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***Humanitarian action for beginners:  
What you always wanted to know about  
humanitarian action but never dared to ask***

**XII. Humanitärer Kongress**

**Theorie und Praxis der humanitären Hilfe**

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# An introduction to the policy and practice of humanitarian aid

## Contents:

### 1. What is humanitarian aid?

Basic terms, definitions, principles

### 2. The international humanitarian system

UN, NGOs, Red Cross movement, donors

# 1. What is humanitarian aid?

## Milestones of humanitarian movement

- Tradition of world religions (compassion, charity, to help people in need)
- Geneva Convention 1863 and Foundation of the Red Cross Movement
- Foundation of the UN 1945 (with increasing involvement of UN in Peacekeeping)
- 1980s: Boom of NGOs
- 1990s: End of the Cold War and worldwide increase of humanitarian aid

# Definitions

## Definition of humanitarian aid:

- Main task is to rescue the victims of natural disasters, emergencies and armed conflicts and to ensure their survival
- It is performed independently of the victims' ethnic, religious and political affiliations
- Measures are humanitarian if they meet the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.
- Humanitarian aid is different from development aid

# Definitions

## **International Humanitarian Law:**

A set of rules which seek to limit the effects of an armed conflict and to protect persons who are no longer participating in the hostilities

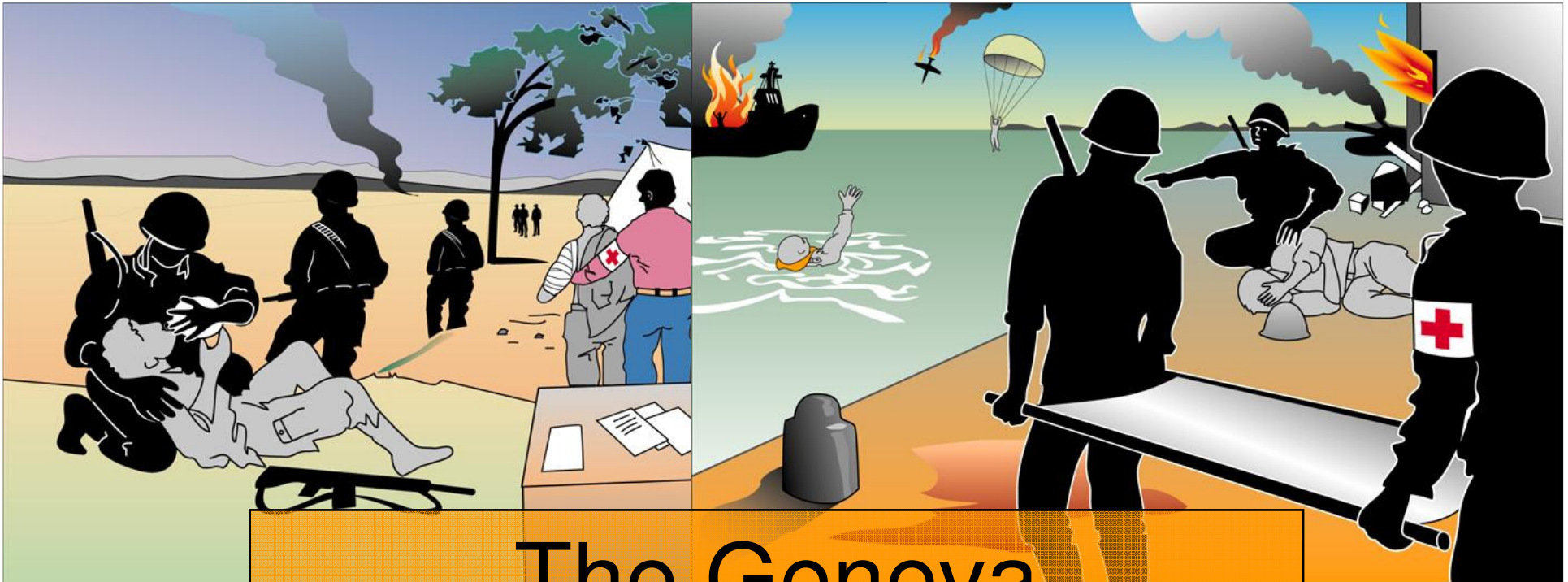
- **Geneva Conventions (1949):**

Ratified by 194 states, and additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005

- **Humanitarian Principles:**

Independence, neutrality, impartiality of humanitarian aid

- **Code of Conduct of Red Cross and NGOs (1994)**



# The Geneva Conventions



# Humanitarian principles

## Independence, impartiality and neutrality:

**Independence** means that aid exclusively serves the purpose of ensuring the survival of victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts and that aid is given exclusively according to their needs;

**Impartiality** means that all victims of all sides of the conflict will be helped and that aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint;

**Neutrality** means that the humanitarian activities of the aid organisations are independent of politics and governments.

# The **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes

**1: The Humanitarian imperative comes first**

**2: Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone**

**3: Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint**

**4: We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy**

**5: We shall respect culture and custom**

**6: ...**

## 2. The international humanitarian system

The humanitarian Agencies are traditionally classified into three sub-groups:

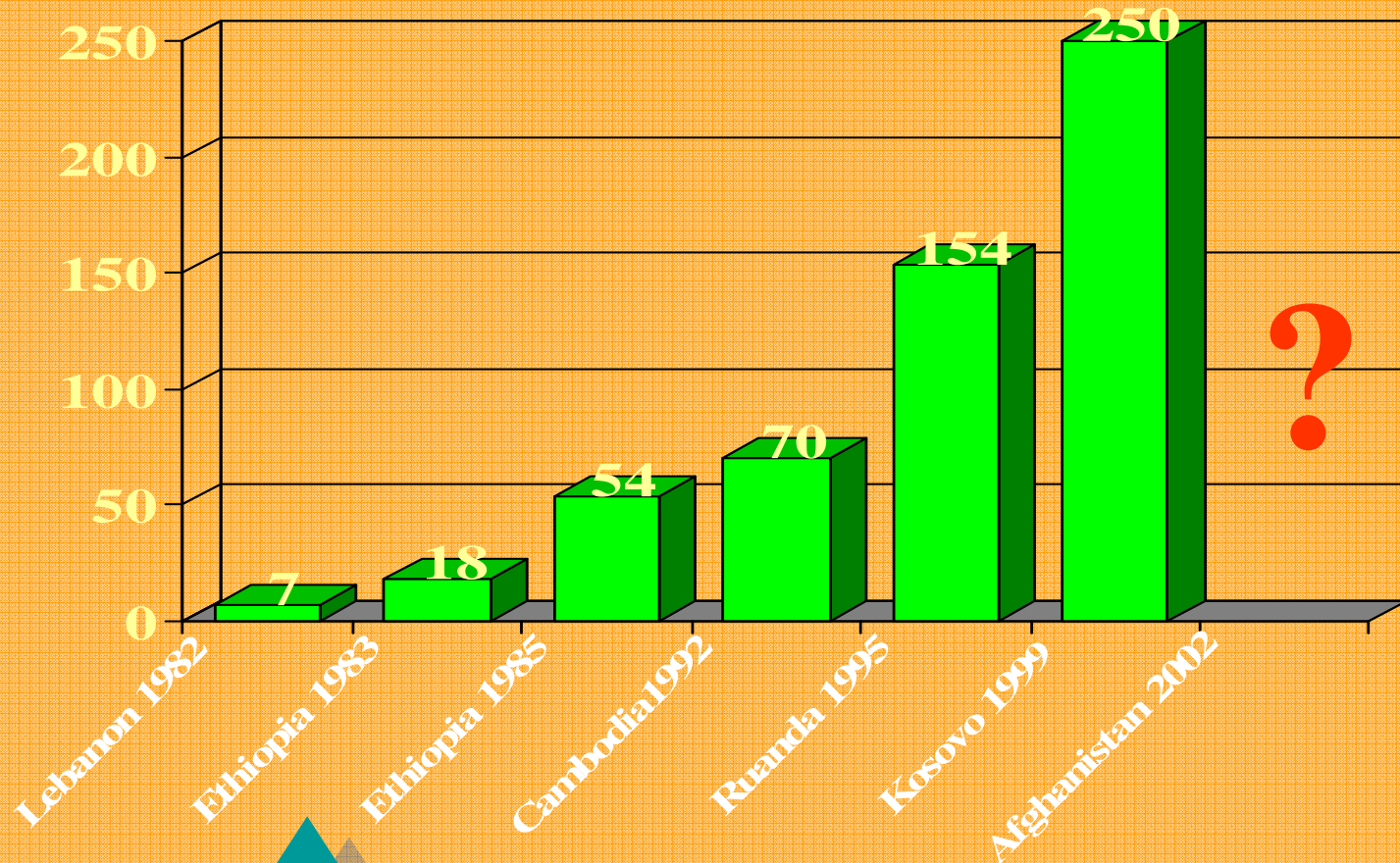
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)
- Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement
- United Nations

# Non-governmental organisations (NGOs):

- non-profit organisations
- organised by civil society
- Private fund-raising
- independent from governments

Examples: **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, CARE, World Vision, Catholic Relief Service, Caritas...**

# No. of NGOs & IOs involved in emergencies (all sectors)



# International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

- international humanitarian movement whose stated mission is to protect human life and health, to ensure respect for the human being, and to prevent and alleviate human suffering
- has a permanent mandate under international humanitarian law to take impartial action for prisoners, the wounded and sick, and civilians affected by conflict
- headquarters in Geneva, ICRC is based in around 80 countries and has a total of more than 12,000 staff members

# The United Nations

- **The „big five“:**
  - UNICEF
  - World Food Programme (WFP)
  - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
  - World Health Organization (WHO)
  - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- **Special UN organisations:**
  - UNRWA = United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- **Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs:**
  - Coordination function primarily through Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)

# Other actors in humanitarian aid

- European Community (DG ECHO)
- Donors / National Governments
- Military
- Media
- Disaster-affected population
- ??

# International system of humanitarian aid !?

