



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM SESSIONS

### SESSION

#### ***Dealing with Conflicts: the Importance of the Human Infrastructure***

When dealing with conflicts and in the aftermath of conflicts, the human infrastructure is often forgotten or dismissed. Who are the stakeholders responsible for rebuilding the human infrastructure? What roadmap is needed to address this important matter in the Arab region for the next decade?

**Date-** Monday | October 14, 2019

**Moderator-** Mona Saliba, Talk Show Host MTV Lebanon

#### **Panelists:**

- Wafa Ben Hassine, Policy Counsel at Access Now
- Ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, Egyptian diplomat, Former Assistant Secretary General of the UN and Deputy Special Envoy for Syria
- Ambassador Robert Ford, Professor at Yale University
- H.E. Jan Kubis, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon
- Peter Maurer, President International Committee of the Red Cross

#### **Peter Maurer, President International Committee of the Red Cross:**

The meaning of human infrastructure over the last 10 years, if you go back to the basic idea of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent movement, we were created to bring individual assistance and protection services to people disrupted by war and violence. In this region, more than individual displacement, over the last 10 years, we are dealing with infrastructure systems which have been heavily impacted by war and violence. We see record numbers of people displaced, water infrastructure heavily disrupted by war and conflict, and water systems heavily disrupted, outrageous attacks on health facilities and therefore health systems heavily disrupted. Therefore, not only do we see the direct impact of war and violence on individuals, but people are dying because hospitals have been bombed. A whole generation of children did not go to school. It is systems that have been heavily disrupted so a big task in this region in particular is that this is a region where millions of people now are outside of infrastructural services and social services, which normally public states deliver to them.



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It is such a big task. It is of critical importance that international and national state and non-state work in a different way together. We have to be visionary but also, we have to know where we start. [There is a] big discrepancy between the needs and the ability to service those needs. The region has a unique paradox of progress, where one part of the region is healthy, wealthy and well connected and the other part is marginalized and disenfranchised. There is the least contact within the region compared to actors outside the region. If we don't tackle these issues, we will continue to replicate those divisions in the future. We have to link new technologies and new opportunities to those realities with which we are confronted today to overcome them, and link the responsibility question by working in a different way together and to get out of the box. Which box fits which activity is the biggest question today but it's wrong - we have to put people at the center and look at the problems.

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The region is confronted with a stark choice for the next 10 or 20 years to grab international and national aid and to put band aids on problems, or to build a series of infrastructure which will only be possible if there is a politically different dynamic in the region, which will attract investment in people. In the first option, the money will run out in a short time.

**Ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, Egyptian diplomat, Former Assistant Secretary General of the UN and Deputy Special Envoy for Syria:**

The human infrastructure includes three aspects: education, health and food. Unfortunately, with the exception of food, the education and health in most of Arab countries, and especially in conflict and warzones, are neglected or not enough attention is dedicated to those infrastructures and might not be there in the foreseen future. We need to differentiate the situation in countries undergoing a conflict or post conflict because with regards to humanitarian aid, there is no specific definition of each phase and this makes it more difficult to rebuild the infrastructure in countries in post conflict. For them to overcome the crisis in which they are found, this matter should be addressed, although it wasn't done yet.

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The governments play the major role in rebuilding but the international community, through the UN and other international organizations, wouldn't only channel humanitarian aid. The rebuilding is an area where there are different views, such as in Syria. There are



challenges that face funding of projects or activities in post conflict zones like Syria where some sanctions imposed by the US would prevent the governments of these countries to go and exceed their aid beyond the humanitarian aid border.

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Building new schools isn't part of humanitarian aid or drilling a well for water. These projects should be classified. The international community has a responsibility and other stakeholders, such as the civic society organizations, who have to contribute and initiate projects that the laws allow to do rather than governmental institutions.

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The roadmap should define what is meant by rehabilitation. There is also a need to build partnerships between governments and the private sector, as well as national and international organizations. We also have to give space through legislations and laws for the national organizations to practice their own activities, especially in education and health.

**H.E. Jan Kubis, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon:**

We shouldn't focus exclusively on conflict and post conflict because if you look at it, we need to be much more visionary. It is not just about 2020, it is about 2030 and 2040, it is about human infrastructure that will fit the future. So, we need to approach this from this futuristic perspective. We don't only want only to rebuild the old, we, if at all possible, need to build for the future, which means it shouldn't be a replica of the old but taking into account the constituencies for which we are trying to build for this, including the young generations. Then you have the scope, we need to speak about justice, now and for the future, we need to think about accountability and good governance to add this element. To be able to deal from this future perspective, we need to be participatory. I don't think the main stakeholders are reflecting this participatory need to engage. It is not dealing only with impact and aftermath of conflict, we need to be more visionary. This region is mostly reactive in many situations. But it is also visionary. Dubai as the first really smart city is amazing, or a Ministry of Tolerance. This is futuristic, not reactionary.

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Lebanon is full of problems and challenges as well. I worked in Iraq for almost four years and before that, in Afghanistan. The leaders relapsed back to their old way of thinking and they thought they could do their business as usual. If the primary agents that are selected to be leaders fail to put the people in the center of all of the efforts, they will fail. Look at Iraq,



they started well, they were full of energy, the government came with a lot of good ideas and promises and reasonable international support, but instead of 80 billion, they received pledges of 30 billion. Three weeks ago, you had massive demonstrations of people because they asked 'where is the benefit of this, where is our future?' These are young people asking where is dignity, justice and jobs? I am a bit concerned that, without changing the attitude, we will have relapses. And this is what is missing.

**Ambassador Robert Ford, Professor at Yale University:**

The conflict in Syria has been so violent and so harsh, and the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe so large, that the international community has been responding mostly on an emergency basis. One half of Syria's population has had to leave their homes and six million Syrians have had to leave Syria. The scale is unprecedented since World War 2 and so under those circumstances, the international community's response has been, above all, just to provide shelter, food and medicine for this vast number of people. If you had the six million Syrian refugees outside the country and then approximately another six million internally displaced, that figure of 12 million is so big that there has been little time and few resources to plan for the kinds of deeper projects to rebuild the human infrastructure in terms of education and stabilization leading to reconstruction. The problem has been too big.

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Syria will be a challenge for the Mashreq for at least the next five to seven years. So how to address a variety of needs? You have to put people at the center but institutions that will address their needs are varied. They need education. Turkey, which has open schools to Syrian refugees, is exceptionally important but it is difficult because they don't speak Turkish. Syrian refugees also need employment. Both Turkey and Jordan have made important steps to open parts of their labor market so that Syrian refugee families can work. But the international community has a big role to play – we need to be able to support such governments when they provide essential services.

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Militias, after conflict concludes, is a problem in Iraq and Libya and will be a problem in Yemen and Syria. Our experience is not very good. A lot of us that have worked on conflicts in this region need to learn from more successful experiences elsewhere in the world, on how to manage these young people that have been brought into militias, how to integrate them in a national security force or to prepare them to work in other sectors.



**Wafa Ben Hassine, Policy Counsel at Access Now:**

When we talk about areas of conflict, we often forget that in these areas, the sun rises the next day, people have to continue working, going to school and getting healthcare. But the silver lining in being in a state of conflict or post conflict zone is you are able to build something new and from scratch. When I think of human infrastructure, I think of investing in humans as a primary driver of a new economy and type of reality. It is investing in knowledge economies, technologies, new types of education for individuals, reskilling people in schools, coding, culture and the roadmap moving forward for that isn't only incumbent on governments. It is on civil society, the private sector, and all of these stakeholders have to work together to envision something new. It cannot be a rinse and repeat of what we have already seen. We need to rethink our social contract, different modes of governance, taking into consideration new technologies that have taken place, in 2040. All these things leave me cautiously optimistic. This region is not at all monolithic, the Levant countries are facing one thing, the Maghreb other issues, the Gulf is facing notably climate change, so our definition should be more encompassing and broader to allow for that visionary thinking.

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If you look at Tunisia and the number of Libyan refugees it has accepted with wide arms, it is somewhat surprising to not see as much support for that kind of acceptance. The region has an opportunity here to leverage the context in favor of building human infrastructure and to take advantage of the strengths of the region. The population in the region is predominantly under 24, mostly tech-savvy but we need to work in this opportunity to ensure the governance matches the potential.