



Plenary Event

Keynote Presentation - Dr Tammam Aloudat, CEO, The New Humanitarian



Dr. Tammam Aloudat, CEO of The New Humanitarian, delivered a keynote presentation that critically examined the current state of the humanitarian sector and its systemic failures. Drawing on over 20 years of experience, Dr. Aloudat discussed the sector's ongoing struggles, which have only been **exacerbated by recent cuts in humanitarian aid**, particularly under the US administration. He criticised the repeated calls for reform within the sector, which, in his view, offer no real solutions and fail to address the **core issues**. He argued that the sector's emphasis on prioritisation and localisation, though well-intentioned, often masks a deeper problem: **the ongoing delegating of life-and-death decisions to civil society** while minimising the resources allocated to those on the frontlines.

Dr. Aloudat highlighted the delusions that continue to plague the sector, including the belief that everything was functioning well until the aid cuts and the assumption that the **system's collapse** is a recent development. He pointed out that many crises, such as those in Sudan, Syria, and Palestine, are not new but have been exacerbated by a failure to address the root causes, such as **capitalist exploitation and military intervention**. Furthermore, he stressed that humanitarianism, as it exists today, is deeply intertwined with colonial and capitalist histories, which fundamentally limits its effectiveness in addressing global crises.

Addressing the lack of funding, Dr. Aloudat argued that the issue is not the scarcity of resources, but the **political and economic systems that prioritise military spending** over humanitarian aid. He rejected the idea that the survival of the current system would ensure the survival of the people it is meant to

help, emphasising that the humanitarian sector must break free from its reliance on donors who are also complicit in perpetuating the very crises it seeks to address.

In closing, Dr. Aloudat called for a radical shift in humanitarian leadership. He proposed the creation of a new humanitarian community - one that is **locally led, politically engaged, and resistant to the hegemonic forces** of global power. This new approach, he argued, should focus on solidarity, grassroots organising, and systemic change, rather than simply striving to sustain the existing system. His vision calls for a decolonised, de-extracted humanitarianism that aligns itself with broader movements for social, economic, and environmental justice. Dr. Aloudat's speech set the stage for a conversation on what the future of humanitarianism must look like if it is to remain relevant and effective in a rapidly changing world.



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Transformational Leadership in a Multipolar World

The panel, moderated by Associate Professor **Mary Ana McGlasson** (Director, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership), delved into the evolving landscape of humanitarian leadership amidst a multipolar world with **Dr Sisira Madurapperuma** (Director, Preparedness and Climate Action, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center), **Dr Aiham Al Sukhni** (Head, International Relations Section, Qatar Red Crescent), **Themrise Khan** (Independent Development Professional) and **Gopinath Payaril** (Founder, The Blue Yonder).

The discussion highlighted the need for a reimagined humanitarian system that challenges old power structures and embraces new partnerships. **Dr. Sisira Madurapperuma** shared insights from his work in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in light of recent US funding cuts. He emphasised that while funding from the Global North has been crucial, the future of humanitarianism lies in harnessing the resources and influence of

emerging economies like China, India, and Southeast Asian countries. Dr. Madurapperuma called for a shift in focus toward regional cooperation and the strategic use of intergovernmental organisations to create more sustainable funding solutions, urging nations in the Global South to lead the way.

Dr. Aiham Al Sukhni echoed these sentiments, acknowledging the opportunities presented by





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a multipolar world while also highlighting the risks of politicisation. He stressed that the traditional aid system, dominated by Western powers, is no longer sufficient or effective. Dr. Al Sukhni advocated for a "**positioned influence**" approach, where humanitarian organisations in the Middle East, like Qatar Red Crescent, leverage their resources and cultural context to drive change, focusing on **operational autonomy, negotiation skills, and humanitarian diplomacy**. He argued that humanitarian organisations need to break from traditional systems and embrace more dynamic and flexible approaches.

Themrise Khan offered a fresh perspective on leadership, emphasising the need to decouple leadership from power. She proposed that instead of creating a new system, there should be a focus on reviving and empowering existing national systems that have long been suppressed by international aid frameworks. Khan highlighted the importance of **national self-sufficiency**, using the example of Pakistan's internal humanitarian efforts during the 2018 floods, where local communities took charge of disaster relief without international aid. She stressed that true leadership comes from within communities, and the international system should support and amplify local efforts rather than impose top-down solutions.

Gopinath Payaril drew on his unique background in disaster management and tourism to present a novel approach to

humanitarian aid. He argued for a **symbiotic partnership** between the tourism sector and humanitarian organisations, emphasising that the tourism industry, with its vast resources, is well-positioned to contribute to disaster resilience. Payaril shared how his organisation successfully supported Kerala's flood recovery by **leveraging local tourism networks**, illustrating that the tourism industry can play a pivotal role in disaster relief without relying solely on charitable donations.





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"Leadership shouldn't be about individuals. It should be about creating a system that can withstand crisis after crisis and not break down."

Ass/Prof. Mary Ana McGlasson

Director, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership

"It is high time for us to use our negotiation power, our local knowledge, and our collective strength to shape the future of disaster response and resilience within our own communities."

Dr Sisira Madurapperuma

Director, Preparedness and Climate Action, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center



"Humanitarian diplomacy is now more than ever a must; engagement with governments is essential for effective humanitarian work."

Dr Aiham Al Sukhni

Head, International Relations Section, Qatar Red Crescent

"Leadership should not be about individuals; it should be about creating systems that withstand crisis after crisis."

Themrise Khan

Independent Development Professional



"The tourism industry must invest in creating climate-resilient destinations, not just for charity, but as a sustainable business model."

Gopinath Payaril

Founder, The Blue Yonder





Critical Action Steps



Foster regional partnerships and engage emerging economies in global humanitarian efforts.



Strengthen negotiation and diplomatic skills to increase operational autonomy and influence in humanitarian governance.



Revive and empower national systems, and local communities for long-term disaster resilience.



Cultivate symbiotic partnerships between humanitarian organisations and the tourism sector to create sustainable funding streams.



Move beyond traditional aid models and embrace dynamic, flexible approaches tailored to the local context.