



Latvian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union



RIGA
GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF
LAW

Seminar on Humanitarian Action and International Humanitarian Law: Perspectives on Ukraine

Friday 15 May 2015 from 9.00 to 16.30

Riga Graduate School of Law, Strelnieku iela 4k-2, Riga, Latvia

Seminar concept

The seminar forms part of the initiatives taken under the Latvian presidency of the Council of the European Union, with the purpose of demonstrating the strong commitment of both the Baltic region and the European Union to upholding the norms of International Humanitarian Law and promoting best practice in humanitarian assistance.

The seminar will provide a brief introduction to the basic concepts of humanitarian assistance and International Humanitarian Law, and will offer some insights into how they have been applied in the particular context of the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict in Ukraine.

As a result of the prolonged armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine, as well as the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, many people have been forced to flee from their homes and have become increasingly vulnerable. As of April 2015, some 1.15 million people are registered as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and about 700,000 have taken refuge in neighbouring countries. The affected people mainly need shelter, food and sanitation, as well as proper healthcare and psychosocial support, education and protection.

The European Union and its Member States, and other donors, are providing assistance to those affected by the crisis through a wide range of implementing partners, including United Nations (UN) agencies, the Red Cross and other international and local non-governmental organisations. But access to the conflict-affected regions remains a challenge for humanitarian organisations and many people in the affected areas remain isolated. Other challenges include the effective coordination of assistance and ensuring cost-efficient delivery.

The European Union and its Member States are committed to act on the basis of the international humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and to ensure respect for International Humanitarian Law. Here too the situation in Ukraine poses a number of challenges, including the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, ensuring safe humanitarian access and free movement of persons.

Outline Programme

In order to bring together the speakers and participants, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia will host a welcome reception on the evening of 14 May preceding the seminar on 15 May at Riga Graduate School of Law, which is financed by Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA) - International Association of Universities that aims to enhance professionalism in the humanitarian sector with contributions from the organisations providing speakers.

The opening of the seminar will be undertaken by the president of NOHA, and joining the president will be the rector of Riga Graduate School of Law, where the seminar will take place. The seminar follows the tradition of meetings and seminars rotating with the presidency of the Council of the EU that have been organised by the NOHA since 2005, with the support from the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO). It provides the opportunity to network with other humanitarian stakeholders at member state level.

In order to set the scene, the seminar will in substance commence with a keynote address from an experienced practitioner from the UN, who is currently engaged in handling humanitarian issues in Ukraine. For each segment of the seminar, ample time is set off for both an in-depth presentation of topics and further development through discussions between the speakers and the participants.

The first panel will focus on actors, coordination mechanisms, access, and funding. Speakers will include representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), NOHA and ECHO.

The second panel will focus on International Humanitarian Law in relation to norms, application and enforcement of protection. Speakers will include representatives of the network VOICE, which represents 82 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are active in humanitarian aid worldwide and based in 19 European countries. Also included are representatives of the NGO "Providus", which promotes evidence-based policy making, starting from the initial preparation phase until implementation and review, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Following a final discussion, the seminar will end at 16.30.

Participation

The target audience for this seminar includes students, academia, NGOs, private sector, representatives of state institutions, and media. The seminar is limited to 50 places on a first come, first serve basis.

Please sign up for participation by email to:
seminar-noha@rgsl.edu.lv

Funding is provided by the European Commission.

