

A Vision for the International Humanitarian Studies Association

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What is the International Humanitarian Studies Association?

The International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA) was established in 2009 in response to a growing interest in humanitarian issues among academics from different disciplinary backgrounds. IHSA is a network of professionals engaged with the study of humanitarian crises and response, including researchers, policy actors and practitioners. The main activity of IHSA has been to organise the World Humanitarian Studies Conference, which offers a platform for exchange of information, debate, and networking for humanitarian professionals from different disciplines, organisations and geographical regions. IHSA has organised conferences every two years since 2009, with the first being hosted by Groningen University in that year. Conferences in 2011, 2013 and 2016 were hosted by Tufts University in Boston, by Kadir Has University in Istanbul and by Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, respectively. The average number of participants has been 375 for each conference, and the number of people on the IHSA mailing list is 1365. In addition, IHSA has a number of affiliate institutions which provide support and share its interests: the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), University of Groningen (Globalisation Studies), the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute in London, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, and the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York.

With the unprecedented scale of humanitarian crises in the world today, involving refugees and displacement, conflict, natural disasters and protracted emergencies, the need for humanitarian studies to understand crises and to inform evidence-based response is greater than ever before. The purpose of the IHSA is to study the rapidly evolving humanitarian sector and its current and emerging practices. In 2016, the IHSA organised a survey of its members to get their opinion on professionalising the association. The result was that most members who completed the survey would like to see greater IHSA involvement in the promotion and dissemination of evidence-based research on humanitarian issues and practices. Survey participants also recommended a governance model which could accommodate both individual and institutional members. This paper outlines the plans for professionalising the IHSA, taking feedback from the membership into account.

Objectives of the association

The aim of IHSA is to:

- Provide a platform for researchers and practitioners for debate, dialogue and exchange;
- Promote the advancement of knowledge on humanitarian crises and response;
- Lead debate on the nature and role of humanitarian studies;
- Facilitate the dissemination of research findings and evidence on humanitarian crises; and
- Encourage exchange and cooperation between universities, specialised research centres, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations.

Humanitarian studies is concerned with the study of humanitarian crises caused by natural disaster, conflict or political instability, and the responses to these by a range of actors, authorities and

organisations. It examines how humanitarian crises evolve, how they affect people and their institutions, communities and societies, the responses they trigger and their intended and actual effects.

Particular areas of interest for the association therefore include, but are not restricted to:

- causes, dynamics and effects of humanitarian crises and famine;
- experience of crisis-affected communities, refugees and internally displaced people;
- the politics and discourse of humanitarian crises and response;
- political, military and humanitarian interventions;
- legal issues pertaining to humanitarian affairs, including protection, access, international humanitarian law and human rights;
- humanitarian aid policies, practices and organisations (local, national and international);
- humanitarian architecture and governance;
- disaster preparedness, prevention, risk reduction, and early warning;
- the linkages between humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation, resilience, development, peacebuilding and security, particularly in protracted crises; and
- aid worker security, remote management and the digitisation of aid.

Areas of interest will change over time as humanitarian crises and policy contexts change. IHSA aspires to provide a forum for discussion and information exchange between associations, organisations and institutions with similar interests. It will build on, and strengthen, the link between scholars and practitioners which has been an important feature of humanitarian studies.

Activities

Conference organisation

The main activity of the IHSA will remain organising the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies every two years. This involves the establishment of a Conference Organising Committee (COC) consisting of a maximum of five organisations. One organisation leads and takes responsibility for the coordination and for the management of the budget. The COC also appoints a chairperson for the conference and a conference secretariat. The COC and the IHSA board determine the date, place, title, and themes for the conference. They also decide the keynote speakers. COC and IHSA members then form Theme Committees to decide on the admission of panels and to maintain communication with panel members.

The sequence of activities (mostly by COC in consultation with the IHSA board) has been as follows:

1. One year before conference: announcement of conference and call for panels;
2. Nine months before conference: Panel registration is closed after thematic committees decide on panels. Call for papers is issued. Panel organisers decide on papers. IHSA secretariat manages web procedure for accepting papers, and for registration and payment of conference participants. Draft programme is prepared; and
3. One month before conference: the final conference programme is prepared and shared with participants.

Other tasks include:

- answering e-mails and providing updates to participants (conference secretariat);
- establishment and maintenance of conference website (IHSA general secretariat);
- advertising of the conference (both secretariats);
- logistics: organising the venue, rooms, technical equipment, catering, conference materials; and providing local information for participants (conference secretariat and the COC).

The registration fee for the conference is based on estimated costs per person. In 2013, for example, the cost was £235 and in 2016 the cost was 275 Euro. For future conferences, a reduced conference fee will be offered to IHSA members. Membership will be offered at the same time as conference registration. The conference location is determined on the basis of bids by members. The IHSA explores the suitability of the location and the management capacity of the members submitting bids with the board making the final decision. As far as possible, the board tries to ensure the conference is held in a different geographic region each time. It will also strengthen support for the COC in terms of follow up with panel organisers and assessing the quality of papers submitted.

Other activities to facilitate exchange of information and networking

In between the conferences a number of activities can take place to facilitate the exchange of information. Such activities include:

1. *Study groups and workshops* on key topics or themes identified at the conference. Members can initiate study groups which meet in the years between conferences. The study group can submit a proposal for funding for these meetings to the IHSA board. A subcommittee of the board will assess the proposals.
2. *An updated and well-maintained website.* The website will include information on: ongoing and new research initiatives; reports and articles; information about training courses, training materials; and jobs. The website will offer a place for exchange of information about courses on humanitarian studies and offer portals and links to these courses. It will also have a searchable list of members so that members with similar interests can link up. A key objective of the website will be the exchange of information.
3. *An active Facebook group,* for direct communication between academics, practitioners and others interested in humanitarian issues. Members can also post information about their research activities, operational programmes, challenges faced, reports, publications and events and ask questions from fellow members.
4. *Continuation of the Humanitarian Studies book series.* Ideally, publication subsidies will be found to ensure the books are affordable for all members.
5. *Advocate for the funding of humanitarian studies,* including reaching out to donors, trusts and foundations agencies with information on where and on what topics humanitarian research is needed.
6. *Seek grants for conference participation* (in particular for members from the south and for students who have to travel far to participate).
7. *Seek affiliations with Journals on Humanitarian Studies,* preferably those who allow open access. IHSA will actively promote open access and encourage publication by its members.
8. *Promote the ethics and security of research* in humanitarian crises

Governance

IHSA needs to expand and diversify its membership. This will also provide the funding needed for the planned increase in activities. IHSA currently links membership fees to conference participation, for a fee of 25 Euro, and conference participants have on average numbered 375 people. Membership of the IHSA will need to be wider than the number of people attending the conferences. The IHSA mailing list is 1365 members and a first step will be to see who in this group is actively interested in the association and prepared to pay a membership fee. IHSA will also carry out promotional activities at conferences, universities and with aid agencies to increase the membership.

Membership

Anyone with an interest in humanitarian studies, or who subscribes to the objectives and interests of IHSA, can become a member. Individual members can therefore include academics, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and human rights workers. They can also represent a range of disciplines, for example: politics, sociology, anthropology, law, health and nutrition, as well as humanitarian and development studies. Efforts will be made by the board to ensure good geographical representation amongst the membership.

Institutional members will similarly be those who conform to the objectives and interests of the IHSA. Institutions can include universities, think-tanks, international and local NGOs and UN and other international or regional organisations. Although private sector institutions are increasingly involved in humanitarian assistance programmes, IHSA will consider carefully whether profit-making objectives and responsibilities towards shareholders are compatible with humanitarian concerns. Government members are not recommended as they would compromise the independence of IHSA and some NGOs may be unwilling to join.

Membership fees for individuals will be determined on the basis of income. A distinction will be made between students and unwaged, and waged members (based on self-selection). For institutional members, a similar distinction will be made on the basis of low, medium, or high annual turnover. Small institutions are considered those with an annual turnover of less than 1 million, medium institutions with a turnover of 1-5 million, and large institutions with a turnover over 5 million. Membership will be offered for a two-year period.

If membership is to be wider than conference participation, the benefits of membership will be important. Such benefits will include:

1. reduced conference fee
2. discount on humanitarian studies publications (arrangements will have to be made);
3. the possibility of financial help with travel to study groups or conferences;
4. access to the website to promote publications;
5. adverts for jobs and training courses; and
6. access to members database to connect with professionals with similar interests (members will be asked for permission to share their name, country and area of expertise).

For institutional members, benefits will also be important but their funding should be seen largely as an expression of support for the organisation. Options for benefits include:

1. IHSA membership for a set number of staff members;
2. publicity for the institution on the IHSA website and in the newsletter in terms of activities, publications, courses, jobs.

As for individual members IHSA would provide a platform for networking with other institutions with similar interests. A first step will be to consult with the IHSA affiliate institutions about their interest in becoming institutional members and what kind of benefits they would be looking for.

The IHSA board

IHSA has 15 board members, part of whom have been elected by the members and part have been appointed by the board. The board has a mix of academics, consultants, policy advisors, and practitioners. The responsibilities of the board include:

1. Management of the Association;
2. Planning the Association's activities;
3. Promoting the activities of the association;
4. Representing the Association at international fora of relevance to IHSA;
5. Fundraising;

International fora of relevance to IHSA may include conferences, meetings or workshops on development studies, conflict, refugees, displaced populations and more.

The role of the President will be to chair board meetings and to have specific responsibilities for representation and fundraising, with support from the other board members.

With expanded activities and funding, the board will also be responsible for keeping financial records, preparing budgets and accounts and prepare an annual report (including a financial report). For this purpose, it is recommended that the board appoint a Secretary and Treasurer, as well as a President.

Most associations have an Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at the time of their conference at which board members are elected. As IHSA organises conferences every two years, it will organise an AGM with members with the same regularity which could be at the beginning or end of the conference.

Board members will have a tenure of 4 years with indefinite re-election. Indefinite re-election is recommended to ensure continuity and the possibility of keeping active and productive members of 6 the board for longer than 8 years. It is recommended that at any elections of board members, only half the board stands for re-election to ensure continuity in the board's management and activities.

Nomination and elections

Existing board members can nominate new board members and members can nominate themselves at the AGM or in advance via the website. Self-nominated applications need to be endorsed by at least two other IHSA members. For institutional members, the board will invite institutions to nominate individuals.

For each board member, it will have to be clear whether they are attending as themselves or as representatives of an institution. Out of the current 14 board members (not including the President), 7 will be institutional members. It will be the board's responsibility to ensure geographical representation. If the elected board members do not have the required representation, the board will have the possibility to appoint board members. The President will be elected by the board.

The Secretariat

An office will be established to carry out the following activities. Some will be carried out by a part-time staff member and others by expertise hired in for specific tasks. Activities will include:

1. Coordinating the organisation of the conference, in collaboration with the local organising committee;
2. Supporting study/working groups;

3. Developing and maintaining the website;
4. Maintaining contact with other organisations;
5. Providing the members with information (website, newsletter);
6. Maintaining and expanding membership register and collect fees;
7. Contacting journals which may offer subscriptions at a reduced rate to IHSA members;
8. Liaising with institutional members about publicity (publications, training, jobs); and
9. Fundraising, including for grants for conference participation (members from the south and student).

For the period of 2017 and 2018, the office will be maintained through a subsidy of the municipality of the Hague. This will provide IHSA with the resources that enable the transition to a professionalized association in accordance with the vision set out in this document.