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Until the nineties, humanitarian action was considered to be an activity performed exclusively by NGOs designed to alleviate the suffering of the victims of emergencies. Right now a vital change is occurring within the framework of humanitarian aid. Government agencies and international organisations have put it on their agendas and even private companies, though their actions are infrequent, have stepped into the humanitarian arena. In addition, there is greater interrelation between humanitarian, political and military intervention. However, the multiplication of actors and the sum of these initiatives have failed to produce greater efficacy of humanitarian action and have even contributed to raising doubts about traditional humanitarian principles like neutrality, independence or impartiality. Furthermore, emergencies are being interpreted as manifestations of profound structural crises, and humanitarian aid should also contribute to overcoming them by surpassing the traditional short-term approach and going on to design complementary and coherent objectives with a broader strategy of human development and security.

**Summary of contents:** A juridical and theoretical reconceptualization of crises and humanitarian action; the multiplicity of actors in the humanitarian arena; the need to guarantee the quality of humanitarian intervention; the emergency-development connection; humanitarian action and human security.