



Are you a Human- itarian?

Inspired by all of the lecturers, speakers, panelists, and organizers of
the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership “Who are the Humanitarians:
Decolonizing the Landscape of Aid” Conference
which took place online on April 28-29th, 2021

Poetic Reflections by
Dana Dajani

What is the value of a single being?
What is the value of a verse, song, or story?

Look around,
why should we care?

Tsunami of Covid wiped our culture bare
For those who lost their lives
in this time we send a prayer
Real Humanitarians care

6 friends and their skills
ready to share, to lend a helping hand

So just WHO are the Humanitarians?

Perhaps you recognize yourself in this crew:
are you the Rabbit who works to prevent food scarcity?
The Tortoise who, slow and steady, works for peace,
or the Hare who protects and safe-keeps?
The Parrot with her coordinated intelligence,
the Nightingale who alleviates our suffering
with her song and ceremony,
or perhaps the Eagle who negotiates
and mediates agreements?

Let me tell you a story:
Ours is the story of Global Justice
We, who believe in the power of the individual
to influence
an institution,
to influence a single life,
to influence the world
for the better

We stand together, collectively
meeting our emergencies and threats
as well as our goals



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The Humanitarians have a willingness
to shoulder a heavy load
share the cost and burdens of taking care of
others in their time of need,
with a commitment to protecting the vulnerable
domestically and internationally

The Humanitarians see in all people the potential for Vulnerability
This links us together, a source of our sameness
We know that we are all capable of coming into harm's way
and this is the taproot of our Empathy
It drives our power with

instead of power over the stigmatized

So we seek to hear what is alive,
set our judgements, biases,
and preconceived ideas aside
to understand a new point of view
to identify and feel with all vulnerable groups
A "Moral Imagination" helps us to
set aside the analytic and theoretical mind
and use our creative thinking and patience to
cultivate compassion

Stories help us develop
the muscle of Empathy

They don't have to be grand moral tales of heroic action
to have an effect that is real;
hearing or sharing a story is a humanizing experience

to put ourselves into someone else's brain
to share their pain

Could you listen
to how we are the same AND
how we are different?

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April 28-29 2021

Could you
walk a mile along someone else
(as they wear their own shoes)
on their own journey?
This is what it is to choose
Solidarity

Beyond a feeling
Action rooted
in Responsibility
an invitation to engage
with the capable collective
and build towards a common goal

And so, we equip ourselves,
protect our spirits,
we create a Map of our shared vision;
a map in hand is a key to come back to regularly
it may grow with us organically
to represent the experiences we are living

We set our compass towards Resilience
unafraid to handle crisis
humble pilots
A Humanitarian is a catalyst
(not a saviour complex)
leading by humility, curiosity, and impartiality
with respect for everyone's inherent dignity



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Supported by our values
we set | BOUNDARIES |
We don't compromise our ideals
to meet a donor's expectation
or trade our ethics for any sum
We say no to what does not align with our mission
And we pledge support others through the ongoing
process of development, knowing we are supported

What are the principles of our partnership?
Shared humanity, equality, growth and cooperation

But what is the fine line between help and control?
And how can we better support without taking over?
We contemplate these questions and reflect on the answers
every day learning a little more

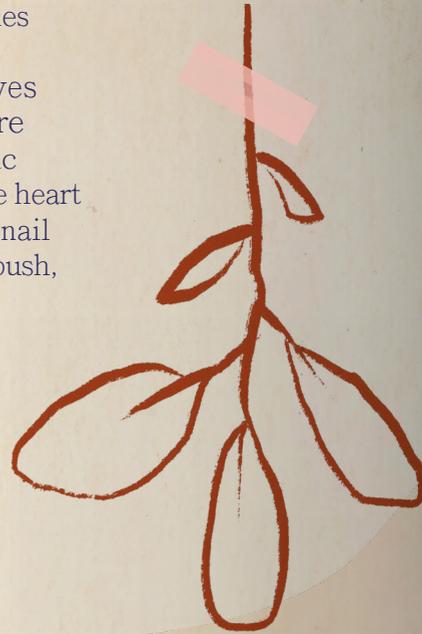
As we start to sense deeply
how your Liberation is tied with mine
we understand that
the forces that oppress
those we define as "vulnerable"
also oppress you and I
And that is the fine line between
mediating / rescuing
Mutuality

Who are the Humanitarians
and what do they know?

That event in our confined spaces,
we can still connect, grow, be there for each other
So those who stand out, step up, show up to serve
the greater global good
Those who programme and engage,
organize, exchange and co-create
YOU are paving the WAY

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And along your path,
you will hear many stories
witness many struggles
and triumphs
Share these narratives
spread them like fire
Don't be diplomatic
tell these stories from the heart
Hit the hammer on the nail
Don't beat about the bush,
just START!



Say it as it is, focus on what needs care
be real and raw,
people are suffering
But who are they beyond their
persecution?

We will de-colonize the humanitarian ecosystem
by making space for all people to actively participate
in deciding the next generations' fate
Mothers, Fathers, Children, lead the way
the future is yours to make

"Innovate" has been a buzzword
heard too often
but what of the hubris of this aim?
Yes, we are all problem solvers
but let's not give in to a cliché
I ask you to consider, Humanitarians,
what are the desires of the space,
the intelligences present in the context?
Can you tune in?



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This is Ethical Listening
Can you value the bravery
(and sometimes the price)
of speaking up?
And the courage it takes
to try again
instead of give up?

Pay respect to local leaders
past, current, and future

Indigenous Knowledge is no oxymoron
nor "informal, alternative, ancient, inapplicable"
Quite the opposite: it is dynamic and emergent
Indigenous Knowledge the ongoing process
of learning to adapt innovative solutions
passed down through oral tradition
after generations of living with nature
It will most likely hold a key
to improve local living conditions

Keep in mind, those with the problems
are usually a few steps ahead in identifying the way forward
So let go of quick fixes, orders given top down
The voices to lead us are on the ground!

They understand best
the landscapes of their issues
We honor their intelligence
their agency and wisdom
and pledge to support them by
providing the requested assistance
to implement their own resolutions

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Because those “indigenous”
are not separate from the rest of us
We are all indigenous to this third planet from the sun
We are all local to somewhere
even in the globalization era
So what do you bring to the pot
of Collective Wisdom?

Humanitarian, you can create a space that wasn't there before
to facilitate interactions that are deliberate and meaningful
Intentional inclusion of: speakers and listeners,
stakeholders and donors,
dissidents and proponents

“Starting at the bottom and
responding to the needs of people”
is not such a unique concept

But it will define success
It will create an environment centered on Justice
a free and open space
huge optimism
“Someone hears us- hey!”
Endless possibilities and outcomes
and eventually... CHANGE

Ubuntu: play,
a collaborative, improvisational,
collective working mindset
to challenge development
and transform it

Can we, Humanitarians,
really recognize our privilege
& make a personal commitment
to listen from the heart
with all of our presence?
Not letting language be a barrier



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Listen
beyond words
to energy, emotion, personality,
the disruptive and unquiet

Sure to also make space
for those in the room who
don't jump to take the stage
Trust that everyone has something wise to say
Engage in a meaningful way

Listen, filter through
Listen to voices unheard
Listen to
care
There are so many willing to share
their stories

Information is power, and therefore it can save
So we commit to spreading awareness
building trust and capacity
Online and offline
cultivating the voices in our communities

Passing the microphone on, speaking out
through smiles, and tears
into a space that is brave
Self-aware
fostering collective care
prioritizing MINDFULNESS > martyrdom
our compassion begins with ourselves
and expands into endless ecosystems

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We EMBODY our values
which connect us
to our WORK
We honor this privilege to serve
with so much GRATITUDE

As we strive to redefine aid, we Surrender
to an inclusive paradigm of healing change, of presence
We pledge to regenerate all natural systems
and aspire to participate in a process of Social Influence
that maximizes the benefit of ALL living beings
Never at the sacrifice of our own well-being!
We reject macho culture traditionality
and instead foster a deep understanding
to listen with patience
and to act with kindness
to ourselves, each other, our organizations,
and the communities we serve
May this echo into the world

Though we are often limited
(more than financially)
needs remain unmet
organizations approaching operational limits
There is no parachute big enough
no band-aid big enough to cover
the crises pile up
of displaced heartache



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Multilateral Systems failing to address
Transnational Threats
Unregulated Financial Capitalism
Growing Inequality
International Crime
Arms Trade
Acts of Terror
Surveillance States
Pandemic
Charity sector
mammoth machinery
reaching ethical limits
in the
lack of participation and agency
for those we are meant to serve

But if the goal of the humanitarian endeavour is to alleviate suffering
how can we focus our energies effectively to achieve just that?

Mutuality, as in, Mutual Liberation

When will INGOs be actively Anti-War?
Soldiers of Peace, move on
from neutrality to solidarity

Social Justice is
the beat of our
pulsing hearts

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Perception emerging from conceptualization
as we redefine what it means to be a Human
-itarian
and the idea of aid

We don't want a piece of the pie
we want to make a whole new cake!

moving from Reaction
to Anticipation and Prevention
this is our intention

There will be barriers
and there will be challenges
as the scale of need continues to grow
But beyond operational limits
and beyond needs unmet
a vision forms together now

Not the AID but the SOLUTION sector

Soon strategy will emerge
each individual's personal edge will merge
into a mosaic of transformation
a scene of uplifted humanity
empowered common responsibility
accountability

Systems Change

working towards the shared goal of preserving our home
And everyone is invited,
every one of us is needed and called
to play our own role in the unfolding of it all



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Who are we,
the Humanitarians?

We are textures of identity and intersection
Individuals of all ages, creeds, and languages
We come from around the world
from all walks of life

United by a mission
to do something with our privilege
to assist others in building a new way
to proliferate and preserve stories
to innovate with new technologies
to celebrate the planet's diversity
and dream up tomorrow today

We are the Humanitarians, and we say
that a genuinely transformed humanitarian
system is on the way

with economic, social, environmental, and political justice
for all of those communities around the world affected
by the industrial growth society and its maladies

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& the change
that is coming
is inevitable

it is fluid convergence
togetherness
global responsibility
NO OTHER
just sister and brother
The change is no poverty,
synergy, sovereignty,
zero hunger,
economic opportunities,
clean food and water,
healthy communities,
education,
gender equality,
clean energy,
fair industry,
resolution,
and peace

That is the future
of Relief.

Dedicated to all those who devote their lives in the service of others, and inspired by all of the lecturers, speakers, panellists, organizers, and attendees of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership “Who are the Humanitarians: Decolonizing the Landscape of Aid” Conference, which took place online on April 28-29th, 2021.



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About the Poet

Dana Dajani is an award-winning Palestinian writer, performer, and social justice advocate. She lives and works between the Middle East and Europe, with bases in Amman and London.

Known for her original spoken word poetry, Dana’s background in theatre has informed and influenced writing, and allowed her to create a unique style of solo performance. Part spoken-word, part one-woman show, Dana uses gesture, character, and a simple scarf to transport audiences across various social justice themes through her characters.

Dana’s work as a performer and educator has taken her around the world, from performing at the Sydney Opera House and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, to creating a Drama Therapy Program for children with Autism in the UAE, where she was honored as Emirates Woman “Artist of the Year” and received the “Young Arab Award for Entertainment”.

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