

Remarks for the Global Protection Forum on “Access that Protects”

Geneva, 24 October 2022

Thank you, Bernadette, for the invitation to share a few opening remarks today.

As you know, supporting and facilitating humanitarian access is a core part of the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinators and of OCHA in support to our humanitarian partners.

Humanitarian access, mandated by UN General Assembly resolution 46/182, refers to a two-pronged concept, comprising humanitarian actors’ ability to reach populations in need and affected populations’ access to assistance and services.

Safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access is a fundamental prerequisite to effective humanitarian action, especially in situations of armed conflict, but also in the context of disasters and civil unrest.

Humanitarian access is a principled and negotiated business. In Resolution 1894, the Security Council underscored the importance of upholding the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Compliance – or non-compliance - with these principles affects humanitarian actors’ acceptance, and their ability to engage in negotiations with State and non-state actors with the aim of reaching affected populations.

Yet, multiple constraints impinge on access, including:

- bureaucratic restrictions imposed by State and non-State actors on personnel and humanitarian supplies.
- Insecurity and conduct of hostilities
- Threats, arbitrary arrests and attacks on humanitarian personnel, premises and assets
- Interference in the delivery of humanitarian assistance
- Restriction of movements.

At global level, OCHA advocates for the safe, timely and unimpeded access to people in need. In 2007, the ERC committed to establishing more systematic monitoring and reporting on access, reporting instances of grave concern to the Security Council, and supporting efforts to increase access on the ground. Since then, the ERC has repeatedly emphasized the critical importance of improving access in the Security Council and other forums.

Under the leadership of the ERC, OCHA has played a leading role in documenting the various types of impediments that counterterrorism measures and sanctions generate for principled humanitarian action and advocating for systemic solutions with all stakeholders – including the Security Council, its Counterterrorism and sanctions Committees, Member States, and donors. Today, there is broad acknowledgement of the humanitarian issues related to the implementation of the sanctions and counterterrorism agendas and the need for measures to preserve principled humanitarian action in counterterrorism and sanctions contexts. This is reflected through

appropriate language in relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and most recently, the adoption by the Security Council of a sanctions carveout for humanitarian operations in Afghanistan.

The ERC actively facilitates, including through negotiation if needed, the access by the operational organisations to emergency areas for the rapid provision of emergency assistance by obtaining the consent of all parties concerned, through modalities such as the establishment of temporary relief corridors, days and zones of tranquillity and other forms where needed.

At country level, Humanitarian Coordinators and OCHA play a critical role in facilitating and coordinating efforts to establish and maintain principled humanitarian access to and/or by people in need, and to overcome factors that inhibit access. OCHA develops tools and provides guidance and support to HCs and Humanitarian Country Teams to address access-related issues, including humanitarian engagement with non-State armed groups and respect for humanitarian principles by both warring parties and the humanitarian community.

OCHA also facilitates efforts to monitor access in order to identify constraints and their implications for affected populations. This data can then be used to build common approaches to resolve issues and to inform advocacy and negotiation solutions.

Turning to the focus of this year's GPC forum on "Access that Protects", I am keen to frame the discussion at the outset, and our collective way forward, by emphasising three points that are crucial from OCHA's perspective:

- First, just as humanitarian action has both a relief and protection objective; so too humanitarian access speaks to enabling both. Humanitarian access is not an end goal but a means to fulfil the broader objective to make people safer and protect their dignity and rights. It's not a simple case of either/or. Often a shortage or lack of essentials like food, water or health care is closely linked to a lack of protection and corresponding human rights. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that a lack of access and proximity to affected populations may have specific implications for protection activities. We need more robust analysis to better understand and address those specific constraints and implications when they arise.
- Second, we must also strengthen our attention to the protection impact within existing humanitarian access arrangements, mechanisms, and tools at global and country-level. Evaluating progress towards securing or sustaining access must be looked at in terms of the extent to which our approaches have led to improvement in protection of affected people. Creating additional or separate processes risks overburdening country-level colleagues and diluting our efforts. At an operational level, for example, this should translate to Protection Clusters strengthening inputs to existing monitoring efforts by, and collaboration with Access Working Groups.
- Third, we must tackle the assumption that addressing protection concerns or advocating for rights will inevitably hinder humanitarian access or result in negative repercussions for the delivery of programmes. One aspect of this is ensuring that leadership have political backing and support. Humanitarian Coordinators (and HCTs) must be given greater incentives to focus

on protection as part of their core responsibilities. This is a key takeaway of the recent Independent Review of the Implementation of the IASC Protection Policy – and was also a priority topic at this year’s annual retreat of Humanitarian Coordinators.

Protection is very much at the forefront of the missions conducted by the USG/ERC and in his engagement with parties to conflict, including on access.

OCHA remains fully dedicated to support and facilitate access on behalf of the humanitarian community and has made access one of its priorities in its forthcoming strategic framework (2023-26). This will translate into enhanced capacities on humanitarian negotiations (creation of the humanitarian negotiations unit in our Geneva office), and in inter-agency efforts on access at both global and field level and efforts to collect and share lessons-learned and good practices.

We stand ready to work with UNHCR and the GPC partners to take this forward.

Thank you.