**Title:Humanitarian action in the digital age**

**Sponsors and Organizers:**

**Switzerland and ICRC**

**Date and Time: 24 June 2019, 0930 - 1100**

**Place: Room XII, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year’s HAS theme**:** “*Promoting action to save lives, reach those in need and reduce humanitarian risk, vulnerability and need: looking towards the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the climate summit called for by the Secretary-General*”.

**Background and objectives**

New digital technologies increasingly transform the capacity of humanitarian action, offering opportunities to interact with populations and broaden the scope of operations. Cash transfer programs enable greater financial inclusion, social media have become a tool for affected people’s engagement in crisis situations. However, these technologies also pose considerable challenges. With the ever-increasing collection and processing of digitalized data, the potential for tracking and intruding into the private sphere of individuals and exploiting their vulnerabilities has become easier. The risk of mishandling data for purposes unrelated to humanitarian assistance is there. The manipulation of online information can increase existing tensions, putting at risk the lives, safety and dignity of thousands of people. Ahead of the seventieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, it is critical for the humanitarian sector to re-think how to comply with the *‘do not harm’* principle in the context of digitalization. The proposed event aims to raise awareness of the vulnerabilities arising in the digital realm, and to reflect on how to better harness the benefits that digital technologies can offer to reach our humanitarian goals. It seeks to foster a constructive dialogue building momentum towards the upcoming 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and – more broadly- to shed lights on emerging societal questions related to privacy, data protection, and ethics which are relevant beyond the traditional humanitarian sector.

**Discussion points**

* How digital transformation and new technologies are changing/affecting the humanitarian sector and the way it delivers protection and assistance, with a focus on associated opportunities and risks;
* How vulnerabilities are shifting as a result of the use of digital means to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection
* What can individual and humanitarian organizations can do to mitigate risks for affected populations as a result of digitalization of data.
* How digitalization is impacting the dissemination and uptake of humanitarian standards opportunities and risks associated to digitalization from the perspective of NGO, especially local organisations.

**Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages**

* Increased awareness of risks associated to digital transformation for people affected by crisis
* Suggestions on how to maximise opportunities related to digital transformation and how to mitigate risks
* Inform preparations for the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

**Format**

Panel discussion

**Chair and moderator:**

* Philippe Besson, Head of the Multilateral Division, Swiss Humanitarian Aid, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

**Panel composition:**

* Caroline Khoubesserian, Head of the Unit for the Protection of the Civilian Population, ICRC
* Aaron K. Martin, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Data Governance, Tilburg Law School
* Paul-Olivier Dehaye, Board Member, MyData Global
* Christine Knudsen, Executive Director, Sphere

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