



Overview



Day 1 - Opening & Keynote Summary

The Humanitarian Leadership Conference 2025 opened with a powerful welcome by Performance Poet **Dana Dejadi**, who set the tone with a poetic land acknowledgment and reflection on global humanitarian crises. **Dr. Ghassan Elkahlout**, Director of the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS), emphasised the urgent need to redefine humanitarian leadership amid polycrises and highlighted the role of Qatar and the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies in bridging academic and field-based humanitarian work. **Professor Simon Tormey**, Executive Dean of Arts and Education at Deakin University, called attention to the responsibility of giving voice to marginalised communities and reflected on the importance

of leadership in moments of crises. Associate **Professor Mary Ana McGlasson**, Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, underscored the need for action over rhetoric, inviting participants to move beyond sectoral talking points and build new systems of collaboration.

Her Excellency Mrs. Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al-Misnad, Minister of State for International Cooperation, State of Qatar, delivered the keynote, calling for international solidarity, accountability, and systemic reform in humanitarian response. She stressed the need for flexible, data-driven mechanisms and reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to relief efforts in Gaza, Sudan, and beyond.

Plenary Panel

Moderated by **Cheyenne Ellis** (Deputy Director, Humanitarian Response, Clinton Foundation), this session convened **Pilar Pacheco** (Senior Program Officer, Emergency Response, Global Development Division, Gates Foundation), **Maya Ghosn Bichara** (Operating Partner, Bridge Builders Collaborative), and **Abdulla Al-Fehani** (Assistant Executive Director Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy, Qatar)

The plenary panel focused on the critical importance of cross-sector partnerships in addressing global humanitarian challenges. Panellists discussed how complex crises demand collaboration between the public, private, and civil sectors, with each bringing its own resources and expertise. **Cheyenne Ellis**, the moderator, emphasised that no single organisation or sector can solve these

problems alone, and instead, a collective approach is necessary to create more effective and sustainable solutions. She highlighted Clinton Global Initiative's role in facilitating partnerships and driving dialogue between different sectors, ensuring that all stakeholders work together towards common goals. The conversation also addressed the evolution of philanthropy in humanitarian aid.





Plenary Panel: Clinton Global Initiative Panel

Maya Ghosn Bichara spoke about the shift from short-term, project-based funding to more flexible, long-term support. She stressed that philanthropy should focus on building trust with organisations on the ground, giving them the flexibility to adapt and respond to rapidly changing crises. **Pilar Pacheco** echoed this sentiment, noting that large philanthropic organisations, such as the Gates Foundation, rely heavily on their partners for on-the-ground impact. She discussed how the Foundation is increasingly working to connect with local actors and co-create solutions rather than dictating terms from the top down. Both emphasised that philanthropy must evolve beyond traditional funding models to become more responsive and trust-based.

Leadership in the humanitarian and philanthropic sectors was another key topic. Panellists emphasised the importance of qualities such as **systems thinking**, **collaboration**, and the ability to foster collective impact. Maya Ghosn Bichara noted that effective leadership requires the ability to think beyond one's own organisational boundaries and to prioritise collective impact over individual success. She also highlighted the importance of **mentor and sponsor roles in developing diverse leadership**, particularly for women and marginalised groups. Pilar Pacheco echoed these points, emphasising the need for leadership to be more inclusive, particularly in terms of gender equity. Both spoke about the need to empower women leaders and ensure that women-led

organisations are supported in their efforts to address global challenges. The discussion also touched on the growing role of the Middle East and North Africa in global humanitarian efforts.

Abdulla Al-Fehani discussed how the region is becoming increasingly influential in shaping global aid. He highlighted the importance of **integrating regional needs and cultural perspectives** into the broader humanitarian dialogue. He noted that this shift is not just about funding but about taking a more active role in leading and shaping the humanitarian agenda. Both Maya Ghosn Bichara and Pilar Pacheco expressed optimism about the region's growing role, particularly in terms of leadership and partnerships.

Innovation and flexibility were also key themes of the discussion. The panellists discussed the need for creative, out-of-the-box solutions to address the humanitarian crises of today. Abdulla Al-Fehani emphasised the need for partnerships that bring in innovative ideas and solutions, particularly in the face of unforeseen crises. He noted that Qatar Foundation for Development (QFFD) is focused on economic development and aid, ensuring that humanitarian responses are not just about providing immediate relief but also about **long-term sustainability**. Maya Ghosn Bichara also underscored the need for more agile, flexible approaches, particularly when responding to humanitarian crises where needs change rapidly. The panellists agreed that collaboration should take precedence over



Plenary Panel: Clinton Global Initiative Panel

competition, and working together allows organisations to create more impactful and sustainable solutions.

Finally, the conversation turned to trust and transparency in humanitarian partnerships. Pilar Pacheco spoke about the importance of trust-based partnerships, emphasising that effective collaborations are built on **open communication, mutual respect, and shared goals**. She shared how the Gates Foundation has worked to build stronger partnerships by being more flexible and inclusive in its approach, regularly checking in with partners to see what is working and where adjustments are needed.

Maya Ghosn Bichara added that trust-based philanthropy should also involve participatory grantmaking, where organisations on the

Both emphasised the need for more transparent data collection and impact measurement, calling for a shift toward bottom-up monitoring and evaluation (M&E) where the receiving organisations define success, rather than being dictated by funders. The panel concluded with reflections on the future of leadership in humanitarian work.

Cheyenne Ellis wrapped up by stressing the need for **continuous innovation, flexibility, and collaboration**. Panellists agreed that the future of humanitarian aid lies in **inclusive, trust-based partnerships** that can effectively address global challenges and create lasting impact. They encouraged all present to take a more holistic and collective approach to leadership, ensuring that collaboration remains at the heart of all humanitarian efforts.





Plenary Panel



"At CGI, our core is partnership building. We're not about directly running projects; instead, we focus on implementing how to build coalitions and spur dialogue."

Cheyenne Ellis

Deputy Director, Humanitarian Response, Clinton Foundation

"The Gates Foundation couldn't achieve its global impact without partners. We see the importance of nurturing relationships and being flexible in our approach to grant making."

Pilar Pacheco

Senior Program Officer, Emergency Response, Global Development Division,
Gates Foundation



"Philanthropy needs to rethink the archaic models of giving. Trust-based philanthropy, giving broader support with longer-term perspectives, is crucial, especially in humanitarian crises."

Maya Ghosn Bichara

Operating Partner, Bridge Builders Collaborative

"In humanitarian responses, we're always seeking improvement. Every partnership is an opportunity to innovate and think outside the box to better serve communities."

Abdulla Al-Fehani

Assistant Executive Director,
Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy





Critical Action Steps



Establish cross-sector partnerships to address complex global humanitarian challenges effectively.



Shift towards trust-based philanthropy, prioritising long-term, flexible support for lasting impact.



Focus on empowering women leaders and ensuring gender equity in all humanitarian efforts.



Adopt innovative and adaptable approaches to respond to rapidly evolving humanitarian crises.



Strengthen collaboration with local actors to ensure humanitarian efforts are relevant and effective.



Foster transparency and trust through open communication and alignment of goals in partnerships.