




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Sociology and Community Development***Effectiveness of the legal framework for humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts: The aggression against Lebanon as a case study**

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the international legal framework in regulating and delivering humanitarian aid during armed conflicts, primarily focusing on Israel's recent aggression against Lebanon as a case study. Although international humanitarian laws stipulate the protection of civilians and alleviating their suffering, the practical implementation of these laws faces numerous challenges. These challenges encompass political and security obstacles, the refusal of some parties to cooperate with humanitarian organizations, and the exploitation of aid as a means to achieve political or military objectives, which negatively affects the neutrality and independence of humanitarian aids. The research is limited to studying the case of the recent Israeli aggression on Lebanon, which may affect the possibility of generalizing the results to other contexts. The researchers employed a descriptive, analytical, and critical approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework regulating humanitarian aid during armed conflicts. The analysis manifested that obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian laws, potentially leading the parties concerned to be held accountable for international criminal responsibility. Based on these findings, the research recommends activating the role of international bodies in holding accountable those who impede the delivery of humanitarian aid and calls for the promulgation of a comprehensive international agreement to regulate this field. Additionally, the research advocates for the establishment of clear mechanisms to ensure the neutrality and independence of humanitarian aid and to facilitate its access to those in need.

KEYWORDS: Aggression, Armed Conflicts, Humanitarian Aid, International humanitarian laws, Lebanon

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Introduction

Armed conflict constitutes one of the most complex crises impacting the lives of civilians and States' infrastructure. These repercussions of such crises are evident in contemporary warfare, where hostilities inflict severe harm on civilians, and devastate essential facilities such as hospitals, schools, and transportation networks. In these circumstances, the provision of humanitarian assistance becomes imperative, aiming to meet basic needs such as food, water, health care, and shelter for those affected by these conflicts. However, humanitarian aid delivery operations face many obstacles, including legal, political, and logistical challenges, which hinder their effective access for people in need.

International humanitarian laws play a vital role in regulating humanitarian assistance. It establishes a legal framework that obligates conflicting parties to provide aid in accordance with the principles of neutrality, humanity, independence, and non-discrimination, while respecting States' sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. (Slim, 2015) Despite this framework that governs humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts, its implementation faces significant challenges. These challenges include security tensions, the exploitation of aid for political or military purposes, as well as political interference and the politicization of aid. These difficulties are further compounded by economic and bureaucratic constraints that impede timely access to humanitarian aids. Additionally, the lack of effective measures that prevent parties from obstructing aid access further exacerbates this issue. (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016 & Concern Worldwide, n.d.)

Lebanon's ongoing armed conflict serves as a contemporary example of the challenges facing humanitarian operations, with civilians experiencing severe difficulties in obtaining support due to obstacles resulting from military operations and political factors. In October 2024, Israel violated the UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which was unanimously adopted on August 11, 2006, to address the Lebanese-Israeli conflict and ceasefire. Israel escalated large-scale military attacks on the Lebanese territory, following the killing of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in an airstrike. This escalation led to a deepening humanitarian crisis, resulting in the death and injuring of thousands of civilians, the disruption of basic services, substantial damage to critical infrastructure, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people within a matter of days. The deteriorating political and economic conditions in Lebanon have further complicated the situation, as the country suffers from a severe economic crisis that has caused a decline in essential services and restricted the access to essential supplies. (World Bank, 2023) In response to this crisis, the United Nations and several humanitarian organizations have launched urgent appeals to secure funding and provide emergency assistance to affected populations, calling for an immediate ceasefire and adherence to international humanitarian law to protect civilians and ensure effective humanitarian access. (International Organization for Migration, 2024 & McKernan, 2024)

This research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the international legal framework governing the provision of humanitarian aid during armed conflicts, focusing on the Israeli recent aggression against Lebanon as a case study. The researcher relied on an analysis of literature and previous studies to best explore the legal rules governing humanitarian aid operations during armed conflicts, highlighting obstacles and challenges to the implementation of these principles in such cases. Through this comprehensive analysis, the researcher aims to provide effective recommendations so as to improve the humanitarian aid system and develop legal mechanisms that ensure the effective delivery of these aids and facilitate its access for people in need.

This research revolves around the following questions:

1. What is the legal framework governing the provision of humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts in accordance with international humanitarian laws?
2. What are the main challenges facing humanitarian organizations in implementing these rules, especially in the ongoing Lebanon's conflict?
3. How can the effectiveness of the legal framework for humanitarian assistance be enhanced in the face of contemporary crises?

Materials and Methods

This research adopted the descriptive analytical critical approach, providing an accurate and detailed description of humanitarian aid issues during armed conflicts utilizing the on-going Israeli aggression against Lebanon

as a case study. The researcher explored relevant information on this field, and presented it in a structured and understandable manner, while also interpreting the legal rules contained in international agreements and instruments. The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of such aids in achieving their intended goals.

To support the analysis and interpretation process and provide a comprehensive overview of the legal framework governing humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts, this research utilized primary sources directly linked to the subject of humanitarian assistance in the context of armed conflicts, such as specialized books that offer in-depth and reliable information. It also used secondary sources such as researches published in international journals, as well as international conventions and documents that address this subject matter.

To ensure constant awareness of the latest developments in the field of humanitarian assistance, academic databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate were used to access high-quality, up-to-date research on the topic. Additionally, reports from international governmental and non-governmental organizations are employed to illustrate the implementation of humanitarian legal rules and to assess the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance during armed conflicts in Lebanon. Finally, the research proposes realistic recommendations for improving the legal framework of humanitarian assistance in future conflicts.

Literature Review

Saaida (2023) analyzed the extent of protecting civilians under international humanitarian law, specifically focusing on the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Protection of Civilians in Time of War of 1949, Additional Protocol I on the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts of 1977, and Additional Protocol II on the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts of 1977. The researcher recommends the development of a new set of laws for the protection of innocent civilians during armed conflict.

Alameldeen (2021) on his part, addressed the main challenges facing humanitarian organizations in adhering to the principles of international humanitarian law particularly regarding the maintenance of their independence and neutrality in humanitarian operations, These challenges may arise due to external pressures such as demands from donor countries, political and security agendas, as well as internal pressures from armed actors, and the overlapping military and humanitarian efforts. He emphasized in this study that adherence to these principles have become more important than ever in contemporary humanitarian contexts.

Similarly, Muguruza (2018) addressed the key challenges to the humanitarian action, including increased violence and armed conflict, difficulties in securing adequate funding for humanitarian organizations, risks associated with corruption and poor transparency, as well as overlapping humanitarian and development crises, and weak coordination among humanitarian agencies. To overcome these challenges, the researcher advocates for a coordinated and effective response from the international community and strong political will from donor governments and affected countries.

In the same respect, Stoddard et al. (2017) investigated the impact of insecurity and violence in conflict zones on the capacity of humanitarian aid organizations to reach people in need. The investigation offered a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between high rates of casualty among aid workers and the significant restrictions imposed on humanitarian operations. These factors significantly impede the ability of affected population to access humanitarian assistance effectively in time of war.

Radivojević & Raičević (2021) further addressed the challenges that humanitarian organizations face in maintaining neutrality, impartiality, and independence while operating in politically charged conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite the existence of a well-established legal framework, the practical implementation of humanitarian assistance frequently faces significant challenges, including security risks, logistical difficulties, and political impediments that hinder the effective delivery of aid to those in need.

Usmanov & Martynevich (2022) on the other hand, addressed the issue of deprivation of humanitarian aid to communities affected by conflicts explaining that the violations of the right to humanitarian access not only obstruct the delivery of aid, but also pose a significant threat to global peace and security. The researchers emphasized that improving coordination between international and local actors as well as creating more flexible mechanisms for humanitarian access are crucial steps toward enhancing the effectiveness of aid during armed conflicts.

Puspoayu et al. (2023) also explored the challenges impeding humanitarian aid in the twenty-first

century, particularly in terms of establishing a balance between the principles of humanity with respect for the State sovereignty. The study investigated how national and international policies influence the delivery of aid in conflict zones, highlighting that humanitarian interventions frequently conflict with the State sovereignty, thereby obstructing aid access for people in need. One of the most notable findings of this research is that the provision of humanitarian aid is not only necessary but also mandatory, with the need to recognize and respect the State sovereignty within the context of these operations. The research also yielded that humanitarian aid can mitigate the impact of armed conflict.

The aforementioned contributions offer a wide range of perspectives on the effectiveness of humanitarian aid in zones of armed conflicts, the risks faced by humanitarian workers, and how these risks affect the provision of aid to civilians. The current research addresses the same issue with a special emphasis on Lebanon.

This research is characterized by the originality and modernity of its subject matter as it focuses on the recent Israeli-Lebanese conflict (2024), which gives it a contemporary character that reflects the challenges facing humanitarian operations today. It highlights the gap between the international legal framework and its practical implementation, offering a valuable contribution to the existing literature on armed conflict and humanitarian aid.

1. The Legal Framework for Humanitarian Assistance in International Humanitarian Law

International humanitarian law constitutes the fundamental legal framework for humanitarian assistance in armed conflicts. The law stipulates the obligation to protect and care for civilians and individuals not participating in hostilities. (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949) This obligation includes ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need without discrimination, addressing their basic needs such as food, water, health care, and shelter. The primary concern is to alleviate their suffering and protect their lives and dignity under the harsh conditions imposed by conflict.

The legal framework for humanitarian assistance within the scope of international humanitarian law requires adherence to a set of rules aimed at ensuring the provision of humanitarian assistance in a neutral and non-discriminatory manner, in line with the principles of international humanitarian law. In this regard, this research addresses the fundamental principles of the legal regulation of humanitarian assistance.

1.1. The Principle of Humanity

This principle mandates that assistance and care be provided to civilians and people affected by armed conflict. Its primary objectives are to alleviate human suffering, particularly in relation to life, health and human dignity. The Humanitarian aid is to be provided based on purely humanitarian needs and free from political agendas (Khater, 2023). Furthermore, the aim of humanitarian assistance should extend beyond merely meeting the basic needs of affected individuals; it should also focus on preserving their dignity and protecting them from degrading or brutal treatment. (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016)

1.2. The Principle of Neutrality

The principle of neutrality requires that humanitarian assistance be provided in an impartial manner, proportionate to the needs of those affected by armed conflict, without regard to ethnic, religious or political affiliations. Humanitarian actors are required to refrain from favoring or supporting any party to the conflict or taking a position in hostilities or engaging in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. Aid should be implemented solely on the basis of need, with priority given to the most urgent cases. (European Commission, 2023 & Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016)

1.3. The Principle of Non-Discrimination

This principle stipulates that humanitarian assistance must be provided without any discrimination in terms of race, gender, religion or political affiliation. It also sets forth that any individual affected by conflict has the right to receive protection and necessary assistance based on their needs. (Jæger, 2009)

1.4. The Principle of Independence

Humanitarian aid providers must operate independently of political, military, economic or other external

pressures or agendas, ensuring that aid are based solely on the needs of those affected. This independence from external actors helps maintaining the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian operations, thereby increasing the ability to alleviate human suffering and allow for the effective delivery of aid in conflict areas. (International Council of Voluntary Agencies, 2023)

1.5. *The Principle of Non-Impediment to the Delivery of Aid*

All parties to the conflict, whether governments or armed groups, must facilitate the passage of humanitarian aid to affected civilians, without any restrictions or obstacles, regardless of their affiliation or control over the territory. Preventing or obstructing the delivery of aid constitutes a serious violation of international humanitarian law, as it increases the risks to the lives of those affected and may lead to international criminal responsibility. (Stoffels, 2004)

The obligation to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid is grounded on Article 23 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states: “Each High Contracting Party shall allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores and objects necessary for religious worship intended only for civilians of another High Contracting Party, even if the latter is its adversary. It shall likewise permit the free passage of all consignments of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics.” (Geneva Convention IV, 1949)

Article 70 of Additional Protocol I (1977) also provides that the parties to the dispute shall “Allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of all relief consignments, equipment and personnel provided.”

1.6. *The Principle of Ensuring Respect for National Sovereignty*

Humanitarian assistance in the context of armed conflicts should be provided in a manner that respects the sovereignty of States, acknowledges their authority, independence and territorial integrity, while avoiding interference in their internal affairs as set forth in Article 2 (7) of the United Nations Charter. Cooperation must be established with the State benefiting from the intervention, ensuring that any assistance should only be provided in coordination with that State or with its consent. Humanitarian assistance should not violate or threaten the national sovereignty of the State concerned, ensuring that it does not become a pretext for interference in the internal affairs of States. Furthermore, the provision of humanitarian assistance should be strictly limited to humanitarian purposes, without any pursuit of political or military interests. (Stoffels, 2004)

It is worth noting that the principle of ensuring respect for national sovereignty is linked to the principle of the obligation not to impede the delivery of aid. A delicate balance must be struck between these principles to ensure the protection of the rights of affected individuals to receive humanitarian aid. While States have the right to regulate the conditions under which humanitarian aid is provided, this regulatory authority must be balanced with the need to ensure that aid reaches those in need without undue delay or obstruction. (Meyer, 2011)

2. *Liability of States and International Organizations to Provide Humanitarian Assistance During Armed Conflicts*

According to international humanitarian laws civilians and individuals who are no longer actively participating in hostilities are the most vulnerable to the effects of armed conflicts. International humanitarian laws seek to ensure that these individuals are protected from attacks, actual violence or threats of violence during both international and non-international armed conflicts.

The liability of States and international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance during armed conflict is a critical issue within international humanitarian laws. Under the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, State parties are obligated to provide protection and care for civilians and individuals not participating in hostilities. These provisions require States to ensure that humanitarian assistance effectively reaches those in need, while adhering to the principles of neutrality, humanity, and independence. (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949) Accordingly, the primary responsibility for meeting affected people’s needs during armed conflicts lies with the affected State. However, if a State fails to fulfil this duty, third States and international humanitarian organizations may intervene to provide assistance, particularly when the state is unable or unwilling to do so. (Radivojević & Raičević, 2021) In this context, a State’s failure to protect its citizens serves as both a legal and moral justification for the intervention of the international community,

including international organizations and other States, to provide assistance in accordance with the “Principle of the Responsibility to Protect” established by the United Nations. This principle states that a State holds the primary liability to protect its population from serious crimes such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. If a State fails to fulfill this responsibility, the international community may intervene in accordance with established standards of international law. (United Nations General Assembly, 2005)

In providing humanitarian assistance, States and international organizations are obligated to respect the sovereignty of affected States. However, in cases of grave humanitarian crimes, such as genocide or crimes against humanity, this principle can be overridden if circumstances necessitate urgent international intervention to protect civilians and preserve their fundamental rights, even if it requires breaching the national sovereignty of the State concerned or failing to protect its citizens. (Meyer, 2011)

International organizations, such as the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, play a pivotal role in providing humanitarian aid, operating independently of governments and conflicting parties to ensure that aid reaches all individuals in need without discrimination. (Slim, 2015) These organizations are required to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian laws, which prohibit the politicization of aid or its use for political or military purposes. Obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid constitutes a serious violation that may amount to a war crime under Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. This Article states that “Willfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions” can be classified as a war crime. This legal framework applies to individuals, regardless of whether they are members of regular forces or irregular armed groups, thereby subjecting them to prosecution before the International Criminal Court. (International Criminal Court, 1998; Radivojević & Raičević, 2021)

The United Nations Security Council plays a crucial role in referring international crimes, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime of aggression, to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. This authority is grounded in Article 13(b) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which empowers the Council to refer cases to the Court when acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. (International Criminal Court, 1998) This power is vested in the Security Council to maintain international peace and security, particularly in cases where international crimes pose a threat. Importantly, even if the State concerned is not a party to the Rome Statute, the Security Council retains the right to refer cases to the ICC. Accordingly, the Council could refer to instances of obstruction of humanitarian access to the Court, given that obstructing humanitarian aid constitutes a war crime under international law. (United Nations Security Council, 2011)

Finally, States and international organizations bear a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches civilians affected by armed conflicts. Despite the practical and political challenges that may hinder aid efforts, international humanitarian law remains the primary framework governing such operations.

In conclusion, although a wide range of international provisions that address humanitarian assistance in armed conflicts exist, these provisions are insufficient to ensure the neutrality and independence of aid, nor do they prevent its use as a tool for achieving political objectives. Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish a comprehensive international agreement to regulate humanitarian assistance in armed conflicts that clearly defines the legal obligations of States and organizations, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and ensuring that it reaches those in need without discrimination or exploitation.

3. International Humanitarian Response to Lebanon’s Crisis and its Challenges

On September 23, 2024, Lebanon witnessed an escalation in the humanitarian crisis because of the illegal Israeli practices targeting its sovereignty, as part of the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah, in an operation called “Northern Arrows”. The airstrikes killed more than 1,000 people, including women and children, and injured 6,352 others in less than two weeks. The victims were civilians and humanitarian workers. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese and Syrian refugees were displaced in Lebanon. (International Organization for Migration, 2024) This prompted international humanitarian organizations to take action quickly to provide the necessary assistance to injured and affected people. These organizations provided a comprehensive response to alleviate suffering and secure the basic needs of those affected by this conflict,

despite its security and logistical challenges.

The United Nations on its part has intervened to provide urgent relief to the Lebanese people in the current crisis. In cooperation with the Lebanese government, an urgent appeal for \$426 million was launched to address the urgent humanitarian needs of the population affected by the conflict. The European Union has been one of the largest contributors to these efforts, providing over €100 million to support the most vulnerable groups in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees and local populations. Many countries responded to this appeal, notably Arab countries such as the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, as well as European countries such as France, which supplied 12 tons of medical aid, including two mobile medical units to support Lebanese hospitals. Germany and Italy also provided financial and logistical support to ensure the continuity of the humanitarian response. The aid efforts included providing food and relief supplies, securing emergency healthcare, and clean water, in addition to establishing temporary shelters for displaced population equipped with basic services such as electricity and water. Other international organizations also contributed to providing humanitarian assistance, such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. For instance, the World Food Program provided food to Lebanese families and refugees affected by the conflict, while the International Committee of the Red Cross delivered medical assistance and support to hospitals. The International Organization for Migration assisted internally displaced persons, while Doctors without Borders provided free healthcare. CARE International on the other hand provided support in the areas of health and food security. (European Commission, 2024 & United Nations, 2024)

Despite the significance of these international efforts aimed at alleviating humanitarian suffering in Lebanon, humanitarian aid continues to face a range of logistical, security, political and economic challenges that hinder effective response efforts to the crisis due to the conflicting parties' failure to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law. These challenges impede the provision of humanitarian aid and affect the ability to reach those in need. These difficulties range from security, political and logistical challenges to the exploitation of aid as a political tool in conflicts (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016).

As for the conflict in Lebanon, humanitarian assistance faces major impediments that obstruct access to these aids for the most affected. The most important of these challenges are:

3.1. Political Challenges

Lebanon suffers from an unstable political environment due to its power-sharing political system which allocates key government positions among specific religious sects. In this system, the president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament is a Shiite Muslim. This framework weakens the government and spreads corruption. Sectarian loyalty and political influence are always prioritized, which reinforces practices based on favoritism and corruption. Despite various attempts to reform the political system through the 1989 Taif Agreement, which aimed to reduce sectarian divisions and redistribute power, these changes were not fully implemented due to resistance from the Lebanese political elites who benefit from this situation and prefer to maintain the existing power structure. (Open Doors International, 2024) Lebanon's political history has been characterized by a series of events that have significantly contributed to deepening political instability. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) constitutes a major turning point in the deterioration of the political situation, as Lebanese sects engaged in a bloody conflict that lasted 15 years. This war resulted in the destruction of the state's infrastructure and the disintegration of the social fabric. Furthermore, Lebanon witnessed Israeli invasions in 1982 and 2006, which further deteriorated the security situation. The Syrian guardianship over Lebanon after the Civil War imposed strong external influence on Lebanese politics. Although this guardianship officially ended in 2005, popular protests in Lebanon persisted, reflecting citizens' anger at corruption and political stagnation (Traboulsi, 2012).

Moreover, Lebanon has suffered from widespread political corruption, which obstructs the government's ability to address crises and implement necessary reforms. The exploitation of power for personal gains leads to a lack of consensus between political parties and a failure to make effective decisions to improve the economic and social situation. (Human Rights Watch, 2023)

The widespread political corruption in Lebanon has significantly impacted the international confidence in the Lebanese government's ability to manage aid effectively and transparently. This has contributed to the

donors' reluctance to provide direct funding to the Lebanese government due to its record of mismanagement and corruption and has hampered the rapid response to humanitarian crises in Lebanon. As a result, many international donors have reduced the amount of direct aid they provide to the Lebanese government due to concerns over misuse or waste of funds. For instance, in the aftermath of the Beirut Port Explosion in 2020, donor countries preferred to provide aid directly to the Lebanese people rather than through the government, as a way to prevent diverting money off track due to widespread corruption. The failure to implement the required political and economic reforms has also resulted in reducing Lebanon's chances of obtaining significant international funding, such as that from the International Monetary Fund. Accordingly, the Lebanese government is required to implement radical reforms in order to regain the confidence of international institutions. (Borgen Project, 2020 & Chatham House, 2023)

The impact of political corruption on the provision of humanitarian aid in Lebanon further complicates the situation and directly affects the groups most in need. Aid distribution is exploited to achieve non-humanitarian interests, as government bodies, politicians, humanitarian agencies, local actors, and community representatives in Lebanon are involved in widespread corruption. These entities may manipulate humanitarian efforts to achieve their own agendas using aid as a means to strengthen political or partisan loyalty, leading to an unfair distribution. Consequently, aid is directed to areas or groups associated with dominant political elites, often at the expense of areas with greater needs, which exacerbates the humanitarian crisis and contributes to the ongoing suffering of the most vulnerable groups. Such corruption also puts aid workers at risk and complicates their ability to maintain neutrality and integrity. (Alameldeen, 2021 & Jenkins, 2024)

Furthermore, Lebanon's political system is significantly affected by sectarian quotas, political divisions and party tensions, as well as weak governance of public institutions, resulting in a lack of coordination among various political parties. This situation adversely affects the distribution of external assistance and limits humanitarian workers' ability to access affected areas, where assistance is often directed to specific destinations or areas, thereby enhancing sectarian and political loyalties. (The Century Foundation, 2023)

3.2. *Logistical Challenges*

Lebanon faces complex logistical challenges that impede humanitarian access to areas affected by the Israeli conflict. The instability resulting from ongoing hostilities obstructs the distribution of aids by humanitarian organizations, as military operations hinder the safe and effective organization of relief efforts. (Project HOPE, 2024 & Human Rights Watch, 2024)

Israeli air attacks against Lebanese territory have severely degraded its infrastructure, particularly affecting major roads, bridges and critical facilities. This destruction has significantly disrupted the movement of relief shipments. This has exacerbated the country's humanitarian crisis. For instance, Israeli shelling targeted the Al-Masna'a Border Crossing, resulting in severe shortages of medical and food supplies and preventing civilians from fleeing conflict zones. As a result, these attacks have intensified the suffering of the trapped population and severely hampered humanitarian relief efforts. (Human Rights Watch, 2024)

Lebanon's acute economic crisis has further compounded these challenges, with fuel shortages and rising prices hindering the movement of vehicles used to transport aid, thereby complicating access to remote areas. Additionally, health and water facilities were attacked, affecting more than 100,000 people whose humanitarian needs increased. (USAID, 2024)

Food and water shortages have further complicated the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon. Complex logistical challenges have impeded the timely and adequate delivery of these essential supplies to the population in need. (Project HOPE, 2024).

3.3. *Security Challenges*

Ongoing security tensions obstruct the access to areas in need of assistance, as ongoing hostilities pose a significant risk to humanitarian workers. A notable example is the attack on the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in October 2024, which injured several UNIFIL personnel. Such actions not only violate international laws but also impede the distribution of humanitarian assistance, thereby diminishing its efficiency. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - UAE, 2024) Clashes in some areas further obstruct the effective delivery of humanitarian aid, exacerbating security challenges and putting aid workers at risk. (USAID, 2024)

In a statement, CARE Regional Director Michael Adams emphasized the complexity of aid distributions, noting: “Yesterday, trips that we usually make in less than five minutes took one hour, because the roads were completely jammed, with a large number of displaced people trying to escape the bombings. We strongly condemn these indiscriminate attacks that are taking civilian lives and also cost the lives of humanitarian workers last week.” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024). This statement underscores the severity of Lebanon’s security situation, where the risks extend not only to civilians, but also to humanitarian workers who face significant challenges in reaching affected areas. Indiscriminate attacks greatly complicate relief operations and further delay critical aid access.

3.4. Economic Challenges

In addition to the aforementioned challenges, Lebanon is experiencing an unprecedented economic crisis, described by the World Bank as “one of the most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century,” and is the “product of three decades of deliberate, reckless fiscal and monetary policy.” This situation has led to a significant inflation and an important depreciation of Lebanon’s currency, which “has lost more than 95 percent of its pre-crisis value.” This economic deterioration has severely impacted the living conditions of displaced persons’ in shelters and has increased the burden on aid organizations striving to provide basic services such as food, water and health care. (World Bank, 2023)

As large numbers of Syrian and Lebanese displaced persons flowed into Syria to escape hostilities, the pressure increased on humanitarian organizations operating with limited resources, affecting their ability to effectively meet the needs of displaced persons. (Chaiban; Skau, 2024 & Human Rights Watch, 2023)

International reports have revealed a significant gap in the distribution of assistance to displaced persons. Some areas have never received assistance while others have received insufficient aid. This shortfall deepens the existing economic challenges and increases pressures on humanitarian organizations facing a sharp rise in the costs of securing basic supplies, owing to the collapse of Lebanon’s currency. (Abdelmoula & Balakrishnan, 2024)

Lebanon’s dependence on imports to meet its energy needs further complicates the economic situation, particularly in light of the world fuel prices increase. This increase heightens logistical costs, significantly affecting humanitarian organizations’ ability to deliver assistance. The high cost of fuel constitutes another burden on relief budgets, especially given the ongoing need for transportation to deliver food, water and medical supplies. Moreover, the deterioration of Lebanon’s currency has made these costs more difficult to cover, exacerbating the economic challenges faced by relief organizations in the effective performance of their functions. (World Bank, 2023)

In these difficult circumstances, humanitarian organizations face an additional obstacle due to dwindling international funding and insufficient support for Lebanon. Growing global crises have redirected international resources to other conflict and disaster-affected regions “leaving Lebanon facing growing humanitarian needs amid a decline in financial assistance. In other words, as humanitarian needs continue to increase, international resources are constantly diminishing, which negatively affect the humanitarian relief operations. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024)

Based on the above, humanitarian assistance in Lebanon’s case has arguably been effective in providing immediate relief and alleviating suffering, such as food, clean water, emergency medical supplies and shelter for displaced persons. However, the provision of assistance has faced increasing challenges that significantly obstructed access to all affected areas. These challenges include security constraints, widespread destruction of infrastructure, and local political and economic complexities, which limited humanitarian organizations’ ability to operate smoothly and effectively. Furthermore, international organizations have often been subjected to pressure or restriction due to the political and security conditions surrounding the conflict. As a result, difficulties related to adherence to humanitarian principles have arisen, such as neutrality, humanity, independence and non-discrimination. Balancing these principles with the need to deal with practical constraints is in itself one of the main challenges in ensuring the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in the context of Lebanon’s armed conflict.

4. Evaluating the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Assistance in Lebanon

In the light of the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Lebanon in 2024, States and international organizations have sought to provide humanitarian assistance. However, these efforts have faced enormous political, logistical, security and economic challenges, which have hampered operations in some areas, obstructing the delivery of assistance to the most in need groups.

At the outset, Lebanon's sectarian system complicates coordination between stakeholders, as patronage and political divisions influence how aid is distributed. This contributes to the politicization and exploitation of humanitarian aid for non-humanitarian purposes, thereby threatening the neutrality and independence of aid efforts. Additionally, several countries, including France, Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, have been accused of using aid to enhance their influence in Lebanon through their local allies. (The Century Foundation, 2023 & Project HOPE, 2024)

On the other hand, funding shortfalls and instability have significantly impacted humanitarian organizations' ability to operate effectively, as the need for sustainable funding in protracted conflicts such as the Israeli-Lebanese conflict increases to address the growing needs of those affected. This lack of funding not only slows the response to the crisis but also disrupts aid access. (United Nations, 2024 & Concern Worldwide, n.d.) In addition, the intense Israeli bombardment destroyed critical infrastructure, such as roads and hospitals, which severely hindered aid delivery. The blockade of some areas, especially in the South of Lebanon, has also delayed the arrival of urgent relief and exacerbated the suffering of those in need. (McKernan, 2024)

In contrast, Hezbollah has been accused of indirectly obstructing humanitarian aid by utilizing some corridors for military purposes. This has provided a pretext for Israel to target those corridors with airstrikes, resulting in the closure of essential humanitarian routes. Such actions severely impact relief efforts and contribute to increased casualties among civilians and humanitarian workers. (Human Rights Watch, 2024 & United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024)

Some actors, such as Hizbullah and institutions associated with the Syrian regime, have also been accused of mismanaging the distribution of assistance to displaced persons in shelters or Lebanese refugees in Syria, resulting in severe shortages of essential items such as food and clothing. It should be noted that similar incidents occurred after the 2020 Beirut port explosion, where reports indicated that some food and equipment that arrived as relief were either confiscated or sold in markets. (Alma Research and Education Center, 2021) Finally, the research confirms that obstructing humanitarian access, whether through military operations, destruction of infrastructure, or diversion of it for military purposes, or confiscation of aid, constitute a violation of international humanitarian laws. Such actions constitute war crimes if they cause disproportionate harm to civilians. The UN Security Council has the authority to refer such cases to the International Criminal Court for investigation, as happened previously in Libya. The ICC is able to take decisive action against governments or armed groups involved in such violations. This would enhance confidence in the international justice system and improve the protection of civilians affected by armed conflict. It would also provide redress for those affected by conflict, by acknowledging their suffering and holding those responsible for such violations accountable.

Conclusion

This research addresses the fundamental principles that should govern the legal regulation of humanitarian aid during armed conflicts so as to ensure its effective provision while respecting the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved. These principles include humanity, neutrality, non-discrimination, independence, respect for sovereignty, and non-obstruction of aid access.

The research demonstrates that the international response to the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon is crucial. However, political and security challenges along with the lack of funding and the targeting of infrastructure, have undermined the effectiveness of aid. This reality highlights the urgent need to strengthen legal tools that ensure the protection of those affected and facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid in more efficient and transparent ways. The research also highlights the need for legal mechanisms to deter parties that obstruct the delivery of aid, to ensure an effective response in future crises in an independent and neutral manner.

The research recommends the necessity of comprehensive internal political reforms in Lebanon to ensure better coordination between different local parties, and the need to address the challenges related to the infrastructure damage resulting from the war. Achieving this goal requires the implementation of legal measures

to reduce the obstruction of aid access and increase international support in response to the escalating crisis in Lebanon. This will enhance the ability of humanitarian organizations to expand the scope of their operations and increase their effectiveness.

The research also emphasizes the necessity of holding accountable the parties involved in obstructing the delivery of aid. The International Criminal Court has the authority to take measures against the parties responsible for violations as they are classified as war crimes.

The research also suggests the following recommendations so as to ensure an effective and timely humanitarian aid distribution:

- Establish a comprehensive international agreement to regulate humanitarian aid in armed conflicts that clearly defines the legal obligations of States and organizations, ensuring the neutrality and independence of aid and preventing its use as a political tool.
- Establish an independent international body to monitor humanitarian aid operations to ensure integrity and transparency in the distribution process and also help prevent exploitation or embezzlement for personal or political interests.
- Provide increased international support to address the deepening crises in Lebanon ensuring that current challenges are effectively dealt with that long-term stability is achieved.
- Ensure sustainable funding, through flexible policies that allow for continuous support as needed, contributing to a faster and more efficient response.
- Improve basic infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and health facilities, to facilitate the effective delivery of aid.
- Strengthen the protection of humanitarian workers, by providing safe passage and facilitating the entry of necessary equipment and logistics to affected areas.

Finally, adherence to these recommendations will increase the effectiveness of humanitarian aid enabling it to fulfill its vital role in meeting the needs of those affected by armed conflicts. It will also improve access to the most vulnerable groups, and enhance the international community's response to the growing humanitarian needs in conflict areas, in the service of international peace and security.

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Disclaimer Statement

The work is not part of a thesis submitted to any university for the award of any degree.

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Dr. Maya Khater: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. Dr. Yassine Chami: Writing – review & editing, Validation, Data curation, Funding acquisition.

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