THE FORDHAM CENTER ON RELIGION AND CULTURE
Saving the World: Does Faith-Based Humanitarian Aid Deliver Relief or Redemption?

May 15, 2013
Fordham University | Lincoln Center Campus
Pope Auditorium | 113 West 60th Street

Moderator
Elizabeth Shakman Hurd
Northwestern University

Panelists
Masood Hyder
United Nations: WFP, UNDP, OCHA

Susan Martin
Institute for Study of International Migration, Georgetown University

Kenneth Gavin, S.J.
Jesuit Refugee Service

David Rieff
Author, A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis

JIM MCCARTIN: Welcome to Fordham University. I am Jim McCartin, Director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture. On behalf of our cosponsors this evening, the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs, directed by my colleague Brendan Cahill, it’s my pleasure to welcome you and thank you all for joining us.

Tonight we bring together an expert panel to consider the growth of faith-based humanitarian aid over the course of recent decades and to explore how this kind of aid may be shaping the broader world of humanitarianism. Each year international faith-based NGOs, as well as smaller-scale religious groups, provide assistance to many millions throughout the world, and yet their work is little accounted for and little understood. This may be, in part, because of the kaleidoscopic variety of faith-based groups that often operate under the radar, overseeing informal transfers of assistance that don’t register with statisticians and researchers. But our limited knowledge may also be because of a latent reticence to take them seriously, I think, the sneaking suspicion that religious humanitarianism may really be about making converts rather than changing circumstances.

So many points remain to be addressed:
• How much aid do these organizations actually deliver?
• Do they, in fact, adhere to principles such as neutrality and impartiality that are championed by other types of humanitarian organizations?
• What particular advantages or disadvantages come with the territory in the world of religious humanitarian work?

These and other questions will guide our search for enlightenment tonight.

Before we begin, two quick requests. First, please turn off your electronic devices, or silence them at any rate. Please make use of the cards on your seats to write out your questions for our panelists. When you’re finished, you can hold up the card and one of our student assistants will bring it forward.
I also want to point out that one of our scheduled guests this evening, Mustapha Tlili, was unable to make it, but we are delighted that Masood Hyder, to whom you will be introduced in a moment, has joined us as a panelist.

Allow me to introduce to you this evening’s moderator. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd is associate professor and Director of Graduate Studies at Northwestern University’s political science department. She has held visiting positions at the University of Virginia, Princeton, Arizona State, the École des hautes études, and the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. In addition to various book chapters and articles, she is the author of *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*, as well as co-editor of *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*.

Hurd is co-organizer of the “Politics of Religious Freedom, Contested Norms, and Local Practices,” which is a multiyear research project that examines the histories and politics of religious freedom in various contexts.

It’s my pleasure to welcome Elizabeth Shakman Hurd this evening.
ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: Thanks, Jim. Hi, everybody. Welcome. Thank you so much for coming this evening.

Before introducing our panelists formally — and I will introduce them all at one time so as not to interrupt the flow of their presentations — by way of introduction, I just want to say a couple of words about the title of this event, from my perspective as a political scientist who studies international relations and the politics of religion.

A focus on faith-based humanitarianism could be taken to suggest that this is something new, that religion and humanitarianism were at one time separate, but that is no longer the case. In this view, religion and humanitarianism would be understood as having been characterized by a wall of separation, to use a very tired metaphor, a wall that had stood strong until the emergence of faith-based actors or organizations came on the scene on the international landscape. This is a very common way of framing the way we talk about religion and international affairs: At one time it was secular, and now religious players are back.

I think this is mistaken. I think this is a much more complex story. To suggest that religion and humanitarianism were at one time separate and are now somehow merging is not quite accurate. To assume that religion and religious actors are something new on the scene obscures the fact that there has always been a world of development and missionary activities in which faith, the acquisition of civilization, humanitarian relief, and development are understood as inseparable, as interwoven, as intertwined, in complex and differing configurations. For many actors throughout history — and here I'm including many powerful secular states — this has been a package deal. So it's not relief or redemption, but relief and redemption — or, we could even say, relief through redemption.

To give just one example, redemption has been a very prominent strand in the history of American foreign relations, one of the areas I study. For Douglas MacArthur in Japan, for example, Christianity was seen as the foundation of civilization, as the foundation of democracy itself.

Today civilizing, relief, and humanitarian projects certainly take different forms, but many of them emphasize redemption in different ways. I think the division of humanitarian efforts into secular versus religious camps doesn't do justice to the complexities of the politics of redemption. I would ask us to think about these projects and these politics more broadly. I'm sure that our panel will help us to shed light on various forms of redemptive politics today.

With that, it's my great pleasure to introduce our panelists this evening, beginning with Susan Martin, who is the Donald G. Herzberg Chair in International Migration and the Director of the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. Previously, Martin served as the Executive Director of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, as well as Director of Research and Programs at the Washington-based Refugee Policy Group.

Susan Martin is the author of two books, A Nation of Immigrants and Refugee Women, and coauthor of two more on international migration, along with numerous articles and book chapters on a range of topics related to humanitarian aid.

Kenneth Gavin is a Roman Catholic priest, a member of the Society of Jesus, and the Rome-based Assistant International Director for the Jesuit Refugee Service. Prior to his service with JRS in Rome, Gavin was Regional Director of JRS/USA in Washington, where his work took him to places such as Colombia, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. Before entering the humanitarian field, he earned a doctoral degree in speech pathology and
taught for many years at Marquette, just up the road from where I live. He subsequently went on to serve as President of his alma mater, Regis High School, here in New York City, and as Superior for the Jesuits’ New York Province.

Masood Hyder was for over 20 years a senior officer of the UN World Food Program. He is now a consultant for the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. His decades of service have enabled him to become closely engaged with on-the-ground humanitarian activities in places as diverse as Sudan, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia and Djibouti. From 2000 to 2004, Hyder lived in North Korea as resident representative for the UN Development Programme. In recent years he has taught at Syracuse University and has written extensively on the conversions of diplomacy and humanitarian work.

David Rieff is a writer and critic who has explored a range of issues related to international conflict and humanitarianism. Rieff is the editor of two books and the author of eight, including *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, a study that explores the limitations of humanitarian aid in advancing peace, human rights, and social justice. Rieff is or has been a Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute, a Fellow at the New York Institute for the Humanities at NYU, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a Board member of Human Rights Watch and of the Central Eurasia Project at the Open Society Institute.

With that introduction, I’m going to turn it over to Susan Martin.

**SUSAN MARTIN:** Thank you, and thank you to representatives from Fordham for having invited me to this gathering, which is certainly on an issue of a great deal of interest within the humanitarian community.

When I was deciding whether to accept the invitation, one of the incentives to talk on this issue was to actually, from my point of view, learn more about Father Edmund Walsh, the founder of the School of Foreign Service, where I have my faculty appointment, at Georgetown. Father Walsh founded the School of Foreign Service in 1919. But two years later, he was called to service by the pope to head up the papal relief program in the Soviet Union, which at the time was going through a period of extreme famine. So he went to the Soviet Union, where he wore two hats. One was his humanitarian hat, organizing the famine relief operation, and the other was his political hat as the representative of the Vatican. He wore these two hats simultaneously.

The Catholic Church’s interest in launching the papal relief operation was as much political as it was humanitarian. The Soviet Union was cracking down on religion. They had started with the Orthodox Church, but were quickly moving towards appropriating the land and imprisoning the Catholic clergy who were there. So Walsh had the responsibility of trying to negotiate.

It was not exactly “we’ll provide food in exchange for some better policies regarding religion,” but there was certainly that connection for Walsh in wearing the two hats that he was wearing.

Another interesting thing about his operation was that, strangely enough, the only recognized relief operation in the Soviet Union at the time was the American Relief Association, which was headed up by Herbert Hoover, who was the Secretary of Commerce at that time. It was a U.S. government effort to try to address the famine in the Soviet Union.

The papal relief operation operated under one of the partners of the U.S. effort in the American National Catholic Welfare Council. Walsh was chosen because he had very good ties in Washington, having founded the School of Foreign Service, and was known
as a very good political negotiator.

He began his operations in the Crimea and then quickly spread throughout Russia, providing famine relief. At the height they were providing aid to about 160,000 people. This was small in comparison to the 9 million that the American Relief Association was aiding at the time, but very important in terms of reaching some of the most vulnerable, including some who were associated with the Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church, but going well beyond in terms of the focus of the relief.

Because of the Soviet concerns about religion, the only way that Walsh could provide this assistance was if the priests, including himself, wore secular garb and made it clear that they were operating not as religious figures, but as humanitarian aid workers. But Walsh made it very clear to the recipients of the aid that it was, in his own words, “a gift of the Catholics of the world.” So it was clear that he was seeing this as a way of winning the hearts and minds of those who had come under Communist rule.

He also wrote to his donors and talked about their need to step up the fundraising to provide more aid for this relief, talking about some of the kitchens that they ran and the little children coming in wearing crosses and genuflecting at the door of the church. His contemporaries who were with him said that he was exaggerating a bit about this religiosity. But it certainly struck a chord with those whom he was asking for donations in order to support the effort.

As religion, though, was more and more suppressed in the Soviet Union, Walsh began to get some pressure from people with whom he was working in Russia, particularly in what was called Petrograd still at that time — it hadn’t changed its name to Leningrad (or back to St. Petersburg, as it is now) — pressure that he should threaten to withdraw the humanitarian aid if the Soviet government didn’t loosen up on its suppression of religion in the Soviet Union. The Vatican rejected this notion, agreed that the feeding of famine-stricken populations should take precedence over any political act. But eventually the pressure got too much, and Walsh himself, after having managed to negotiate the release of some of the priests who had been imprisoned, including one who was about to be executed, returned to the United States, where he became one of the main spokespersons against communism and against the threat that the Soviet Union posed to the Western world, not only for its communist views, but also because of its views about religion.

But he also returned a very committed humanitarian. He became the first president of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, which provided relief in much of the world at the time, the humanitarian world. Later in his career he became a consultant to Chief Justice Jackson, who was the head of the Nuremberg trials. Walsh used his background in geopolitical science in order to determine whether some acts were ones that should come under the tribunal’s auspices.

I’m spending some time on Father Walsh and the papal relief and subsequent action because, first of all, matching what was just said in the introduction, the involvement of religious organizations, faith-based organizations, is nothing new even in the modern humanitarian world, let alone throughout the millennia in which religious organizations have been some of the principal deliverers of humanitarian aid and certainly of relief, but also because Father Walsh’s experience raises many of the challenges that faith-based organizations continue to be facing in their humanitarian work and the way in which it often comes into tension with other issues and other relationships.

I think there’s a clear strength in faith-based organizations in doing humanitarian work. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees held a consultation in 2011, and part of that was to talk about faith-based organizations working in the refugee field. The conclusion was that faith itself helps people cope with trauma, validates their humanity, informs
their decisions, and offers guidance, compassion, consolation, and hope — very strong things that refugees and other victims of humanitarian crises are desperate for — validation of their humanity. The faith-based organizations that work in the humanitarian field follow much the same guidance and reasons that they are out in the field often working in quite difficult situations.

Yet they do face challenges. I'll list four quickly, because I'm probably already over my time.

First, there is certainly the tension between their religious mission and humanitarian principles. There's a core humanitarian principle that has developed over the past century that humanitarian aid should be delivered in an impartial and neutral manner. It should be based solely on need, and that need should be assessed in a rigorous manner and aid should go to it.

We violate that all the time. I'm not suggesting that all of the humanitarian field abides by this.

But for faith-based organizations, there's often a tension. I think most of the very well-established faith-based organizations that work all the time in the refugee field or in humanitarian emergencies have a firewall between their humanitarian work and their proselytizing or their religious work, often between their humanitarian work and their development work, in which development allows for proselytizing, in their view, whereas humanitarian action doesn't. But in any given humanitarian crisis, there is a wide variety of organizations, with very, very different views with regard to the extent to which, in the context of delivering relief, they should also deliver the word of God as they see it, from whatever religion they belong to.

This has subtle effects and it has very overt effects. The overt effects can be ones where there's a backlash, and humanitarian aid workers as a whole become quite endangered by the proselytizing of what is often a minority of the organizations. But there are subtle ways in which this tension derives; for example, even just framing the humanitarian mission as charity, charity derived from a religious mission, something that people are supposed to do because of their religious faith. This is a very, very strong view. Many come to the field with it. Yet when faced with the need also to empower those who have been victimized, often by conflict, or who have lost everything in a natural disaster, victimization that often is a part of the charity framework can doubly hurt people rather than help them, by making them very dependent on external help, rather than have the capacity to build up their own resilience, their own capabilities.

A second tension is between the humanitarian mission and the interests of donors. This can be in terms of the interests of governments. Many faith-based organizations are funded by governments, including the U.S. government, and have to deal with the tensions inherent in following what sometimes may be a foreign policy mission as well as a humanitarian mission, as my example of Father Walsh demonstrated. But, also, the private donors that faith-based organizations are often dependent on — their own congregants, the members of their own religious groups — can create distortion. We see, for example, amongst groups that work on human trafficking that very often the focus is almost exclusively on trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation. It's a very anti-prostitution viewpoint, which is one way of looking at trafficking. But there are many, many people who are trafficked for forced labor that has nothing to do with prostitution. Very often some of the faith-based organizations are not funded by their own membership to work on those issues. The faith determines, in some respects, what the cut into humanitarian action will be.

The third tension is between the international faith-based organizations and indigenous
groups, in terms of who determines what the needs are, what the best modes of delivery are, and how the issues can work out best. This is a cross between the international and the indigenous within the same religion, but, of course, it’s sometimes even more obvious when the indigenous are a different religious group than the international aid agencies.

The fourth tension, which I’ll end with, is the tension that arises when faith-based organizations are doing relief in the context of religious conflict, the sectarian violence, in which religion is a part of the problem. It’s very difficult to frame a faith-based solution operating in that type of environment of extreme tension and conflict amongst warring parties over religion.

Those are the challenges that were there in 1921 and remain with us today, and are ones that obviously need solutions. But those solutions are by no means easy. I hope we’ll hear about some of the efforts that move towards them.

[Applause]

KENNETH GAVIN: My name is Ken Gavin. I come to you not as an academic, but as a practitioner, or at least an administrative practitioner, who has worked for the past ten years in JRS — that is to say, Jesuit Refugee Service — both here in the United States, in Washington, D.C., and, for the last two years, as Assistant International Director in Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome, where we have our headquarters.

It was interesting to hear Susan talk about the longstanding connection between faith and humanitarian aid. I was reminded when she was talking that in the winter of 1538 — it was a very rough year in Rome. That’s two years before the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits were founded. Ignatius and his companions were there in Rome, a city at that time of no more than 50,000 people. In that winter they housed close to 4,000 men and women who had come largely from the countryside into the city. We can see even within the Society of Jesus that there is a longstanding relationship. Frequently when we talk in JRS about where our roots are, we don’t always go back that far, but we’re certainly reminded of that as well.

What I would like to do is address with you kind of the religious motivation behind faith-based humanitarianism, at least as I see it. JRS began in 1980 in Southeast Asia as a response, really, to the tragedy that was so incredibly obviously in the fate of the Vietnamese boat people as they fled their homeland seeking some sense of safe haven, some sense of hospitality, some sense of a welcome. From the start, we spoke of our work as work that is human, that is spiritual. “Pedagogical” is the word that was used, but I think it meant educational in the deepest sense of that word of drawing people out to their fullest humanity.

Now JRS works in over 50 countries throughout the world serving refugees and forcibly displaced people in over 200 projects or so. We provide largely refugees with education at the formal level, at primary, secondary, and even now at the higher education levels, but we also offer, in terms of education, vocational training. We offer adult literacy, peace education as well.

In addition to that, we’re probably also known well for our work with psychosocial care for people who have been traumatized by conflict. And although we’re not an emergency relief organization in and of itself, we occasionally find ourselves — for example, in Syria at the moment — doing emergency relief and also pastoral work.

Perhaps I can give you a sense of what drives us as a faith-based organization by describing for you the work of Father Mourad Abou Seif, who is the project director of JRS in Aleppo, in Syria. Mourad and his JRS team have been working there for the last
five years or so, primarily at the beginning in response to the needs of Iraqi refugees who streamed into Syria from Iraq. Within the last two or three years, though, of course, there has been a remarkable change — no longer simply the Iraqi refugees, but the Syrians as well.

What happened originally with the Iraqi refugees was that Mourad and his team were able to basically build up a tremendously amazing, wonderful community in Aleppo, a community that consisted of Syrians and Iraqis, a community that consisted of young people and old people, a community that consisted of Christians and Muslims, working together, being trained educationally in a variety of ways and also given support, especially to the Iraqi refugee women.

That has all changed, of course, in the last two years. In the last two years, with the outbreak of violence in Syria, the center itself had to be closed because of security reasons. But even more than that, about ten months or so ago, the center was bombed and severely damaged. Even though those projects have been closed, it’s also true to say that JRS has not simply left the scene. JRS has turned its attention to providing emergency care in terms of food and rent subsidies and basic household provisions to the thousands and thousands of internally displaced Syrians in the country.

Father Mourad himself really has become a central figure in this emergency relief effort, well known and esteemed by both Christians and Muslims alike.

In an episode that happened about nine months or so ago, one of the brothers of our center’s night watchman, who was a mentally handicapped youth, was walking down the street with his mother and, as happens so often, was caught in a crossfire and was shot and killed before her eyes. At that time in Aleppo, it was hard even to get permission to move through Aleppo so that you could actually bury the boy. What Mourad did that afternoon was to simply take the boy’s body in his little beat-up car and went with the grieving mother and the boy’s brother, with the lights out in the car, as dusk came on, and he moved across Aleppo until he finally reached a Muslim cemetery, where this boy could be buried.

I’m moved by that story, and I tell you that story simply because it highlights for me the faith-based perspective that is at the center of JRS’s mission. We frequently describe our mission as one of accompanying, serving, and defending the rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced people. As a Christian Catholic organization, we clearly say that JRS is inspired by the compassion and the love of Jesus for the poor and the disempowered. JRS is truly inspired by faith, but a faith that is inclusive rather than exclusive, a faith that values other religions and cultures. We believe in the intrinsic value of every human being, and because of that, we do not proselytize. Rather, we strongly support the right of all people to religious freedom.

With other faiths and like-minded partners, we share common human values, such as justice and dialogue, peace and reconciliation, that we see as the core and the sustaining course for a viable, workable human community.

We see no radical distinction between living in faith and acting in justice, between belief and humanitarian aid. It’s not an either/or decision, from our standpoint. It’s not a choice of one over the other. For us, faith and commitment to the poor are bound together in a symbiotic relationship. Someone once said to be a friend of Jesus is to be a friend of the poor. We believe that.

This understanding is really, in many ways, at the heart of that Last Judgment scene from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, when those who are invited into the kingdom of God ask, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and not feed you? When did we see you thirsty
and not give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?"

The answer that Jesus gives is both simple and challenging: “Whatever you did for the least brothers and sisters, you did for me.”

Jesus identifies himself with the poor, with the stranger, with refugees. His life, as the gospels describe it, was one of accompanying the poor and the most excluded, giving them life and giving them hope. It’s no wonder, then, that JRS describes its own work as a form of accompanying refugees, in an attempt to proclaim that even in the most tragic moments of human history, our God is present. Our God is present bringing forth hope and possibility.

If I were asked to describe in some fashion how a faith-based organization like JRS is related to other faith-based organizations, my simple response would be that, in many ways — in many ways, but not all — they are quite similar. Other religious traditions and faith-based organizations that stem from those traditions are built on similar deeply felt and deeply believed human and religious values. The Sacred Scriptures of nearly every religion that we know in our world stress the importance of compassion, of responsibility, and of welcoming the stranger and the needy.

Within the international community itself these days, as Susan said, there’s a growing sense of the importance of faith-based response to refugees. In point of fact, more and more it’s understood that faith does play a pivotal role in the experience of refugees and can be a key factor in providing protection to displaced people. Faith-based organizations, because of their closeness to refugees, often find themselves experiencing greater trust within the refugee community. They have more access, frequently, to the refugee community and they know the lives of refugees better.

Faith-based communities like JRS often accompany refugees from the very beginning of their exile and stay with them until a durable solution, such as repatriation or resettlement, is able to be found.

This last December, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees held a high-level dialogue with faith leaders from a variety of religious traditions in Geneva. At that meeting, High Commissioner Antonio Guterres stated, “For the vast majority of uprooted people, there are few things as powerful as their faith in helping them cope with fear, loss, separation, and destitution.”

Faith is also central to hope and resilience. If we were to ignore faith, it would be to ignore its potential for preserving dignity and for finding solutions for people we care for.

If I had to suggest where we move forward from here, I would say a few things. I think within the faith-based communities, we need to spend more and more time talking about the core human values, the core spiritual values that our religions share and that underpin our work in humanitarian aid. Another way of doing this would be to focus on issues of welcome and hospitality, welcome and hospitality that strengthen and encourage strong human communities within the refugee world. In fact, welcoming faith communities can and often does combat xenophobia. It allows us, in some ways, to prevent hate crimes and to educate congregations in how they can create communities of hospitality and welcome themselves.

Another need is for faith-based communities to respond, as has been said, to need and not to creed. That is to say, we must continue to respect core humanitarian principles of impartiality, of nondiscrimination and equality in the work that we do.
For the humanitarian aid world in general, I think we need to become more faith-literate, to deepen our understanding of one another’s faith commitments and how that faith impinges on the work that we do.

In response to the meeting that UNHCR held last December, a group of faith leaders who attended came together and started to create what first they were calling a code of conduct. Later they changed their opinion and now it’s simply called an affirmation of belief. It’s a lengthy document. I want to just recall for you four or five of those affirmations that these faith leaders speak about in talking about refugees and in talking about humanitarian aid. I think in terms of Mourad Abou Seif, who I think could easily and lovingly speak these.

A core value of my faith is to welcome the stranger. I will challenge others, even leaders in my faith community, to do the same.

I acknowledge that welcoming the stranger sometimes takes courage, but the joys and hopes of doing so outweigh the risks and the challenges.

I will offer the stranger hospitality, for this brings blessings upon the community, upon my family, upon the stranger, and upon me.

I will build bridges between the stranger and myself.

I will welcome the stranger.

[Applause]

MASOOD HYDER: Good evening. My name is Masood Hyder. I’m going to talk to you about humanitarianism and its relation with the Muslim world.

Before doing that, I’ve been inspired by the two preceding speakers to make a few comments about my own experience in the field, working on humanitarian problems.

In 1984, at the height of the Ethiopian famine, I was assigned to Djibouti, which is a feeder port into Ethiopia, where we were supposed not only to coordinate food shipments into Ethiopia, but also look after the thousands of drought-affected people that were gathering in Djibouti. I remember very well, very early on, there was a particularly terrible group of Ethiopians who had walked their way into Djibouti and they were in bad shape. I expressed my concern about them to my government counterpart, a very nice man. But in response to my comment, he said, “Mr. Hyder, don’t be too worried about them. They are inoculated against drought.”

Why I recount this story is that there is this impression all across the world where most of these disasters occur that it is human beings’ fate to suffer, and suffering is their inevitable lot. It was that kind of expression that he was expressing to me.

Soon after I was sent to this place, Azila [phonetic], to again go and visit this group of Ethiopian drought victims. I arrived there where the district commissioner was addressing this group of drought victims. Of course, he was speaking in the local language. I asked my colleagues, “What is he saying?”

Everyone was listening to this harangue from the district commissioner and nodding their heads. I was told he was saying, “You are suffering because you are a sinful people. This is God’s punishment to you for your sins.” And they were all nodding.

It struck me very forcibly that we, with our modern ideas, with our modern abilities, go to these traditional societies and try to help them, often without realizing that they have
experienced a completely different reality. The problem then is, how soon do you want to wake them up, that hunger is an outrage, suffering is an outrage, and you should be angry rather than sitting back and saying, “This is my fate”? The problem is, if you do it too quickly, then there would be consequences that you will not be able to control. There are a billion people hungry in the world. If they all rose up in revolt, you will have great trouble.

So here we are. This is one of the major problems, it strikes me: How soon do you want to tell them what their rights are? How are you going to manage the consequences?

The other part that struck me very forcibly was that although I worked for a secular organization, my very first assignment, as I said, was in Djibouti, which was bringing thousands of tons of grain for Ethiopia. Of course, there was a great deal of congestion in the port of Djibouti, which I was supposed to manage. I had no idea how to manage it. I remember one day a vessel docked called The Shandong Star carrying several thousand tons of slightly wet corn. I remember walking ankle-deep in this wet corn. A thought struck me quite forcibly that I was engaged in a job which was not like an ordinary job, that if I did it well, I could be really helpful to many, many thousands of people, but if I did it badly, there might be consequences not only here, but also up there, because when I reached up there at the Pearly Gates, I might be told, “You know, we gave you an opportunity to help your fellow creatures down there in Djibouti, and you blew it. You blew it.”

So there is something spiritual about humanitarianism that really affects not only those who come with their faith, but also those who think they are doing work on a secular basis. It's very easy to imagine how it is for the faith-based among us.

These are just thoughts, but let me move on quickly to humanitarianism and its relation to the Muslim world. Let me preface that by saying I have some experience of humanitarianism, but if my wife heard that I was talking about Islam, she would laugh. So please bear that in mind. But with some due diligence, I have done work on these themes, dating back to the time, about six or seven years ago, when I wrote a paper on this very topic, humanitarianism and the Muslim world.

I thought it was a good paper. One of the things that struck me was that no peer-reviewed journal would accept my paper. The kinds of comments I got back — because peer-reviewed papers get back comments — didn’t seem very relevant to me. So there is something that will be reflected in my paper, as well, about this reluctance of the humanitarian world as we know it today and as we have known it in the past twenty years which is sort of exclusive in many respects, some of which I will rehearse in my paper.

Very quickly, a gallop around the Muslim world, if you can talk about “a” Muslim world.

First, on the Islamic doctrine of giving: Traditional Muslim concepts of charity and the contemporary idea of humanitarian assistance are not identical. There is a very large literature on Islamic giving, covering the concepts of zakat, sadaqa, and waqf, three different concepts. Zakat is obligatory for all Muslims and payable only to Muslim beneficiaries who are specified in the Qur'an and whose status has been much discussed by Muslim jurists.

There’s a huge literature on this whole question of charity.

Zakat therefore does not really qualify as being equivalent to humanitarian aid in modern terms. Sadaqa, especially one particular kind designated as “alms of spontaneity,” is voluntary and can be given to Muslim and non-Muslim alike without further specification of their status or need. This type of sadaqa is therefore
more akin to humanitarian aid in modern terms.

Third, *waqf* does not come into the picture, as far as I can make it, because it involves endowment of property and the establishment of foundations, and there is no evidence I could come across of *waqf* income from property endowments going as a voluntary contribution to international agencies.

As you can imagine, there has been a great deal of discussion among jurists about how these terms, in particular *zakat*, should be treated in a modern context, and different Muslim countries have adopted different strategies. The interface between the Muslim concepts of *sadaqa*, *zakat*, *waqf* and humanitarian assistance remains largely unexplored. Here is an instance of exclusivity.

The best expert on these matters that I could find in my contacts was someone working at SOAS, the School of Oriental and African Studies, in London. I asked him this question: What’s the difference between humanitarianism and various forms of *zakat*? He said, “Masood, that’s a topic for a conference, and we should have a conference. To date, we have not had a conference. So this matter remains unresolved.”

So much about doctrine. What about practice?

Interestingly, whatever the differences, they do not prevent Muslims from accepting Western humanitarian assistance. Thus, the majority of those receiving humanitarian assistance worldwide are Muslim.

The number of countries with majority Muslim population where large-scale humanitarian operations and programs are under way at any given time in the past, let’s say, fifteen years is impressive. If you imposed the map of the fifty-seven member states comprising the Organization of Islamic Cooperation over a map indicating the major humanitarian disasters, you will see what I mean. There’s a very good fit between the two. Muslims are in trouble almost everywhere.

In my own career in the UN, I spent most of my time in Muslim countries without meaning to, including Sudan and Djibouti in Africa, Iran in the Middle East, and Bangladesh and Indonesia in Asia. Obviously, I had some experience of this at the field level.

I said the majority of those receiving humanitarian assistance worldwide are Muslim. In fact, this is a little difficult to establish formally, because most humanitarian agencies — perhaps all — do not keep records of recipients differentiated by religion. Given the sensitivities, the most uncontroversial method of calculation is to establish the number of recipients in Muslim countries, based on their membership, say, of the OIC. For example, according to World Food Program’s provisional calculations of some time ago, some 49 percent of its almost 100 million beneficiaries hailed from OIC countries. Thus, even after allowing for overlapping clientele between WFP and other humanitarian agencies, direct recipients of humanitarian assistance have easily numbered over 50 million Muslims at any given time over the past ten or fifteen years — 50 million. Of course, you might say not all recipients from OIC countries are Muslim, but that discrepancy is more than made up for by the existence of significant Muslim minorities in non-OIC countries.

I thought this was a very interesting fact, that in a time when we talk about the conflict between Islam and the rest of the world, there is this benevolent contact, with literally millions of people involved.

Let us move on to consider Islamic states as contributors. Their contribution is modest, and the humanitarian enterprise that we are talking about today is largely Western
activity. The established members are not very welcome to what they call nontraditional donors, a point we should return to later, perhaps during our discussion. Nor, incidentally, have they encouraged the development of the resources of Islamic trusts and foundations that I mentioned, Islamic waqfs.

I remember giving a presentation at the World Bank and making the point, “Look, instead of providing assistance to the Muslim world, why don’t we help them to develop their enormous trusts that are not really running properly?”

In India, for example, these trusts have been taken away from the mosques, as it were, and handed over to Indian bureaucrats. Now, Indian bureaucrats, like most bureaucrats around the world, do an efficient job, but they are very careful to be extremely conservative and not the risk the money and the valuables that have been entrusted to them. As a consequence, literally billions of dollars’ worth of trust funds and endowments are simply there not doing very much, whereas if they were properly treated, properly invested, they could really make it not necessary for the West to help the Muslim world.

I say this advisedly. These trusts are enormous.

By the way, when I mentioned this to the World Bank, they said, “Oh, so you think we can do a better job than Indian bureaucrats,” to which I had no answer.

Turning now to a definite growth area, in the past decade or so we have seen the growth of Western Muslim aid organizations, such as Islamic Relief USA or Muslim Aid UK and so on. These NGOs are careful to distinguish themselves from fundamentalist organizations and are similar in approach to the traditional Western faith-based organizations. That is to say that while their work is an expression of their religious beliefs, it is humanitarian in the accepted sense — witness of faith through charity, as was described earlier.

Of course, their main focus is on countries with significant Muslim populations, which is neither surprising nor difficult, given the condition of the Muslim parts of the world. Being new, they have not yet developed a constituency broader than immediate humanitarian concerns. They don’t necessarily work through local mosques the way many Christian agencies work through local churches. Thus, their ability to give early warning of disasters, for example, is quite limited.

To summarize, Western Muslim aid organizations are new, small, and focused on Muslim populations in need. The main question about them is whether they have an advantage in working in predominantly Muslim areas in terms of access to people in need or in terms of establishing good relations with the local authorities or generally being more effective in providing aid and succor to Muslims in need.

I have thought about this and I’m not sure. My own view is that we can’t say that they have an automatic advantage. The Muslim world is so divided that just being Muslim is not enough. Also, non-Muslim or secular organizations with good national staff can establish effective relations, too, with the local authorities and the intended beneficiaries.

The main difference, it seems to me, between Western Muslim aid organizations and their Christian and other faith-based counterparts is that the former are much smaller in size — almost ridiculously smaller in size — and in funding. Here in the USA Islamic Relief Organization maintains good relations with U.S. aid, but is not supported by government funds. Its total income is about $80 million per year. Incidentally, I live in Scarsdale. I was sent the education budget for the Scarsdale school system. It’s exactly $80 million per year — not for the rest of the world, just for Scarsdale.
In the same year, the CRS, Catholic Relief Service, had an operating revenue of $919 million, more than ten times larger.

The U.K.-based Islamic Relief Worldwide gets money from the European Commission, and according to its financial report, its total income for 2011 was $120 million, of which $45 million was spent on disasters worldwide. The U.K.’s Muslim Aid showed an income of $9 million.

So very small, just starting. So much for the West-based Muslim organizations.

We know even less about local faith-based NGOs. As I said, Western Muslim NGOs have been a little careful in establishing relations locally, preferring often secular agencies as their partners.

Moving on, generally international humanitarian assistance is only a very small fraction of charitable giving. It always surprises me when international humanitarian assistance is called “big business” in the literature, when it is, in fact, small compared with the need or compared with domestic giving. I hesitate to make these comparisons, but as an academic exercise, I offer it to you: Katrina received 200 times more per death than the Asian tsunami and 1,100 times more than the Pakistani earthquake.

So when you think about giving, there is a distinct difference between giving at home and giving abroad. I wrote somewhere — I didn’t want to repeat it, but knowing that you are such a hardy audience, I can say this — it seems to me that charity begins and almost ends at home. Very little gets out. Very little gets out.

The same with the government. In 2009, out of U.S. government revenues of $4,352 billion, the total for aid was $29 billion, of which humanitarian assistance was $4.4 billion, or exactly one-thousandth of government revenue.

That’s to give you some idea of what we are talking about. The scale of need outstrips the scale of response for all types of givers.

One final point that I want to add is this. We often tend to talk about the humanitarian enterprise as if it’s going to last forever and as if it’s going to remain unchanged. But change is on the way. Many see the current phase of international humanitarian assistance as having peaked and now going into decline. It was Western in funding and organizational culture. It was always very political. It is now being militarized. It is being overtaken by other funding sources, such as remittances as a form of direct assistance.

But most significantly, large parts of the world, for long dependent on Western assistance, are now emerging into a new era of self-sufficiency. We are heading towards a period when middle-income countries will no longer be dependent on international assistance. China is now the second-biggest economy in the world, a donor rather than a recipient. India, too, is a growing economic power. Several other countries are expected to join these rapidly growing countries.

Why I mention this is, although they have grown big and powerful, they still have vast pools of the poor inside their borders. The majority of the poor and the vulnerable still live in these middle-income countries that are no longer dependent on direct international assistance. What they still need is help in influencing domestic policy. They don’t need help of the former kind. They need a different kind of help, for which I think all of us are very poorly prepared. They need help in influencing domestic policy to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits from public spending in the form of pro-poor
advocacy and what UNDP calls upstream advice on such matters as nutrition, health, disaster preparedness, strategic stocks of food and special items and so on.

But it is these very elements of humanitarian assistance that the international humanitarian enterprise — I think including its faith-based partners — has rarely been good at delivering, rarely been good at delivering.

So what are we going to do about it?

I think I’ll stop there. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

DAVID RIEFF: You’ll forgive me for addressing you from here.

I’m slightly puzzled by why I was asked to this meeting, I must confess, because my expertise is in none of the questions that have been addressed. I’ll try to put on my historian’s hat and take up a little bit where we began, with the question of what the role of faith-based relief has been historically, and try to finish with where it’s going.

As Professor Hurd said, if the reigning mythology — I didn’t understand this, but if it is true that the reigning mythology is that faith-based organizations were never important in the past but have since become so, that’s a radical distortion of history. Western humanitarian action has two sources. One is religion. The other is imperialism. Sometimes they went together. Sometimes they came separately. It depends when; it depends where. The missionaries came with the armies in many cases, remained as a de facto form of the colonial apparatus. For example, various orders in Belgian Africa were, in effect, the health service of the Belgian empire in Africa, in Congo and in the Great Lakes. Even today in certain parts of the relief world, you will see the vestiges of this. South Sudan, until at least relatively recently, was an example of this — the Anglican Diocese of Torit, for example, and its actions there.

So, far from humanitarian action coming out of some secular matrix which at some point faith-based relief groups joined — if anything, the opposite is the case. The origins, and not just going back to — Father Gavin mentioned 1538 — not just going back to that period or St. Vincent de Paul or Father de las Casas in Latin America, but in the beginning of what would be recognizable to us in the early twenty-first century as humanitarian action as we know it, development work as we know it — as I say, these have two origins. One is Christianity; the other is empire, European empire and later American empire, as with the American missionaries in China, which was a kind of informal empire, American missionaries in the Middle East.

That’s what happened. If anything, I think historically you could make a stronger case that secular humanitarianism is a twentieth-century invention, largely speaking. It came to the fore largely in the aftermath of the First World War. Professor Martin talked about Hoover and the ARA. The First World War gives rise to a whole series of secular organizations, probably the most important of which is Save the Children. Although these are people with some religious engagements, it is a largely and increasingly secular organization.

The Second World War gives further impetus to this in, for example, Oxfam. Oxfam is an organization founded, quite literally, to deal with the famine in Greece, the war-provoked famine in Greece, in 1943.

Then after that, in the 1970s, with the rise of the so-called French doctors of Doctors Without Borders and all the organizations around that, you have a further move toward, if you like, secular humanitarianism and even, in certain instances — Ireland is a good
example of this — the secularization of previously religious foundations. For example, the Holy Ghost Fathers are critical in African relief. At some point what were the actions of the Holy Ghost Fathers are wrapped into a secular organization, Concern, in Ireland. If you like, there is still a further secularization.

It seems to me that, in some sense, humanitarian action, however much it tries to be nonpolitical, always is going to reflect its times. The high-water mark of secularism in the world probably was the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s, and it shouldn’t be surprising that in that period at least it appeared that the faith-based groups took a kind of backseat. I’m not sure this was ever actually true, but it seemed that way. Maybe it was just a question of who had the best public relations.

I would have to think about that a little bit more than I have. The thing I expected to talk about here I have had to throw out and madly recalibrate now.

So you have faith-based organizations all along. In some ways, they are at the root of things. In some ways, insofar as there is a religious revival politically and culturally speaking, not in the countries that give the aid, but in the countries that receive the aid, it shouldn’t be surprising that again this issue comes to the fore. Indeed, I’m quite surprised at how little attention, if you will, is paid to this. Katherine Marshall, a colleague of Professor Martin’s, has talked very intelligently about how one of the problems with the Millennium Development Goals was the weak quality of the religious input into them, given who they were destined to, which is largely people of faith. Whether this can be gotten over or not is not something I have looked at enough.

Let me be very clear. I think faith-based organizations are as varied as any other group. I don’t think we have even begun to plumb the depths. I don’t particularly want to name organizations. There are groups that do proselytize, both ostensibly and in secret. There are others that do create very effective firewalls between proselytizing and humanitarian work. I think you could make a very good case and you could separate, as it were, the wheat from the chaff on this one pretty easily. These examples, to those people who are in this world, are well known.

Now you have a situation where the world is in flux. As a result, the humanitarian and development element of the world is also in flux — new powers, as Mr. Hyder said, some expectations not met, again to pick up on a point that Mr. Hyder made that I thought was very important. He had a lot to say, and therefore couldn’t dot the i’s and cross the t’s on this one. We have discovered that, far from hunger being most problematic in poor countries, it’s actually most problematic in middle-income countries, something we didn’t expect to find. India, for example, is the ground zero of child malnutrition. The next time you read in a business magazine about “shining India,” remember that 46 percent of Indian children are wasted or stunted or both.

You have a world in flux. You have a development world in flux. The old models, where the European Union and the Bretton Woods institutions and the United States could determine the deal, are gone. Now people go to China. They say, “If you want to impose these conditionalities, we can go to Beijing, and they don’t impose these conditionalities.” They perhaps impose other conditionalities.

There’s an Irish play where, at the end, a man who has been a rather awful husband says to his wife, apologizing — it’s called The Speckled People, in Dublin not that long ago — as he’s dying, he says if he had it to do all over again, he would have made different mistakes, better mistakes.

Perhaps the Chinese are offering the developing world “different mistakes, better mistakes.” You’ll be the judge of that.
But, of course, we are in a great deal of flux. Again to take up Mr. Hyder’s point, we don’t know what these new Islamic relief agencies are going to become. We don’t know, if you like, whether the zakat model will prevail or whether the other possibilities that he very well outlined will prevail. If the zakat model prevails, then it can’t be humanitarianism in any sense that we have understood it, because that will simply be what is called in Western relief work a solidarity organization — that is to say, not on the basis of neutrality and need, but on the basis of political and cultural and sometimes ethnic solidarity.

That’s fine. The Norwegian People’s Aid did that in South Sudan for many years. They even used to run ads — I’m sure you remember this — in Norwegian newspapers that said, “We’re not neutral. We support the SPLA.” There is that tradition. It has been a minority tradition in the relief world, but it’s certainly a tradition of some importance.

But right now, just as we don’t really understand what the global economy is going to be like — we know certain things. Some things have turned out as we expected. Some things have been very different, as with extreme poverty in middle-income countries, which was not the expectation either of the Marxist or of the Rostow version of the creed of modernization and development. We’re not clear. In that world, everybody has to do some rethinking, the secular agencies — the Doctors Without Borders, the Oxfams, the International Rescue Committees — are going to have to do a lot of rethinking. And — dare I say it? — so are the faith-based agencies.

I’ll stop there and hope that this hasn’t been too far off topic.

[Applause]

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: Thank you to everyone. I’m just going to take a couple of minutes to pose a couple of questions of the panelists and then we’ll open it up to the audience.

Just as a reminder, you have little cards and pencils. If you do have a question, please feel free to write it down and submit it to us.

This is directed, I guess, at all of our panelists, but perhaps more so to David Rieff, given some of the writing that you have done on this topic. I want to raise the question of Libya. My sense is that a lot of politics involving the use of force today takes place under the heading of humanitarianism. I’m wondering if you would care to comment on how we should view this intervention, how the justifications for it resonate or don’t resonate with some of the work that you guys do. What were the views of the organizations with which you have been affiliated on this very contentious “humanitarian” intervention?

DAVID RIEFF: I bitterly opposed the intervention in Libya. I thought it was absolute folly. I do rather think that the events in Mali and in southern Algeria bear out my anxieties.

I teach in the fall at Sciences Po in Paris. The course I normally teach there, apart from supervising some master’s theses, is a course on the history, not of humanitarian action, but humanitarian intervention, humanitarian military intervention. There is a faction, a part, of the “Humanitarian International” — to use the phrase of the English development expert, Alex de Waal — which is interventionist, just as there’s an element of the UN system that is ordered that way. This is reflected in the Responsibility to Protect doctrine and in the human rights movement.

It’s perfectly understandable. Madame Ogata, one of the previous high commissioners from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, from UNHCR, famously
said in 1994 in Rwanda, “There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems.” Therefore, it’s understandable that people want to get at the political root of it.

I think it’s a grave error. I think what has happened is the co-optation of certainly needs-based and impartial and neutral aid in the interests of some larger policy of regime change. The intentions behind that regime change may be excellent or they may be questionable. Some of you, I’m sure, will feel one and some, the other. But I don’t actually think that Médecins Sans Frontières or Catholic Relief Services is best used as giving a moral warrant to the Fifth Fleet.

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: Thanks.

The next question I have is a little bit more for Father Gavin and Professor Martín. I read recently in The Washington Post that the U.S. is giving aid, through USAID and other organizations, to Syrians living in rebel-held areas in northern Syria, but they are prohibited from advertising this at all in order to prevent reprisals.

I’m wondering how much this politicization also inflects faith-based organizations and faith-based aid, such that this aid has to be undertaken basically secretly or hiding its origins so that donors don’t know who is giving it, for any number of different reasons.

SUSAN MARTIN: I think this is actually part of a larger problem that I was alluding to in my remarks. The interests of donors do very much dictate a lot of humanitarian action. It can be the interests of government and it can be the interests of the public. It happens from both directions.

I think what we have seen is increasingly a tension within government itself with regard to how much visibility to give to its humanitarian action. One of the things about the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and, to some extent, the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration is that things like sanctions don’t apply to the aid that USAID, through these offices, will provide in the context of humanitarian crises. But there is always a concern with regard to what that means. USAID has flip-flopped over the years from times of saying, “Okay, we’re doing this. You go off and do your work. We’re pretty hands-off. If you can get in and do what you need to do, that’s great. You don’t have to acknowledge that we have provided that aid. Just go and do it,” to other times when it has said, “You have to go in there with big signs saying ‘This is U.S. government funding’ on them, and that has to be plastered over everything that you are doing.”

There are implications in both respects to operating in the context where the donor is, in effect, either a party to the conflict — the situation in Libya, I think, was nothing in comparison to the problems in Iraq and Afghanistan for humanitarian organizations operating under the umbrella of the U.S. funding, in terms of what that does for your neutrality, both the appearance and reality of it.

So there are a lot of problems. But not coming under that umbrella has implications of its own, including the security implications of operating in a context in which operating on your own can be quite dangerous.

I think every NGO now has to make that decision. Do you accept government funding? Do you accept the rules under which governments require your actions to take place? What is the implication of that in terms of your relationship with your beneficiaries or with the government of the country in which you’re operating? It’s a terrible dilemma that almost all humanitarian organizations have to face.

KENNETH GAVIN: Certainly in our case — and we are a modest-size organization,
that’s for sure — it’s safe to say that what we try to do is try not to follow the dollar. For example, when we move to Population, Refugee, and Migration in the State Department, when we ask for funding from them — and they are pretty good about this — we basically say, “We intend to do this project,” and they will say, “We’ll buy that,” or, “We won’t buy it.”

But we try to lead them as they try to lead us, I presume. I’m not foolish enough to think that there aren’t geopolitical interests, for example, in South Sudan. We have been supported in the work we have done in education by the U.S. State Department quite significantly. It has really made a difference, I believe. But it’s basically led by our desire to make a difference in education. We have been with South Sudanese refugees for at least a dozen years or more, when they were in northern Uganda. We have educated a lot of teachers. As we have come back to South Sudan, the State Department has allowed us to set up schools throughout that border area between Uganda and South Sudan and make a difference in education that could last for a considerable amount of time.

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: Thank you. Can I just return to something that you spoke about, Father Gavin, which was this notion of accompaniment? You talked a little bit about your organization’s work in multi-faith contexts and in working with people from other traditions and the kind of ethos of respect for those other traditions that is so integral to your mission and your work.

I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about what you mean by this. The phrase “accompaniment” — I know you have used it in the past, in interviews I read of yours — is very evocative and very interesting for those of us who think about multi-faith or interfaith work. I wonder if you would care to expound on that just a little bit.

KENNETH GAVIN: A couple of years ago, a programs director from a major funder was interested in an educational project that we had in eastern Africa. I had never met the man before. When I met him, I said to him, “Where do you know JRS from?”

He said, “When I was in eastern Africa, Nairobi, I met them and I was very impressed by them.”

I said, “Why were you impressed by them?”

He said, “Because they’re close to the people.”

In some ways, that’s what I like to hear about us. When people say JRS is close to the people, it means that we’re doing our job of accompaniment well.

In another instance, in Aceh after the tsunami, I went to a coastal town that was absolutely destroyed. The only thing that had been repaired was the mosque in the town. People said, “JRS is different than other organizations who come with their clipboards and do their questionnaires, and then they get back into their Land Rovers and we never see them again.”

That’s not to say that doesn’t happen to us, too, at times. But in point of fact, what they said was, “JRS stays here.”

I’m looking at this coastal town that is destroyed. Literally, it is all rubble, aside from the mosque. I said, “Where do they stay?” And they pointed to a little REI pup tent that was probably a two-person pup tent. They said, “They stay there.”

As a matter of fact, our staff members who stay there are Muslim staff members, who were working with the Muslim population itself.

But it is that sense of being close to the people, of remaining with the people, of coming to know their hopes and their dreams, their losses and their frustrations. I think what we have learned in JRS is that just simply giving people provisions, giving people all the
things that they need in order to survive, is not enough. What people need is something far deeper than that, something that has deeper spiritual value in terms of self-worth, of self-determination, of empowerment. I think we decide to do that by the sense of accompaniment and being very close to people.

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: Thank you.

I now have a very long and interesting list of questions from the audience. I'm going to direct to the first one to Mr. Hyder.

You mentioned British and American Muslim aid organizations. The question is, are there similar, perhaps wealthier Muslim aid organizations in Saudi Arabia or in the Gulf states that are providing aid on a larger scale?

MASOOD HYDER: When I think of Saudi Arabia, their most consistent form of foreign assistance has been to the madrasa system throughout the world. This is something that is really very striking. In the Muslim world, they are very good at doing separate things with separate people. From time to time, Saudi Arabia has given enormous amounts of money. For example, during the world food price crisis of 2008, they gave, I think, $500 million to the BFB — $500 million, very generous.

It has done similar acts of assistance to UN organizations in an ad hoc manner.

If you think about their consistent help, I can only think of the kind of systematic help they have provided to that form of educational system that has come back to bite us all.

I'm not very sure about secular humanitarian aid agencies. I have not read in the literature or come across them in the field. There could well be, but I'm not aware of it. I don't have complete knowledge of this topic.

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: Several of our questions circle around a similar theme that I want to make sure to get to, which is this very porous wall that we have tried to identify between proselytizing and aid. There's a lot of curiosity in our audience about whether there might be some best practices that have been identified to keep separate these two domains of proselytizing, on the one hand, and providing humanitarian relief, on the other. If there are best practices, could you explain and give any examples that come to mind of where this has become a problem and how it has been resolved, or any illustrations of this issue and how it has been negotiated?

SUSAN MARTIN: JRS does a great job of keeping that firewall.

KENNETH GAVIN: I think that's true, but it's so much a part of us to say that respecting religious traditions is so important for us. It's not making an exception in any way, but it's so much a part of how we see our approach to our work that we reverence and cherish the religious tradition of other folks. It's a whole different category, I think, of looking at how you see your faith impinging upon the reality of faith-based humanitarian aid. Clearly, there are faith-based organizations that say that proselytizing is the core of who they are. I don't think that's how we preach God's love and mercy.

SUSAN MARTIN: I would say that it's probably amongst the evangelical Protestant groups that the issue most often comes up. Some of the ones who have been involved for a long time in humanitarian relief physically separate their humanitarian emergency offices from the remainder of their usual development work which has a proselytizing focus to it, sometimes to the point of actually being in separate locations, so that it's easier for the humanitarian part of the agency to function without reference to the proselytizing mission.
But it can be very, very difficult for them. The root of why they are doing this is because of their religious mission. I think there aren’t a lot of good practices. But the field itself has evolved a lot, for better or worse, towards accountability structures, professionalization, standards. There are standards in terms of how you provide a number of calories of food, how many latrines, all of these types of standards for the agencies that have signed on to those. That in and of itself has some impact in terms of what they are doing, because they are operating, in some respects, along very regimented standards in terms of what happens in a humanitarian situation — as I said, for better or worse, because sometimes innovative ideas don’t get to rise up to the top because of the method of professionalization that has happened. But on the other hand, it can sometimes keep really bad practices from coming out because of the accountability standards.

**MASOOD HYDER:** I was interested in an associated issue. When you are close to people in those dire circumstances, when you are trying to help them, is there not a point where it becomes very difficult to not wake them up to their rights, to say, “You are like this, not just because God willed you to be suffering, but because you have a rotten government that is not giving you your dues.”

The danger there is that if you say this too prematurely, you do more harm than good. It’s a very great responsibility, as soon as you are associated with people in trouble, to choose your words carefully and not give them hopes that you cannot satisfy. That’s a very real dilemma. I don’t know how you resolve that, especially if you are getting deliberately close to them, accompanying them. How can they accompany you without some of your values rubbing off on them? Then what happens after that?

**KENNETH GAVIN:** The whole issue of advocacy, which is a key notion for JRS, is sometimes a very difficult one. It’s particularly difficult, for example, in places like Sri Lanka, where we have teams in the field, on the ground. If we said what we know, our teams would be in serious danger. That happens in any number of places throughout the world.

So it’s a tension. What we normally do is back-channel information to other organizations, like Human Rights Watch and folks like that, who can use this in a careful way that does not trace its way back.

But the dilemma is there, and I understand it.

**DAVID RIEFF:** If I may inject a note of cynicism here, victims are not necessarily innocent. To be a victim doesn’t make you a good person. It just makes you a victim. Today in Rwanda, the victimizers of day one were the victims of day thirty. The stuff is a lot less of the morality play that one likes in fundraising appeals to present it as being.

The other thing is, Father Gavin talks about back-channel stuff, and I have even done a bit of that myself when I was a consultant for relief agencies — secular ones, I should quickly say. It’s working less and less well. One of the many political changes in the last fifteen years is the reemergence of the strong state in the global South, if I can put it in a slightly formulaic way. The way in which the Sri Lankan government, to take your example, basically made it clear to all the relief NGOs that if they didn’t toe the line, they were out — a relief is not a human rights agency. Human rights groups have to be purists. Relief agencies — if they are not going to be on the ground, why don’t they just become human rights agencies or right op-ed pieces or whatever? You have to actually be there. And if you have to be there, unless you are going to have a blue-flag military intervention everywhere, you are going to have to do what the people with the guns tell you to do. At least you’re going to have to seem like you’re doing what they tell you to do. Let’s put it
ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: I think we have time for one more question here before we wrap up. This is for Father Gavin or anyone else who wants to respond. Even if you do accept and help people of all religious faiths, do you feel having a Catholic name in a Muslim country puts extra stress or discomfort on an already stressed population? Are there initiatives in place to promote the fact that all are welcome?

KENNETH GAVIN: I suppose that’s possible. What do we try to do? The interreligious dialogue, so to speak, that we have is an interreligious dialogue of action. Our dialogue, for example, with the Muslim refugees we work with is not a dialogue of prayer. It's not a dialogue of theological discussion, at this point certainly. It's really a dialogue of action. The surprising part about that is that in many places where we work, it does become a dialogue, a partnership, where we feel like we are working together. We also recognize and esteem our own faith perspectives that are not trying to impose a reality one upon the other.

That’s, I think, where we have found a way of proceeding.

Does that work in a highly fundamentalist Muslim population? Perhaps not. I think that would be much more difficult.

SUSAN MARTIN: I’ll just add one point on both of these last discussions. Secular humanitarian organizations run into the same problem. It came up a little bit. I work a lot on issues related to women who are refugees or displaced. Secular organizations are constantly facing the issue of what you say about women’s rights in the context of delivering — I’m a proponent of women being very strongly involved in participating in decisions on aid. One often hears in organizations that take that position that you are not being culturally appropriate in certain contexts. Then it always becomes, well, whose culture, and where do those decisions come from, et cetera, et cetera?

But that is, in effect, proselytizing, even if it’s on a set of what we may consider to be universal human rights standards, but it’s not necessarily going to be taken by the local population in that same way. So I think all humanitarians face very often this issue: To what extent are your values going to determine the way in which you provide relief and assistance? Is relief the endpoint of what you are doing or is it to provide an environment in which, hopefully, that relief won’t be needed in the future? Which gets us into both the humanitarian intervention, on the one side, but also the difficulties very often of transitioning to a development context in which you are addressing some of the underlying vulnerabilities that make people victims in these situations.

So it’s a universal problem.

ELIZABETH SHAKMAN HURD: I think I’m going to let that be the last word. It was a very articulate conclusion.

Thank you so much to all of our panelists.

I’ll turn it over to Brendan Cahill now to wrap up the session.

BRENDAN CAHILL: My name is Brendan Cahill. I’m the Director of the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs.

First of all, I would like to thank Professor Hurd for moderating this, our panelists, Jim McCartin, and Patricia Bellucci at the Center.
One of the interesting little facts at Fordham is that the Center on Religion and Culture was founded in 2004 and our Institute was founded in 2001. We both are the only two centers that report directly to the president. The reason for that, at least for us, was so that we could be neutral, impartial, and independent. Now here we are having a conversation about the role of faith-based organizations, and it sort of comes back again, Jim.

I think it’s interesting to look at humanitarianism and religion in general. We want to put them in a neat little box, and as you could see in the conversations tonight, they don’t fit in a little box. When you ask one question, they always spill on into other things. These conversations can go on for hours and years and decades and millennia. I can only hope that we do this on a regular basis and examine where we have been and where we’re going and how we might have better solutions that are based — as Ken said, our religious values are human values. If we stick to those core human values, we can get a little bit further.

Thank you very much. Thank you for coming. Come again.

[Applause]