Research article

UN HIGH-LEVEL PLEDGING EVENTS AS A TOOL TO MOBILISE HUMANITARIAN FINANCING FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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SHATALOV Artemii Sergeevich, attaché, Department of International Organisations, MFA of Russia; PhD Candidate, Diplomacy Department, MGIMO University, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0009-0004-5170-8946. E-mail: artemiyshatalov@gmail.com

Abstract. This article studies UN high-level pledging events as a tool for mobilising funds for humanitarian assistance. The author traces the evolving approaches of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) towards such conferences, including their thematic and financial part. It highlights the increasing convening of "state-specific" meetings, and while until 2022 the focus was on a limited number of protracted humanitarian crises (Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen), in 2023–2024, it shifted towards regional crises in Africa. The article stresses that, unlike donor conferences with limited participation, UN high-level pledging events are organised in line with the Guiding Principles of Humanitarian Assistance enshrined in the fundamental UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 1991, including the key role of the affected state in organising and coordinating humanitarian aid for its own population as well as the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The study analyses the cases of UN donor meetings for Sudan and Ethiopia and demonstrates that, while the financial outcome of such conferences might be dubious, they can be quite effective in countering the donors' politicising humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, they give the affected state a platform where it can provide the international community with its own data on the humanitarian situation in the country in order to prevent launching "humanitarian interventions" or some cross-border mechanisms, including those under UN Security Council resolutions. In this regard, the author concludes that multilateral humanitarian meetings are primarily an instrument of political interaction between a donor and a recipient of humanitarian aid.

Keywords: UN, UN Security Council (UNSC), food security, humanitarian aid, humanitarian assistance, Sudan (the Republic of), Ethiopia.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2024-69-4-74-89

Acknowledgments: The author expresses his gratitude to the Acting Head of the International Humanitarian Aid Section of the Department of International Organizations of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs N.A. Karmazinskaya for valuable comments.

The last 25 years have seen a gradual deterioration of the global humanitarian situation[1]. Therefore, each year the respective organisations and agencies of the UN system need more financing in order to both cover their operational costs and provide urgent humanitarian aid for those in need. While in 2000 the global humanitarian plan of the UN

[1] Global Humanitarian Overview 2024. *United Nations*. 2024. https://unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024 (accessed: 22.10.2024)

was estimated at $1.9 billion, in 2006 it reached $5.1 billion, in 2019—$29.7 billion, with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) asking donors to pledge $46.4 billion in 2024. At the same time, the percentage of the funds collected by the humanitarians, on the contrary, has been gradually decreasing: in 2000 they managed to mobilise 59% of the resources, with this number falling to 35.1% in 2023[2].

In this regard, the UN humanitarian branch (the respective offices of the UN Secretariat—OCHA, UNHCR,[3] as well as specialised agencies—WFP[4], FAO[5], UNICEF[6], etc.) has to adapt to the new reality and look for new strategies to mobilise donor funding, including for humanitarian relief in Africa [Scott 2015]. Organising UN high-level pledging events constitutes one of such strategies. This article aims at analysing the specifics of holding such events, their goals and tasks, their place in the modern humanitarian landscape, and benefits for the recipient states, using the cases of two such conferences: on Sudan and Ethiopia.

GENERAL APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN RELIEF AND THE ROLE OF THE RECIPIENT STATE

It is the international humanitarian law (IHL) that regulates humanitarian relief operations during an armed conflict. For instance, the definition of humanitarian assistance, though covering only the obligations of an occupying power to the population of an occupied territory, may be found in the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949. An occupying power "has the duty of ensuring the *food* and *medical supplies* of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary *foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles* if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate."[7] According to the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), "in addition to the duties specified in Article 55 of the Fourth Convention concerning food and medical supplies, the Occupying Power shall (…) also ensure the provision of *clothing, bedding, means of shelter, other supplies essential to the survival* of the civilian population of the occupied territory;"[8] it is prohibited to use starvation as a means of warfare. Therefore, parties to an armed conflict must[9] guarantee the passage of food assistance to civilians[10]. Moreover, humanitarian

[2] Financial Tracking Service. *Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).* https://fts.unocha.org/ (accessed: 10.10.2024)
[3] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
[4] World Food Programme (WFP).
[5] Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).
[6] United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).
[7] Art. 55 par. 1. The Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949. *United Nations*. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)
[8] Art. 69 par.1. The Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I). *International Committee of the Red Cross*. 1977. https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977 (accessed: 06.11.2024)
[9] Ibid. Art. 54 par.1.
[10] Later, this norm was reaffirmed by the respective UNSC resolutions 2417 (2018) and 2573 (2021). See. UNSC Resolution 2417 (2018). S/RES/2417. *United Nations.* 2018. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N1815935&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)
UNSC Resolution 2573 (2021). S/RES/2573. *United Nations.* 2021. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2110498&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

relief operations must be impartial and conducted without any unfavourable distinctions, with the affected state having the right to control them [Ferraro 2021: 135].

At the same time, the key IHL sources do not explicitly mention the responsibility of a state to guarantee adequate humanitarian supplies to *its own* population in a case of an emergency or a non-international armed conflict, to cooperate with humanitarian organisations in a broad sense (as opposed to third countries), or to protect humanitarian convoys [Stoffels 2004: 516]. As there are no relevant international conventions[11], it is the "soft law" that plays the key role in creating the international law base of humanitarian assistance, primarily the resolutions of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). [Yastrebova 2022]. Such resolutions, though not being legally binding for the member states, constitute the mandate of the organisations and specialised agencies of the UN system (inter alia, those making part of the UN Development System—the UNDP[12], FAO[13], UNFPA[14], UNOPS[15], etc.) that take part in humanitarian relief operations. Furthermore, the listed below documents, as well as practically all the resolutions of the UNGA Second (the Economic and Financial) Committee, are adopted by consensus, therefore containing provisions appropriate for all the countries, including the recipient states [Van der Veen 2011].

Relevant "humanitarian" resolutions include annual omnibus[16] UNGA resolutions: "Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations,"[17] "Safety and Security of Humanitarian Personnel and Protection of United Nations Personnel,"[18] "International Cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance in the Field of Natural Disasters, from Relief to Development"[19] and "Disaster Risk Reduction."[20] They cover pressing issues of humanitarian relief, the rights and privileges of

[11] Negotiations on the adoption of such an international legal instrument have been conducted on the basis of the UN International Law Commission's Draft Articles on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters. As of July 2024, the discussion was taking place in the UNGA's respective Sixth Committee. There is no consensus on the draft articles.

[12] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading development organisation in the United Nations system. It coordinates most of the UN assistance to developing countries.

[13] The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is a United Nations organisation working to eliminate hunger and address food insecurity and malnutrition, poverty, sustainable management and the use of natural resources.

[14] The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is a UN specialised agency dedicated to achieving zero maternal mortality, eliminating gender-based violence, addressing family planning needs.

[15] The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is an operational agency of the UN system that implements infrastructure projects and acts as the lead service provider in the UN system.

[16] UNGA "omnibus" resolutions include resolutions that focus not on one specific issue (e.g., document A/RES/77/1 on assistance to people in Pakistan affected by devastating floods), but on a set of issues (e.g., resolution A/RES/78/119 below addresses such topics as mobilising humanitarian funding, humanitarian access, engagement with relevant non-governmental actors, etc.). UNGA "omnibus" resolutions are usually very long (up to 25 pages).

[17] E.g., "Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations." A/RES/78/119. *United Nations*. 2023. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2340634&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[18] E.g., "Safety and Security of Humanitarian Personnel and Protection of United Nations Personnel." A/RES/78/118. *United Nations*. 2023. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2340628&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[19] E.g., "International Cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance in the Field of Natural Disasters, from Relief to Development." A/RES/78/120. *United Nations*. 2023. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2340646&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[20] E.g., "Disaster Risk Reduction." A/RES/78/152. *United Nations.* 2023. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2341808&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

humanitarian personnel and the recipient state, touch upon the protection of human rights during humanitarian aid operations, the relationship between humanitarian aid and development assistance, etc.

The UNGA resolution 46/182 is the most important document on the matter, as well as the annex to it, which codifies the Guiding Principles on humanitarian relief [Lebedeva, Shatalov 2024: 52–53]. For instance, humanitarian relief operations must be conducted "in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality."[21] Later, the UNGA resolution 58/114[22] added to these "guiding" principles the principle of "independence,"[23] with governments of affected countries regularly being accused of violating it [Mačák 2015: 157–158] and donors using it to politicise humanitarian assistance [Lebedeva 2023: 14–15]. Furthermore, the UNGA resolution 46/182 explicitly stipulates the necessity to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the recipient state and that humanitarian aid "should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country."[24] For its part, the affected state must play "the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory."[25] Though some western experts support the idea that the international community (meaning thereby first and foremost big donors) has the right to violate the sovereignty of the recipient state, inter alia, in line with the concept of "humanitarian interventions" that has not enjoyed universal acknowledgement [Barber 2009], and resort more actively to some "cross-border" mechanisms, the fact is that such an approach violates the principles enshrined in the "humanitarian" UNGA resolutions.

It is these documents that guide UN organisations and specialised agencies, including the UN World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and others, in their "fieldwork" [Galischeva, Kapitsa 2022: 281–282]. Humanitarian assistance channelled through the UN must meet the requirements of those in need and enjoy the support of a recipient country, while the choice of humanitarian relief programs must be made already at the stage of the drafting of annual UN Humanitarian Response Plans and mobilising the financing.

It stands to reason that strengthening donor-recipient interaction in the field of emergency assistance should be in line with the UN guidelines, enhancing the effectiveness of the existing humanitarian coordination system. Taking into account that African countries traditionally remain the key recipients of international assistance [Morozkina 2019: 88], it is advisable to consider new mechanisms of mobilising humanitarian financing, such as UN high-level pledging events, and the participation of African countries in them, studying the cases of the two most severe humanitarian crises of our time—in Sudan and Ethiopia.

[21] UNGA Resolution 46/182. A/RES/46/182. *United Nations*. 19.12.1991. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/135197?v=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[22] "Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations." A/RES/78/119. *United Nations*. 2023. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2340634&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[23] "The autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented."

[24] UNGA Resolution 46/182. A/RES/46/182. *United Nations*. 19.12.1991. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/135197?v=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[25] Ibid.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates the total number of people in need of assistance in Sudan at 24.8 million, including 11.9 million children and 6.4 million women. According to the UN World Food Programme (WFP), 20.3 million people (42% of the country's population) are in need of food assistance. The civil war has provoked large-scale population displacement: according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of internally displaced persons in Sudan reaches 4.85 million people and more than 1.3 million refugees to neighbouring countries. The situation is further complicated by the Rapid Response Force's sieging of major cities, particularly in Darfur. OCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan for Sudan for 2023 was only 38% funded ($974 million of the $2.6 billion). A similar UN plan for 2024 is requesting $2.7 billion (second highest in Africa)[26].

OCHA assesses the total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia at 31.4 million, of whom 16.5 million are children and 7.8 million are women. WFP estimates that 20.1 million people (more than 15% of the population) require food assistance, 15.1 million of whom are in urgent need. A serious threat is posed by desert locust infestations in Afar, Amhara, Somali, Tigray, and Oromia regions (with at least 25,000 hectares affected). There are large-scale population displacements: according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the total number of internally displaced persons in Ethiopia reaches 4.39 million people, and Ethiopia itself ranks third in Africa in terms of the number of foreign refugees received (about 950,000 people). At the same time, OCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan for Ethiopia for 2023 was only 32% funded ($1.3 billion out of $4 billion raised). A similar UN plan for 2024 is requesting $2.9 billion (ranked first in Africa)[27].

HUMANITARIAN FUNDING FOR AFRICA TODAY

The global humanitarian situation today appears to be extremely challenging. In 2024, more than 300 million people are in need of emergency assistance, requiring $46.4 billion in aid.[28] OCHA estimates that the overall humanitarian situation is worsening due to protracted (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Syria) and new armed conflicts, a "climate emergency" (with the Sahel and the Horn of Africa affected the most), and echoes of the global pandemic (continuing to generate economic turbulence, market volatility, and widening poverty).

The food security situation is degrading. In 2024, 258 million people in 58 countries suffer from hunger (versus 113 million in 53 states in 2019), including 45 million children. 13.6 million children under the age of five are already suffering from severe wasting, putting them at risk of death. Traditionally, more than half of the world's starving population is located in Africa. According to OCHA, the most problematic is the situation in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Republic of Sudan, and South Sudan. Due to severe underfunding, WFP experts assess that by September 2024, an additional 24 million people could face a situation of emergency levels of hunger (level IPC4 on

[26] See Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024. *United Nations*. 2023. https://unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023 (accessed: 23.07.2024)

[27] See Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2024. *United Nations*. 2024. https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-humanitarian-response-plan-2024-february-2024 (accessed: 23.07.2024).

[28] Global Humanitarian Overview 2024. *United Nations*. 2024. https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfrzh (accessed: 23.07.2024)

the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale, with IPC5 meaning a catastrophe)[29].

As a result, the need for humanitarian funding is also increasing. OCHA experts see the reasons for this in the mounting number of humanitarian crises, rising operational costs, and high global inflation rates. At the same time, the reduction of funds requested by the UN humanitarian branch in 2024 ($46.4 billion vs. $37.7 billion in 2021 and $56.7 billion in 2023) is caused not by an improvement of the global humanitarian situation but by the reduction of expenditures for these purposes, primarily by major donors. While in 2013 the UN received 64% of the requested funds, in 2017, this figure dropped to 52%, and in 2023, it plummeted to 35%. Meanwhile, global humanitarian needs more than quadrupled between 2013 and 2023 (Table 1). Researchers record the increasing funding needs with decreasing allocations since at least 1995. [Milante, Lilja 2022: 3].

Table 1. **UN Global Humanitarian Overviews, 2013–2023**

Year	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2023
UN Global Humanitarian Overview, $ mln	12900	19300	24000	29700	37700	56700
UN Accumulated Financing, $ mln	8300	10800	12480	15960	18200	19900
Implementation of the UN Global Humanitarian Overview, %	64	60	52	54	48	35

Source: *Financial Tracking Service*. https://fts.unocha.org/ (accessed: 10.10.2024)

Humanitarian spending per capita is declining. For instance, in 2019, an average of $135.9 was spent per person, but due to the growing number of those in need and chronic underfunding, this figure almost halved to $81.2 in 2023 (against a requested $156.5)[30]. In the current context, humanitarian agencies have to make difficult decisions to reduce their programmes overall or the scale of the assisted populations in need. Such forced moves have led to cuts in food supplies in food insecure Syria and Afghanistan and the halting of shelter construction in Myanmar and Haiti.

On the African continent, the shortfall in donor funding is particularly acute (see Table 2). While $187 million was requested in 2019 to provide humanitarian assistance to populations in need in Burkina Faso, this sum rose to about $877 million in 2023; for Somalia, $1.08 billion was needed in 2019 versus $2.6 billion in 2023, with a similar amount required in 2023 for Sudan, which in 2019 needed $1.15 billion. For Africa's largest humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia, OCHA requested a record $4 billion in 2023.

[29] New WFP Analysis Shows Every 1% Cut in Food Assistance Pushes 400,000 People into Emergency Hunger. *World Food Programme*. 12.09.2023. https://www.wfp.org/news/new-wfp-analysis-shows-every-1-cut-food-assistance-pushes-400000-people-emergency-hunger (accessed: 23.07.2024)

[30] Calculated by the author based on the UN Humanitarian Overviews for 2020 and 2024, which contain complete data for the previous calendar years. See Global Humanitarian Overview 2020. United Nations - Coordinated Support to People Affected by Disaster and Conflict. *United Nations*. 2020. https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2020-enarfrzh (accessed: 23.07.2024), Global Humanitarian Overview 2024. *United Nations*. 2024. https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2024-enarfrzh (accessed: 23.07.2024)

Table 2. **Financing of United Nations multilateral humanitarian assistance to Africa, 2019–2023**

Country	2019			2021			2023		
	UN Over-view, $ mln	Allocated Financing, $ mln	Plan Implemen-tation,%	UN Overview, $ mln	Allocated Financing, $ mln	Plan Implemen-tation,%	UN Overview, $ mln	Allocated Financing, $ mln	Plan Implemen-tation,%
Burkina Faso	187	76,6	41	607,9	248,7	41	876,7	297,8	34
Burundi	106,3	64,3	60,5	194,7	67,2	35	237,2	60,8	26
Cameroon	298,9	123,6	41,3	361,6	158,6	44	407,3	115,1	28
CAR	430,7	287,2	66,7	444,8	364,1	82	533,3	251,5	47
Chad	476,6	231,9	48,6	617,5	185,7	30	920,6	278,4	30
DRC	1650	680,9	41,2	2000	713	36	2300	837,2	37
Ethiopia	771,5	646,6	83,8	1500	726,6	49	4000	1300	32
Mali	324	160	49,4	563,3	212,4	38	751,5	191,5	25
Mozambique	620,5	291,6	47	254,1	161,5	64	512,9	183,8	36
Niger	383,1	221,7	57,9	523,2	205,6	39	583,9	244,9	42
Nigeria	847,7	504,5	59,5	1000	648,4	64	1300	502,1	38
Somalia	1080	812,3	75,4	1100	753,2	69	2600	1100	42
South Sudan	1510	1010	67	1709	1100	67	2100	990	48
Sudan	1150	582	50	1900	705,2	36	2600	973,9	38
Zimbabwe	–	–	–	507	93,9	19	–	–	–

Source: *Financial Tracking Service*. https://fts.unocha.org/ (accessed: 10.10.2024)

At the same time, the collection rate has been gradually declining and did not exceed 48% for South Sudan in 2023, with an average of 36%. The humanitarian response plan for Ethiopia was funded at just 32% (83.8% and 49% in 2019 and 2021, respectively), while the next most expensive plans for Sudan and Somalia were funded at 38% and 42%, respectively. For Mali, only a quarter of the required financing was mobilised.

Since 2005, the UN system has been using the so-called "cluster" approach in providing humanitarian assistance, whereby individual organisations and specialised agencies are responsible for assistance of a certain type (food security, clean drinking water and sanitation, education, and so on) [Bogatyreva 2022: 181–182]. In this regard, it is necessary to assess not only the collection of contributions within the system as a whole but also in respect to the "humanitarian appeals"[31] of each agency. The respective funding situation seems to be equally dismal. For instance, after the second quarter of 2023, UNICEF, the "head" UN specialised agency for the Education cluster[32], reported

[31] "Humanitarian appeal" is a type of document published by OCHA and individual organisations and specialised agencies of the UN system in order to mobilise donor financing. It contains a detailed description of the humanitarian situation in a country/region based on statistical data (number of starving people, refugees, those in need of clean drinking water, shelter, etc.), as well as the amount of funds requested by humanitarian organisations to provide them with the relevant type of assistance. The source of information is data from the UN itself and "partner" NGOs "on the ground."

[32] Following the 2005 reform of the United Nations system's humanitarian coordination mechanisms, humanitarian assistance is grouped into thematic "clusters"—"Food Aid," "Clean Water and Sanitation," "Shelters," and others. Each "cluster" is the responsibility of one, rarely two, specialised UN agencies (e.g., for the Logistics cluster, the head UN agency is the World Food Programme). Within the cluster, the "head" agency collects information from "implementing partners," primarily various NGOs, on the resources they require,

that the Fund's plan for Sudan had collected only 7% of the requested financing, for Burkina Faso—9%, for Democratic Republic of Congo—10%, for Ethiopia—17%[33].

The situation with aid spending per person in need is equally dramatic (see Table 3).[34] The year of 2023 did not see any country on the African continent where humanitarian organisations had fulfilled the previously stated needs of the population. By comparison, in 2019, 1.5 times more assistance, in cash equivalent, was provided to each person in need in Burundi than planned; in CAR and Chad, 114% and 105% of initially requested funds were allocated per person, while in 2023 the corresponding figure hovered around 40–50% with few exceptions. As a result, for instance, WFP had to halve the food rations provided to more than 200,000 refugees hosted in Tanzania in 2023[35].

Table 3. **Financing of United Nations multilateral humanitarian assistance to Africa per capita, 2019–2023**

Country	2019			2021			2023		
	UN funds required per capita, $	UN funds collected per capita, $	Implementation, %	UN funds required per capita, $	UN funds collected per capita, $	Implementation, %	UN funds required per capita, $	UN funds collected per capita, $	Implementation, %
Burkina Faso	155,8	85,1	55	47,2	38	81	190,6	96,1	50
Burundi	59,1	90,3	153	84,6	61,1	72	87,8	38	43
Cameroon	69,5	53,7	77	82	52,9	65	86,6	42,6	49
CAR	148,5	168,9	114	158,8	202,3	127	156,8	104,8	67
Chad	110,8	115,9	105	112,3	46,4	42	121,2	53,5	44
DRC	128,9	75,6	58	102	74	73	87,1	83,7	96
Ethiopia	86,7	77,9	89	78,9	49,1	62	139,8	64,7	46
Mali	101,3	69,6	68	95,5	45,2	47	85,4	33,6	39
Mozambique	238,6	121,5	51	195,5	161,5	83	256,4	114,8	45
Niger	166,6	138,6	83	137,7	97,9	71	135,8	90,7	67
Nigeria	119,4	81,4	68	114,9	101,3	88	156,6	83,7	53
Somali	257,1	238,9	93	186,4	188,3	101	313,2	144,7	46
South Sudan	209,7	177,2	84	204,8	166,6	82	210	133,8	64
Sudan	201,7	132,2	65	141,8	79,3	56	105,3	53,8	51
Zimbabwe	–	–	–	74,6	20,9	28	–	–	–

Source: *Financial Tracking Service*. https://fts.unocha.org/ (accessed: 10.10.2024)

which is then published in "humanitarian appeals." In addition, to ensure inclusive humanitarian assistance to those in need, "unearmarked" contributions from member states under individual humanitarian response plans are shared across clusters to ensure that all types of humanitarian assistance are provided to affected populations.

[33] Humanitarian Action: 2023 Mid-Year Snapshot. *United Nations Children's Fund*. 2023 https://unicef.org/documents/humanitarian-action-2023-mid-year-snapshot (accessed: 23.07.2024)

[34] The high cost of relevant activities in some countries (Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, CAR) is due to logistical difficulties, high standards of the United Nations Office for the Safety and Security (UNASS) in situations of armed conflict or heightened terrorist threat, etc.

[35] Critical Funding Shortage Forces WFP to Slash Food Rations for Refugees in Tanzania. *World Food Programme*. 30.05.2023. https://www.wfp.org/news/critical-funding-shortage-forces-wfp-slash-food-rations-refugees-tanzania (accessed: 23.07.2024)

Thus, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the world, together with the critical underfunding of UN country plans, requires the search for new methods of mobilising donor financing while strictly adhering to the above-mentioned Guiding Principles of Humanitarian Assistance [Slim 2022: 224]. Today, for protracted crises in Africa, to this end the UN is increasingly using high-level pledging events—summits that bring together donors and recipients of humanitarian aid.

UN HIGH-LEVEL PLEDGING EVENTS AS A TOOL FOR MOBILISING DONOR FINANCING FOR AFRICA

The UN has been convening high-level pledging events since 2005, after the last major reform of the organisation's emergency response coordination system: the introduction of the so-called "cluster approach," the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as its own urgent humanitarian financing mechanism, and the increased role of the Under-Secretary-General—the UN Humanitarian Coordinator [Mingst 2018: 66]. Initially, on a regular basis, it convened only the summits aimed at raising funds for the budget of the CERF, which acted as a new element of the strengthening global humanitarian response system. For instance, in 2019, the Fund's budget managed to raise a record $831 million, allowing UN staff not only to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to those in need in 34 countries but also to support underfunded programmes. The CERF Pledging Event for 2021 mobilised only $370 million (58% of the funds raised for the year)[36].

OCHA has similarly organised "thematic" donor conferences (e.g., "Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises" in May 2019), with donors contributing $363 million to such programmes[37]. However, "state-centric" events appear to be exceptional: The UN Secretariat organised no more than two such conferences per year, and they usually covered only two states—Afghanistan and Yemen. It is worth noting that this article does not take into account the regular "Brussels" conference on Syria, co-chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. The funds it raises are spent on helping Syrian refugees in third countries. The donors condition their possible channelling to technical assistance activities for the reconstruction of Syria on political transition (i.e., early departure of the legitimate government of B. Assad), while the recipient country itself is represented only by the opposition in exile [Khodynskaya-Golenishcheva 2019: 280–282]. In this regard, the pledging event on Syria appears to be not an instrument of humanitarian response but an attempt to exert political influence on Damascus, and therefore it does not fit the characteristics and objectives of humanitarian events proper in accordance with the above-mentioned Guiding Principles of International Humanitarian Assistance.

It should also be noted that although, in accordance with the documents described above, humanitarian aid is provided directly to the affected population and not to a

[36] Donors pledge over US$370 million to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund United Nations. *Reliefweb*. 9.12.2020. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/donors-pledge-over-us370-million-un-central-emergency-response-fund (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[37] Outcome Statement, Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises, 24 May 2019. *United Nations. Inter-Agency Standing Committee*. 09.07.2019. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/outcome-statement-oslo-conference-ending-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-humanitarian-crises (accessed: 13.10.2024)

political entity (official government, opposition structures, non-governmental armed groups, etc.), the issue of the ultimate actual recipient of humanitarian assistance is a separate problem in the research literature. This issue is addressed, for instance, by F. Kalshoven [Kalshoven 2007: 531–532] and F. Bouchet-Saulnier [Bouchet-Saulnier 2013: 10–11], who analyse the provision of assistance to the population on the territory under the control of one of the parties to an armed conflict, as well as by J. Slim [Slim 2022: 531–532] and E. Gillard [Gillard 2013: 360, 372], who delve into the organisational and legal aspects of humanitarian response operations in general. As a consequence, humanitarian assistance can be used by one of the parties to a conflict to increase its own attractiveness in the eyes of the local population or as a cover-up for the delivery of ammunition and supplies to the respective combatants. However, these issues are beyond the scope of this study.

Of course, the humanitarian situation in countries other than those mentioned above has also occasionally been in the spotlight of UN donor summits. One example is the High-Level Conference on the Situation in the Lake Chad Basin (Berlin, 3–4 September 2018) convened by the UN with the assistance of the governments of Germany, Nigeria, and Norway. At the same time, the said meeting cannot be considered purely humanitarian, as it also discussed peacebuilding, the fight against Boko Haram[38] terrorists, and other issues. For instance, the Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs, I. Eriksen Søreide, emphasised the need for a comprehensive approach that would include humanitarian action, addressing the root causes of the crisis, and establishing sustainable peace, including security and support for political processes in the countries of the region[39]. As a result, of the $2.17 billion raised, only a fraction went to emergency humanitarian relief, while the main funds were used to support political processes in individual countries and international development assistance programmes.

Table 4. **"Country-Specific" UN High-Level Pledging Events and Their Financial Outcome ($ million), 2019–2024**

Country/region	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Afghanistan	–	–	1200	2200	–
Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya)	–	–	–	–	2400
Chad Lake Basin (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria)	–	–	–	–	500
Yemen	2620	1350	1670	1300	1200
Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger)	–	1740	–	–	–
Sudan and Its Neighbour States (Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Chad)	–	–	–	–	1500

Source: UN Humanitarian Overviews (OCHA) for 2020–2024. See, for instance, Global Humanitarian Overview 2020. United Nations-Coordinated Support to People Affected by Disaster and Conflict. *United Nations*. 2020. https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2020-enarfrzh (accessed: 23.07.2024)

Thus, UN high-level pledging events in support of African states have not been convened for a long time. The years of 2019–2022 saw only one such event dedicated to the African continent (see Table 4), while the rest covered Afghanistan and Yemen.

[38] Boko Haram is recognised as a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation.

[39] NOK 325 million in humanitarian aid to the Lake Chad region. *Permanent mission of Norway to the United Nations in New York*. 04.10.2018. https://www.norway.no/en/missions/un/news/123/news-on-development-and-humanitarian-efforts/nok-325-million-in-humanitarian-aid-to-the-lake-chad-region/ (accessed: 23.07.2024)

However, the coronavirus pandemic and the general recession in the global economy, as well as high energy prices, which caused a sharp increase in transport tariffs, affecting in particular foreign trade in agricultural products, led to a multiple increase in global humanitarian needs, as described above. Large-scale natural disasters (droughts, torrential rains, floods) exacerbated by the armed conflict in Tigray region in Ethiopia [Ismagilova 2023: 80] and the full-scale civil war in Sudan between the government of Abdel Burhan and the paramilitary Rapid Response Force of Mohamed Dagalo [Denisova, Kostelyanets 2022: 31–32] triggered the degradation of the humanitarian situation in the region. Given the chronic underfunding, the UN needed to draw additional donor attention to the humanitarian catastrophe in Ethiopia and Sudan, as well as to discuss the challenges faced by humanitarian organisations "on the ground," including the issues of humanitarian access.

In this regard, instead of the annual one or two country-specific high-level events, the UN organised four such conferences in 2023, three of which focused on the African continent: the Lake Chad Basin High-Level Pledging Event (23–24 January 2023), the High-Level Pledging Event on Humanitarian Response in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia (24 May 2023), and the High-Level Pledging Event on Supporting Humanitarian Response in Sudan and Neighbouring Countries (19 June 2023). A separate conference on humanitarian response challenges in Ethiopia was held in Geneva on 16 April 2024. All these meetings were organised with the participation and support of recipient countries.

As a result, the years of 2023–2024 saw an increased use by the UN Secretariat's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of high-level pledging events on certain countries as a tool to mobilise financing. The focus, instead of on the traditional Yemen and Afghanistan, has shifted to African states, first of all to Sudan, Ethiopia, and their neighbours. But what is the real effectiveness of such meetings, and what can they offer to recipient countries?

THE BENEFITS OF UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL PLEDGING EVENTS FOR HUMANITARIAN RECIPIENT STATES

The stated purpose of UN high-level pledging events is to draw the attention of the world community to a crisis situation in a particular country, region, or humanitarian response area and to raise additional financing for the underfunded humanitarian appeals of the UN. Representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the UN Secretariat traditionally announce the success of such conferences: for instance, the high-level meeting on Ethiopia (Geneva, 16 April 2024) raised more than $600 million[40].

However, announced financial "pledges" do not imply *new* contributions: donors may also pledge funds from planned humanitarian activities allocated prior to the conference. It is therefore *de facto* impossible to determine the actual financial impact of such meetings. The positive political effect for the recipient country often seems to exceed the financial and humanitarian ones.

First, UN high-level pledging events are traditionally organised by both OCHA and the governments of donor and recipient countries (with the exception of the "Brussels"

[40] UN secures over $600 million to tackle Ethiopia's "critical" humanitarian crisis. *France 24*. 17.04.2024. https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20240416-un-secures-over-600-million-to-tackle-ethiopia-s-critical-humanitarian-crisis (accessed: 23.07.2024)

conference on Syria, as shown above). Recipients of aid at such summits have the same rights as its providers. This is in line with the Guiding Principles on Humanitarian Assistance: those in need can speak out for themselves about their priorities for support, highlighting problematic areas. Thus, recipient states become not only objects but also actors in the multilateral humanitarian assistance system. Regional associations also play a leading role: for instance, the High-Level Pledging Event to support Sudan and neighbouring countries (Geneva, 19 June 2023) was organised with the active participation of the African Union[41].

In contrast, donor events held outside the United Nations often do not take into account the real needs of the affected country. The International Donor Conference on Sudan (Paris, 15 April 2024) initiated by the government of French President E. Macron may be mentioned in this regard. Although the organisers announced the mobilisation of more than $2 billion for the needs of the region, the government of Abdel Burhan was not invited to the meeting, and the funds raised, similar to the conferences on Syria held under the patronage of the European Union, would highly likely be used to assist Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries rather than to provide real assistance to Port Sudan[42] and the Sudanese people.

Secondly, as part of the preparation of the event programme (which may include simultaneous roundtables and other events) and presentations, recipient countries have the opportunity to prevent attempts by donor states to politicise humanitarian assistance [Lebedeva 2021: 62]. In this regard, the situation in the above-mentioned Sudan is illustrative: with the gradual degradation of the humanitarian situation in the country and growing food insecurity, relevant organisations and UN specialised agencies saw their approaches to classifying the situation as "famine" diverge. While experts of the UN World Food Programme (with more than 80% of donor contributions coming from the United States) spoke of an imminent famine by September 2024[43], experts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) noted the high agricultural potential of Sudan and saw the main cause of the disaster in problems with food distribution with the absence of "famine" as such[44].

To remedy the humanitarian situation, on 13 June 2024, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 2736 (2024) on the situation in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, which had been besieged by the Rapid Response Force since May 2024. It notes in particular the need for a "full, rapid, safe, unhindered and sustained *cross-border* and cross-line humanitarian assistance into Darfur and other conflict affected areas."[45] Cross-border humanitarian response mechanisms, in the absence of effective control by the government of the affected state over the nomenclature and further distribution of aid, constitute a clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the recipient.

[41] UN Secretary-General's remarks to the High-Level Pledging Event on Sudan and the Region [as delivered]. *United Nations*. 19.06.2023. https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-06-19/un-secretary-generals-remarks-the-high-level-pledging-event-sudan-and-the-region-delivered (accessed: 23.07.2024)

[42] Government offices of the Republic of Sudan have been evacuated to Port Sudan since April 2023; the city is the de facto capital of the territories controlled by the legitimate government of A. Burhan.

[43] Sudan Updates: WFP Scaling Up as Hunger Catastrophe Looms. *World Food Programme*. 20.06.2024. https://www.wfp.org/stories/sudan-updates-wfp-scaling-hangeer-catastrophe-looms (accessed: 23.07.2024)

[44] The Sudan: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024. *Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations*. 2024. https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc9996en (accessed: 23.07.2024)

[45] UNSC Resolution 2736 (2024). S/RES/2736. *United Nations*. 2024. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2417002&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

In UN practice, it was only in Syria that, until recently, the organisation had had a cross-border mechanism initiated by the UN Security Council[46]. It is important to note that it was launched only on a temporary basis and due to the fact that there were no other ways to deliver aid to Syrians trapped in terrorist-held enclaves. At the same time, all subsequent Council decisions (most recently, the resolution 2672 (2023)[47]) contained a list of specific checkpoints through which aid could be brought into Syria from neighbouring countries.

The operative part of the latest UNSC resolution on Sudan 2736 (2024) calls for the opening of one checkpoint in the town of Adre on the border with Chad, while the wording of the preambular part of the resolution could further serve as a justification for the expansion of cross-border transfers in violation of Sudan's sovereignty. And although no corresponding UN Security Council "products"[48] have been adopted, the issue of cross-border shipments in Ethiopia had similarly been fanned in 2020–2021 in relation to the Tigray conflict.[49]

In order to reject such biased approaches of certain groups of states, which are also major donors, recipient countries need depoliticised universal platforms where they could present their point of view and propose acceptable options for resolving the crisis and establishing assistance on the territory of their states [Lebedeva 2023: 14]. UN high-level pledging events seem generally to be able to fulfil that function.

As an example, one might cite the words of I. Coleman, Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), at a high-level event on mobilising donor financing for humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia (Geneva, 16 April 2024). Although Washington remained one of the main critics (including in the UNSC) of the Abiy Ahmed government during the war with the Tigray People's Liberation Front and actively promoted the "humanitarian" narrative, the only remark by the American to Addis Ababa was a call to "do more to protect humanitarian workers, especially in Amhara State, where nine aid workers have died since April 2023."[50]

The reasons for the balanced rhetoric of the US, usually characterised by alarmism and demands for more rights for humanitarian workers "on the ground" to the detriment of the host state's control, can be seen, among other things, in the unique nature of the high-level pledging events held under the auspices of the UN and in the participation of the Africans themselves, including representatives of the affected country, in their organisation.

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[46] UNSC Resolution 2165 (2014). S/RES/2165. *United Nations*. 2014.https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N1446591&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[47] UNSC Resolution 2672 (2023). S/RES/2672. *United Nations*. 2023. https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2300965&t=pdf (accessed: 06.11.2024)

[48] The "products" of the UNSC refer to its decisions (resolutions), other documents published by the Council (e.g., presidential statements), as well as the agreed positions of the UNSC on specific issues that are communicated orally to the international community (e.g., UNSC statements to the press). "Products" have different legal natures and effects on both the Council's activities and on member states, including those affected by their text.

[49] Address by Deputy Permanent Representative A. M. Evstigneeva to the UNSC on the situation in Ethiopia. *Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN*. 6.10.2021. https://russiaun.ru/ru/news/ethiop06102021 (accessed: 22.10.2024) (In Russ.)

[50] Deputy Administrator Isobel Coleman at the High-Level Pledging Event on Ethiopia. *United States Agency for International Development*. 16.04.2024. https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/apr-16-2024-deputy-administrator-isobel-coleman-high-level-pledging-event-ethiopia (accessed: 23.07.2024)

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As a result, the financial efficiency of UN high-level pledging events seems to be questionable. It is *de facto* impossible to track the fate of contributions pledged at the event and the impact on those in need, and OCHA's active use of this tool in 2023 has not helped to address the chronic underfunding of UN humanitarian operations.

At the same time, such meetings have an important political effect for the recipient countries. In accordance with the UN Guiding Principles of Humanitarian Assistance contained in UNGA Resolution 46/182 of 1991, the affected state is actively involved in the organisation and conduct of the conferences. In contrast to events convened by individual donors or groups of donors, UN meetings, in addition to being universally attended, traditionally aim to raise funds to assist the country itself, and the presence of official authorities allows for a focus on the true needs of the affected population with the central coordinating role of its government.

Furthermore, pledging events provide an effective platform to counter the politicisation of humanitarian assistance by individual Western donors. Recipients have the opportunity to present their own vision of the humanitarian situation "on the ground" and propose ways out of the crisis without imposing "recipes" from the outside. In this regard, despite the unobvious financial returns, such events serve as an important political element of the global multilateral humanitarian system and donor-recipient relations, including on the African continent.

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ДОНОРСКИЕ КОНФЕРЕНЦИИ ООН ВЫСОКОГО УРОВНЯ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ МОБИЛИЗАЦИИ ГУМАНИТАРНОГО ФИНАНСИРОВАНИЯ ДЛЯ СТРАН АФРИКИ

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ШАТАЛОВ Артемий Сергеевич, атташе, Департамент международных организаций, Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации; соискатель, кафедра дипломатии, Московский государственный институт международных отношений (университет) МИД России, Москва, Российская Федерация. ORCID: 0009-0004-5170-8946. E-mail: artemiyshatalov@gmail.com

Аннотация. В настоящей статье рассматривается такой инструмент мобилизации средств на нужды гуманитарного реагирования, как донорские конференции ООН высокого уровня. Прослеживается эволюция его применения Управлением по координации гуманитарных вопросов (УКГВ) Секретариата ООН, включая тематическую и финансовую составляющие. Указывается на все более активный созыв «страновых» встреч, причем если до 2022 г. основной упор делался на ограниченное число затяжных гуманитарных кризисов (Афганистан, Йемен, Сирия), то в 2023–2024 гг. такие конференции были в основном посвящены региональным кризисам в Африке. Подчеркивается, что в отличие от донорских конференций ограниченного состава подобные мероприятия в полной мере соответствуют Руководящим принципам гуманитарного реагирования, закрепленным в основополагающей резолюции Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН 46/182 от 1991 г., включая ключевую роль пострадавшего государства в организации и координации мероприятий по оказанию гуманитарной помощи населению, а также принципам нейтральности и беспристрастности. На примере донорских встреч ООН по Судану и Эфиопии демонстрируется, что при неочевидной финансовой отдаче такие конференции могут быть использованы в качестве платформы для противодействия политизации донорами вопросов гуманитарного содействия и отстаивания правительствами пострадавших стран собственной точки зрения на гуманитарную обстановку в стране в целях предотвращения «гуманитарных интервенций» или создания неких трансграничных механизмов, в том числе с использованием потенциала Совета Безопасности ООН. В этой связи автор приходит к выводу о том, что многосторонние гуманитарные встречи представляют

собой в первую очередь инструмент политического взаимодействия по линии «донор-реципиент» гуманитарной помощи.

Ключевые слова: ООН, Совет Безопасности ООН, продовольственная безопасность, гуманитарная помощь, гуманитарное содействие, Судан, Эфиопия

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2024-69-4-74-89

Благодарности: Автор выражает признательность исполняющему обязанности начальника Отдела международной гуманитарной помощи Департамента международных организаций МИД России Н.А. Кармазинской за ценные комментарии.

Для цитирования: Шаталов А.С. Донорские конференции ООН высокого уровня как инструмент мобилизации гуманитарного финансирования для стран Африки. *Ученые записки Института Африки РАН*. 2024. № 4. С. 74–89. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2024-69-4-74-89