



# Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action

*Fiona Terry*

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Humanitarian groups have failed, Fiona Terry believes, to face up to the core paradox of their activity: humanitarian action aims to alleviate suffering, but by inadvertently sustaining conflict it potentially prolongs suffering. In *Condemned to Repeat?*, Terry examines the side-effects of intervention by aid organizations and points out the need to acknowledge the political consequences of the choice to give aid. The author makes the controversial claim that aid agencies act as though the initial decision to supply aid satisfies any need for ethical discussion and are often blind to the moral quandaries of aid. Terry focuses on four historically relevant cases: Rwandan camps in Zaire, Afghan camps in Pakistan, Salvadoran and Nicaraguan camps in Honduras, and Cambodian camps in Thailand.

Terry was the head of the French section of Medecins sans frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) when it withdrew from the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire because aid intended for refugees actually strengthened those responsible for perpetrating genocide. This book contains documents from the former Rwandan army and government that were found in the refugee camps after they were attacked in late 1996. This material illustrates how combatants manipulate humanitarian action to their benefit. *Condemned to Repeat?* makes clear that the paradox of aid demands immediate attention by organizations and governments around the world. The author stresses that, if international agencies are to meet the needs of populations in crisis, their organizational behavior must adjust to the wider political and socioeconomic contexts in which aid occurs.

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