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ARCHITECTURE IS A HUMAN RIGHT





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Founder of Architecture and Human Rights ARCH+H.R.

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Stephan O'Brien, United Kingdom
Former United Nations' Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Building Through Historical Knowledge

Throughout the history of mankind, people have always been on the move, often in very large numbers. People movement does not need to become a humanitarian emergency, let alone a catastrophe. Some people move very successfully – but when the world community doesn't address the consequences of people who are suffering the dangers of forced displacement then rapidly it becomes a humanitarian disaster. That's when the rest of us must act – preferably we must act before disaster strikes, but mobilizing resources before the facts is habitually difficult in the world of emergency response from unexpected natural disasters or from violent conflicts, almost invariably the product of political failure. And the world is increasingly complex, with over 80% of humanitarian needs now arising directly as a result of man-made conflict, rather than natural disasters.

Not since the Second World War, however, have we seen so many people fleeing for their lives from fear and persecution – 60 million women, men, girls and boys, old and young, frequently sick and with disabilities - all seeking safety and hope. More than half of these people today are fleeing the atrocious conditions and hardship in Syria as a result of the endless fighting and fracturing of what was previously a well-educated, middle-income society. Like any human being, if our children are threatened because

we fear bombs, or can't get drinking water, or at least one meal a day, or can't keep dry, warm or cool under a shelter and secure a place to call 'home', then we move if we possibly can to where we are safe and can get the staples of life for our families. And flight is also the normal response whenever these conditions have persisted for so long for those who are internally displaced or have fled to neighboring countries that they have now given up all hope of ever being able to return to their home. So, we have recently seen horrific scenes as people with very little to start with are prepared to risk even more, down to their very last assets, to go on perilous journeys, often across rough seas in hopelessly inadequate vessels plied by unscrupulous and criminal traffickers, in search of a new home, new jobs, justice and life.

This is the story of forced displacement of our fellow human beings down the ages. One of the essential staples for life is shelter, not only to survive but also because of the essential need of each of us as a human being to feel that we have a place – even if temporary – that is 'home' and where we can feel safe. So we must be as prepared as we can be to react when disaster occurs. This book is a significant contribution to our global preparedness.

This book is the fourth in a series which has brought

authoritative insights and imagination to the architectural skills, experience and professional qualities and opportunities that can support our common humanity to our fellow human beings at the time of their greatest need for shelter and community support. People without shelter, wherever they are and however their plight has arisen, do not deserve to be judged; it is the time for the rest of us to step up to our common responsibility to help and provide shelter and a safe refuge from the perils they are facing and are trying to put behind them. Refugees and those seeking asylum have the same basic needs as all of us – and this book helps us to have the capacity to meet our common responsibilities.

All those with an interest in putting people at the heart of everything we do in our partnership and response to humanitarian emergencies will find in these pages innovative thinking and design which gives hope that these ideas can be converted to reality in the cause of our common humanity. This book is unapologetic in its determination to put the ‘human’ in ‘humanitarian’ when it comes to the practicalities of using space and marginal opportunities to create and adapt ‘living’ shelters designed to fit within, and to make best use of their specific contexts and the basic needs of the people, who will be the users.

To meet the needs of those who have the least and are the most vulnerable is the way we can all help those in need recover their dignity and live in hope of a future that is secure. I commend this book to all as an expression of the solidarity we can have for our fellow human beings whose need for shelter is always as great as our own – and here we can find and develop the ideas to meet those with emergency needs. This book is a blossoming of what ‘can be’ when there is a fusion of experts from the built environment with the empathy of those same experts seeing the world through the eyes of those for whom everything that was built has crumbled – and how to give practical help to rebuild their lives as they rebuild their shelters and a built community environment to underpin their hope and our collective partnership as global citizens on their new journey to a safer, more secure life.

FOREWARD

Arne Vaagen, Denmark
Head of Disaster Management at Red Cross Denmark

Disaster Prevention Needs To Be Improved

Human suffering is seen in many different situations: disasters, conflict, poverty, slums, epidemics, drought, hunger etc. Fortunately, it is possible to identify progress within many areas, but we, who are in the situation that we can assist, will always be confronted with new situations and challenges.

Relief of human suffering will always be on the agenda. In order to cope with that, we need resources. The most important resource we have is dedicated individuals with a professional background.

I hope that this book “Architecture & Humanitarian Emergency 04” will serve as an inspiration for young professionals – architects and others – who want to contribute in one way or another in emergencies and in more long term efforts to improve living conditions for those in need.

Professionalism and knowledge about technical tools – like architecture - are key factors in developing solutions for humanitarian aid. However, an important requirement is the ability to combine professional solutions with the realities that we as humanitarian organizations are confronted with when we work in a disaster setting: i.e. budgets, cultural aspects and traditions, security,

logistics, authorities, other organizations, standards and coordination, level of emergency etc.

I find it very useful and interesting that architects are focusing on innovation and improvements within shelter solutions in emergencies and in a recovery/development phase.

We – the Danish Red Cross – have a modus operandi which is based on experience, professionalism and – I hope – a realistic judgment of possibilities and limitations. One particular advantage we have is that we are always able to work with a local partner – the actual national society.

This gives us unique possibilities for access to and knowledge about the situation, the population, the culture, the needs and priorities and the method preferred.

Before a disaster strikes we are working on preventing the fatal results of it: evacuation plans, information, improvement of infrastructure and houses etc. Architects should be able to play an important role in such work. For example, simple methods to improve houses so they can better withstand the effects of an earthquake.

During and immediately after the disaster, we are involved

in assistance, directly contributing to the survival of people. We implement simple solutions, which help on the spot and on time, like water, sanitation, health, food and shelter.

After the disaster and the emergency phase, recovery activities will take place, probably and hopefully followed up by more long term development efforts.

We will usually be involved in these three phases: preparedness, emergency and recovery. We will always be confronted with limitations and considerations on how to help as many as possible within recognized standards (SPHERE) and within narrow budgets.

We will seek simplicity and our work will always be based on local resources and traditions. We cannot base our work on complicated drawings and methods requiring advanced skills, special tools, spare parts and material imported from faraway countries. Usually, we have no choice but to possibly improve existing solutions, which have been practiced over long time and very often with limited resources.

We have to respect traditional ways of doing things and acknowledge the value of methods developed over generations.

Finally, we have to realize that we are often standing on building materials like mud and clay and materials for the roof might be available in the nearest forest or on a plain nearby.

Welcome along on the scene and good luck!

Peter Thule Kristensen, Denmark
Head of Department, Lecturer, Head of the Academy of Fine Arts, School
of Architecture, Cand.arch., PhD,
KADK

How Emergency Architecture Started

This is the fourth book made in connection with the long term cooperation between architect Jorge Lobos from the University of Sassari UNISS and the School of Architecture at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, KADK in Copenhagen, represented by architect Jørgen Eskemose.

The initiative behind the cooperation is called Architecture & Emergencies. It focuses on different strategies to develop architectural projects in extreme social conditions, low cost interventions, communities without previous experiences with professional architecture or communities which claim for more democracy and social equality.

Following the changes after the 1968 student rebellion, a course for foreign students was established by prof. Ole Thomassen and Jørgen Andreasen in 1972. In 1973 it was joined by Lars Marcussen. Exiled architects from Chile, Miguel Lawner and Ana Maria Barrenechea, assisted this Foreign Students Department from 1975 to 1984, from 1985 named Department of Human Settlements (DHS). Students from all continents joined the 9 months' course. A major task was the upgrading of Tanzanian architects and planners to take over teaching at the Ardhi Institute in Tanzania.

From 1991 to 2008 DHS developed a research capacity at the Institute, which received recognition as Ardhi University in 2005. The program received intensive support from Danida between 1972 and 2008 producing a number of PhD candidates from Tanzania and Ghana. Today DHS offers course activities and workshops to KADK students' related urbanization and housing in the Global South.

The initiative behind this book also involves students from the School of Architecture and has included field trips to different countries.

Enjoy reading!