

Aid consortium rolls out new edition of UN-backed guide for humanitarian workers



Valerie Amos

14 April 2011 – The latest edition of the United Nations-backed handbook setting out universal standards for ensuring effective and accountable humanitarian work made its debut today with a new chapter on protection principles as well as information on emerging issues such as climate change and civil-military relations.

The Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response is produced by the Sphere Project, a consortium of humanitarian actors that includes some of the biggest and oldest organizations and agencies in the field.

“The Sphere Standards are the benchmark for ensuring humane and fair humanitarian assistance to people in need around the world,” Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said at the launch in New York.

“I hope that all organizations that provide humanitarian aid will become familiar with the standards and use them. This will improve the quality of humanitarian assistance to survivors of disasters and conflicts,” she stated.

More than 650 experts from some 300 organizations in about 20 countries, including from the relevant UN agencies, participated in the process of revising the handbook.

The resulting 2011 edition incorporates a new chapter on protection principles, which considers the protection and safety of populations affected by disaster or armed conflict as an integral part of humanitarian response.

Also, the humanitarian charter portion of the handbook has been completely re-written for the new edition to offer clearer language on the core principles that should govern humanitarian action.

This year's guide also addresses emerging issues such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, early recovery of services and livelihoods, cash transfers and civil-military relations, and places high priority on understanding and supporting local responses to disasters as well as reinforcing the capacity of local actors.

Since its first edition in 1998, the Sphere Handbook has been translated into more than 40 languages, becoming the most widely-known and internationally-recognized set of standards for humanitarian response.

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