Home exam GEOG 3516 Humanitarianism: theory and practice autumn 2014

The exam question will be made available on GEOG 3516’s It’s learning page under the folder ‘Exam’ at 08.00 on the 19th November.

The exam should be submitted before 12.00 (noon) on the 26th November.

*When submitting the document, please do the following:*

- To maintain anonymity of each candidate, please send an email with your exam paper attached as a pdf-file to Rita Hokseggen at the Department of Geography: geoeksamen@svt.ntnu.no
- On the first page of the document: Write your candidate number and the number of words (and please remember to insert page numbers in the document)
- When saving the document, give it the following name: “GEOG3516 Home exam, [your candidate number]"
- When sending the document write the following in the subject line: “GEOG3516 Home exam, [your candidate number]"

The administration staff will save the document and delete your email so that no-one can trace your name attached to the document.

It will not be acceptable to submit the exam paper too late. If you should have any problems in meeting the deadline, you must get in touch with the department, but generally late submissions will not be accepted.

The exam paper should be between 3500 words and 4500 words, references, figures and tables come in addition.

Remember to refer to sources and literature used according to academically accepted standards. You can, for example, follow the guidelines distributed on the It’s learning pages for this course.

During the exam, you cannot receive any supervision from staff in the department, but if you have questions regarding the question of the exam and formalities, we will try to answer collectively by making responses available on It’s learning.

I may not be available on email in the last hours before the submission deadline so any questions should come before this last day. If there are any last minute issues regarding the submission, please contact Rita Hokseggen (phone 91774 566).
The attached brief article indicates that new emergencies and contemporary conflicts place humanitarianism’s current practices under great pressure.

Is humanitarianism in crisis? The humanitarian principles and humanitarian actors have at various times been placed under scrutiny for failing to assist those in need in humanitarian crises? Theory and practice are constantly coming into conflict with each other and there are calls for the humanitarian system to change. How can contemporary humanitarian emergencies be defined and described? What are the main tensions between theory and practice in contemporary humanitarian emergencies? Use examples to show how these tensions become visible on the ground. To what extent can humanitarian principles and instruments continue to be useful and what additional principles and guidelines can you find in the course literature that can help to improve the humanitarian system?

Attachment:
http://relieftorecovery.ca/humanitarianism/, accessed 12.11.2014
Follow our wide range of experts as they share stories, best practices, and tips on humanitarian work.

Humanitarianism
October 27, 2014, Will Plowright in Thought Leaders  Leave a comment
Humanitarianism was famously founded on principles of neutrality and impartiality; the ideas that we should deliver assistance to everyone equally based on need, and that we should never pick sides in a conflict. But what does that mean in the twenty-first century, in conflicts like those in Syria and Iraq? How are humanitarians to be neutral with a group like the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in Syria, or al-Shabab in Somalia? The humanitarian response to these groups has largely been one of flight; there are increasingly large areas where major humanitarian organizations are unable to work. Is it simply the case that we cannot work in areas where such armed groups exist?

ISIS – and other groups like them – represents a nascent trend in transnational violence, in which armed groups do not represent a single nationality or ideology, but instead, a broad alliance of people rallying to the same flag. Such groups are adept at using social media, as well as mass media, and are knowledgeable of geopolitics, regional politics, and the interventions of humanitarians and development workers. How are we to adapt humanitarian action to meet these strategically challenging terrains? Is our only option to simply withdraw from the worst conflict zones of the world, and help to assist those who limp to the borders and sidelines?

Humanitarianism exists in a state of near permanent crisis. MSF was founded after a crisis in humanitarianism regarding the idea of speaking out against atrocity. A new round of crisis emerged in the 1990s, when humanitarians realized how uncomfortable they were with the rise in international peacekeeping and peacebuilding. A further crisis came recently, when humanitarians perceived their work being undermined by military interventionism in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

A dramatic re-thinking of humanitarianism is needed. We need to find innovative and creative ways to work in such terrains as Syria, and not to try to ignore or hide from armed groups, but to engage with them as stakeholders. Some changes are small ones. In 2013, seven Red Cross staff were kidnapped in Northern Syria by local Islamist militants.[1] The ICRC protested that the vehicle was clearly marked with the Red Cross showing that they were humanitarians.[2] Though no armed group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, it occurred in an area held by Jabhat al-Nusra, an Islamist group formerly affiliated with al Qaeda and the ISIS.[3] For them, the cross is not a symbol of peace, but instead, is a Christian symbol. Remember that this is the context of what is by far the most bloody and intense conflict currently in the world. The ICRC responded by noting that the Red Cross is not a religious symbol.[4]

I am not trying to pick on the ICRC; they are a fantastic organization with amazing access, and lead amazing projects all over the world. However, this incident perfectly represents what I am talking about. Engaging in a discursive confrontation with an Islamist militant group over whether or not the cross is a Christian emblem is an act which completely misses the point. In such scenarios, it doesn’t matter what the ICRC thinks the Red Cross means. It matters what the local stakeholders think the Red Cross means. To armed groups on the ground, the Red Cross is a Christian symbol. That’s all that matters.

If we want to work in areas where there are groups like ISIS or al-Shabab are working, we need to come to understand that what we think and what we say as humanitarians is only a small part of the story. When we work in an armed group’s backyard, we are working on their terrain, and we need to find ways to seek our own goals and values in that context. The fact that so many humanitarian organizations simply withdraw from major conflict zones demonstrates our lack of understanding of the armed groups point of view. In order reach the suffering civilians in these areas, we need to try to come to grips with how to engage with armed groups.

Currently, we are failing at this.


Tagged as: Aid, Conflicts, Intervention

About Will Plowright

Will Plowright is currently completing a PhD in Political Science at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada. Will’s work focuses on the politics of insurgency and the negotiation of humanitarian space in conflict zones, with a secondary specialization on the use of child soldiers. He has completed research with armed groups in more than a dozen conflict zones, including Syria, Uganda, Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia, South Sudan and others. Among the groups that Will has interviewed are organizations including the Lord’s Resistance Army and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) Additionally, Will has 6 years of experience in various aspects of humanitarian assistance in conflict and disaster zones across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, in areas including human resource and project management. This has included work with organizations including the Child Soldiers Initiative and the Humanitarian Training Initiative. Currently, Will is working in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, working with MSF.

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