda (1994) • Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (1994) • Accountability initiatives: ALNAP, HAP, People in Aid • The Sphere Project results in a draft Handbook of Minimum Standards and a Humanitarian Charter (1998) • ICISS established (2001)

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