

Strengthening the International System for Environmental Emergency Response

A discussion paper prepared for the
7th meeting of the
Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies

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Background

In preparation for the 7th meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE), the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Section (Joint Environment Unit) commissioned this discussion paper. It is intended to stimulate discussion and debate at the AGEE and provide a basis for concrete action to improve the overall international framework for environmental emergency response.

This discussion paper uses as a starting point the following questions:

How can the international framework for environmental emergencies response be improved?

Specifically, how can multilateral cooperation through the United Nations be improved to reduce further the impacts of environment emergencies in the areas of disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response?

The Joint Environment Unit considered such analysis timely given the steadily increasing interest in addressing environmental dimensions of disasters, which brings a corresponding window of opportunity to make improvements. Furthermore, the Joint Environment Unit identified a need to ensure that the global environmental emergencies system is equipped for more, and more severe emergencies as a result of the immediate global challenge of climate change. Climate change may not alter the fundamental nature of environmental emergency response, but will increase requests for response assistance, and substantially increase the need for preparedness measures. This necessitates a careful analysis of the entire international framework for environmental emergency management including prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation.

Based on interviews with environmental emergencies stakeholders (see Annex 1 for complete list) and a review of the history and current systems of multilateral response to environmental emergencies, this paper:

- identifies thematic areas in around which environmental emergencies stakeholders could orient their efforts;
- describes goals that could be achieved within five years from this AGEE meeting – i.e. by the year 2012 – within each thematic area;
- provides analysis and current context for each thematic area and goal: and,
- recommends specific actions that could be considered by the AGEE to strengthen the international environmental emergencies response framework

Some thematic areas contain activities and/or challenges that currently no stakeholder is addressing and which need substantial thought and development. Others include activities and challenges that are currently being addressed in some measure, but where efforts could be scaled up and/or benefit from greater support or the engagement of more parties. Some issues relate specifically to activities of the Joint Environment Unit; others extend far beyond them. AGEE participants are invited to discuss this document, provide guidance to the Joint Environment Unit on steps to be taken, and consider in which areas participants themselves may wish to become more engaged, including perhaps via working groups of the AGEE.

The document is divided into the following thematic areas:

1. Environmental awareness and integration
2. Sources of support

3. Risk identification, alert and early notification
4. Assessment of environmental impacts and risks
5. Expertise
6. Specialized assessment and assistance
7. Humanitarian activities and early recovery
8. Standardization of international response
9. Capacity for the Joint Environment Unit

The discussion paper was developed between January-April 2007 by Dr. Piero Calvi-Parisetti, Professor of Emergencies and Humanitarian Action at the Bocconi University in Milan, Italy, with the assistance of Ms. Gudrun Van Pottelbergh, an intern with the Joint Environment Unit.

Thematic area 1 - Environmental awareness and integration

2012 GOAL: *The international disaster management community – including authorities of disaster-prone countries, authorities providing assistance and international humanitarian organizations - is fully aware of, and takes into consideration, environmental dimension of natural disasters and complex emergencies.*

Analysis: During recent years, the disaster management community has grown more aware of the importance of environmental concerns in natural and human-made disasters. Nevertheless, challenges remain.

First, many humanitarian responders associate environmental issues primarily with longer-term ‘green’ issues such as ecosystems. Many fail to consider the impact environment can - and often does - have in immediate and acute ways on the lives and livelihoods of the beneficiary population they assist. Examples of immediate environmental impacts include the release of hazardous materials into the air, soil or water from industrial facilities following a storm or earthquake.

Second, certain environmental concerns are often ignored when planning and carrying out large-scale relief operations. For instance, while guidelines and tools exist on the management of water resources during a population displacement, the decommissioning of boreholes and wells after displaced populations have returned or moved on is frequently ignored. This can have potentially serious consequences for the health of resident populations and not addressing these issues early in planning and development processes will result in high costs, often to be born by the affected country.

Third, many humanitarian responders are unaware that relief and recovery activities themselves may have negative impacts on the environment. For example, when relief agencies distribute hundreds of thousands of water bottles to affected populations, they may find themselves confronted later with the problem of tons of plastic scattered in the environment. This may result from a lack of awareness of the issues, a lack of awareness or use of guidance, or both.

To address some of these problems, the Joint Environment Unit has embarked, in association with UNEP’s Post Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB), on a comprehensive strategy to raise the visibility of the environmental dimension of crises with disaster managers at various levels. This strategy includes:

- Capacity-building support for national authorities in disaster-prone countries, such as preparedness workshops held in Iran in 2005 and Yemen in 2006, and the national capacity assessment carried out in Turkey in early 2007.
- Advocacy, information and capacity building initiatives targeting international organizations, mostly in the framework of the implementation of the 2005 UN Humanitarian Reform. These include

the preparation and dissemination of a *Guidance Note on Environment and Emergencies*, the development of technical guidelines for the benefit of the humanitarian agencies and a series of proposed follow-up activities including the provision of training within the Humanitarian Cluster system.

The Joint Environment Unit and PCDMB can carry matters only so far, however. Global awareness of the role of environment in disasters requires the engagement and commitment of many more actors. Specifically, individual countries represented at the AGEE could build on existing efforts and promote the application of the various environmental guidelines and ensure environmental integration in their own activities. In addition, these guidelines can be promoted at the international level through the appropriate channels.

Recommendation 1.1: *Countries should work through their respective competent national authorities to promote a greater awareness of the environmental dimension of crises and the importance of addressing these as an integrated part of humanitarian response. Through competent authorities, they should also encourage knowledge of, and adherence to, recommendations, guidelines and technical standards that exist or are being developed in this field. The Joint Environment Unit and PCDMB should consider providing a portal for all environmental guidelines applicable to disaster response.*

On a related but distinct point, certain respondents described a need for increased general public awareness (as opposed to narrower institutional awareness within the disaster community) about environmental emergencies. The overall objective would be to broaden the base of interest in, and support for, the reduction of environmental emergency impacts. An advocacy and outreach campaign could address this.

The campaign could involve public recognition and rewarding of organizations and agencies that support and facilitate international response and capacity building missions. Acknowledging participants in environmental emergency response will enable the public to understand better the effort required to tackle environmental emergencies. It will also provide an opportunity to underscore why immediate response to environmental emergencies is important. Such a campaign could also recognize developing countries that are taking steps to improve domestic ability to respond to environmental emergencies. The campaign could be used as a platform from which the benefits of being an environmental emergencies assistance-providing nation could be articulated. The Environmental Emergencies Partnership (EEP), launched in 2002 by OCHA and UNEP, could be used as the platform for this campaign.

Recommendation 1.2: *The Joint Environment Unit should work with governmental, international and non governmental organizations through the EEP to build a communications campaign to raise public awareness about environmental dimension of natural disasters and complex emergencies and the international effort to respond, prepare for and prevent environmental emergencies.*

Thematic area 2 - sources of support

2012 GOAL: *National authorities and UN Country teams in disaster-prone countries are aware of the environmental emergency services offered internationally and know how to request them when needed.*

2012 GOAL: *Governments in assisting countries know how to provide such support through multilateral channels.*

Analysis: The management of the environmental impacts of disasters often requires a level of technical expertise that is beyond the capacity of individual countries. Often, governments in affected countries must resort to expertise and resources available internationally to address such crises. In

these cases, international support may be provided bilaterally – i.e. directly from one assisting country to the affected country – or multilaterally – i.e. through the United Nations.

As far as multilateral assistance is concerned, the Joint Environment Unit:

- Monitors information sources concerning possible environmental emergencies and alerts the international community;
- Supports the rapid deployment of ‘environmental generalists’ to natural disaster sites to assess whether significant environmental threats are present;
- Supports the deployment of “environmental specialists” for in-depth assessments of the impact and provision of recommendations for response, remediation and early rehabilitation; and,
- Mobilizes and coordinates multilateral assistance and brokers for bilateral assistance.

Although these services have been consistently provided since the inception of the Joint Environment Unit, it appears from interviews for this paper that not all potential recipients of assistance (governments and international organizations) are aware of what could be available to them. Furthermore, many potential recipients do not know the procedures to request assistance. This may result in delays in getting assistance, with negative impacts for populations and the environment, and/or duplication and overlap of efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1: *The Joint Environment Unit should develop and disseminate guidelines on the provision of international environmental assistance. It should scale up efforts to inform potential recipients about what kind of international support is available through the multilateral system, who provides it, and how such support may be requested (see also Recommendation 2.4).*

RECOMMENDATION 2.3: *Countries are invited to support the Joint Environment Unit in the information campaign by distributing guidelines through appropriate national channels.*

A more difficult challenge identified by respondents is how, specifically, countries providing specialized environmental emergency expertise should do so. As described in thematic area 5 (below), to act as an effective donor for the multilateral system, a country should establish and maintain a system for the management of at least three separate but interdependent resources: experts, specialized equipment, sources of funding and mobilization procedures.

Identifying national experts and having them ready to respond is only part of the challenge. Actual deployment through the multilateral system requires knowledge of and compliance with a range of systems, procedures and requirements. Many actual and potential donors identified this as a problem area: they did not always know what they are ‘getting in to’, what is expected from them, what they may expect in return for their participation in multilateral assistance and what is expected by affected countries. It has been suggested that procedures and requirements for providing environmental expertise through the multilateral system should be ‘spelled out’ in concise operational documents that serves both as a technical reference for existing and potential donors and provide a basis for the comprehensive guidelines discussed in section 9 of this document.

RECOMMENDATION 2.4: *To assist potential donor countries and facilitate their support, the Joint Environment Unit should develop a document clearly outlining procedures and requirements for the provision of international environmental assistance and disseminate it.*

This section has described a variety of inter-linked issues, challenges and actions related to awareness. Within the context of the AGEE, additional efforts could be undertaken to ensure that these, and other possible activities that may be discussed at the AGEE, are coordinated, scaled-up where needed, and fully effective.

RECOMMENDATION 2.5: *The AGEE is invited to establish a Working Group to support and provide guidance to the Joint Environment Unit on the implementation of the above recommendations*

Thematic area 3 - Risk identification, alert and early notification

2012 GOAL: *All major environmental risks have been identified in disaster-prone countries and are known to the international emergency response community.*

2012 GOAL: *Environmental emergencies, including those with potential international dimensions (i.e., trans-boundary impacts and/or needs for international assistance) are identified as soon as possible after their occurrence, and the international disaster management community is promptly notified and provided with relevant details.*

ANALYSIS: Environmental emergencies can represent ‘secondary risks’: natural and complex emergencies can impact infrastructure and industrial installations, and such impacts may affect ecosystems as well as the health and security of the population and the emergency responders. It is easier to manage secondary environmental risks if their location and potential extent is known prior to or very early in the crisis, and if such information is readily available to relevant authorities and emergency responders.

To this end, the Joint Environment Unit has launched a pilot project called *Profile of Potential Environmental Risks* (PPER). Using as a basis desk-based research, the Joint Environment Unit provides UN Country Teams with a list of sites that pose potential risks within a few hours of notification of an emerging disaster (the actual trigger for doing a PPER is normally the issuing of an OCHA Situation Report). The PPER has completed the feasibility phase, including the mapping of publicly available information sources, case studies on ten recent natural disasters and the screening of existing risk assessment tools. In an important development, it has also been recently linked to the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS). GDACS is a joint initiative of the United Nations and the European Commission. This web-based platform combines existing web-based disaster information management systems to alert the international community in case of major sudden-onset disasters and to facilitate the coordination of international response during the relief phase of the disaster. Phase 2 of the PPER aims at overcoming the shortcomings identified during the feasibility study, particularly by identifying additional databases and integrating risk assessment tools. Phase 3 will consolidate the product, by integrating inputs coming from early post-emergency assessments in the field and ultimately implementing the system as a GIS-based database.

The PPER project is now at a crossroads. It can remain a standard response tool of the Joint Environment Unit, as it is now. In this option, a list of facilities at risk in the affected area would be compiled after each large natural disaster – in effect, used only on a responsive basis. In addition, the PPER could also provide the basis of a larger database indicating secondary environmental risks in vulnerable countries for the purpose of disaster risk reduction and response preparedness. More information on the two options for the PPER project and the associated required resources can be found in the related background document.

RECOMMENDATION 3.1: *The AGEE is invited to endorse the PPER project as an important risk identification tool and to advise on the future direction to be taken by the project based on the above-noted two options. Based on the results of the pilot phase, and needs and gaps identified, countries are also invited to offer practical assistance to ensure that the PPER realizes its full potential as a vital disaster management tool, particularly by identifying and providing relevant information from national databases and linking it, as appropriate, to other alert/notification systems.*

Once environmental emergencies have occurred, it is essential not only that they are identified at the earliest stage in order for the multilateral system to be able to offer assistance, but that a prompt

notification is provided. A major challenge is the possible reticence on the part of the affected countries to acknowledge that an incident has indeed occurred and to reveal the full extent of the accident through appropriate notification. A lesser challenge is that the systematic monitoring of information and data sources is often carried out only partially, and often by several partners at the same time, in an uncoordinated manner. For instance, the Joint Environment Unit is active in the field of monitoring— although unsystematically – and so is the European Union and the World Health Organization and, to a lesser extent, selected donor countries are also. There are therefore reasons to assume that some important sources of information are not currently being considered, and/or that there is duplication of effort. To the extent that risks are identified and information is available, maximum use should be made of existing systems such as GDACS, noted above.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2: *A thorough analysis should be carried out of current activities and capacities of the systematic monitoring and notification of environmental emergencies, aiming at identifying gaps, overlaps and potential for synergies. A country could volunteer to engage one or more experts to undertake this work, or the Joint Environment Unit could seek resources from a donor to do so.*

RECOMMENDATION 3.3: *The Joint Environment Unit should ensure that environmental component issues are fully integrated into international emergency disaster tools such as GDACS.*

Thematic areas 4 - Assessment of environmental impacts and risks

2012 GOAL: *The identification and assessment of environmental impacts and risk is integrated in the first response to all sudden-onset disasters involving international assistance.*

ANALYSIS: There is broad agreement on the need to assess urgent environmental issues during the earliest phase of the response to a sudden-onset emergency. There is also agreement that such immediate assessments should not consist of in-depth, specialized analysis of specific risks, but rather an initial indication of the existence of environmental threats and a general assessment of the kind of risks to be expected. Key to this first assessment is the use of the Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT), currently under development and available soon. (Other AGEE documents provide greater detail on this tool, in particular document EU/AG/48).

Such assessments should be carried out by “environmental generalists” – individuals who have a good general knowledge of environmental threats (in order to be able to identify them) and of disaster management and humanitarian operations (in order to fit with the broader community of disaster responders). Any such “generalist” should ideally be trained in the use of the FEAT.

Finally, as UNDAC has become a standard feature of the international response to sudden-onset emergencies, there is agreement that all UNDAC deployments should include the assessment of environmental threats by an “environmental generalist” using the FEAT.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1: *The routine inclusion of a FEAT assessment into every UNDAC deployment following sudden-onset emergencies should be institutionalized by OCHA.*

A major problem, however, is the scarce availability of individuals who are conversant both in environmental and humanitarian disciplines. Ways of addressing this problem include the provision of emergency management and humanitarian training for professionals in the environment sector and the provision of environmental training for disaster managers and humanitarian workers. It is also essential that donor countries commit to making the necessary personnel available.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2: *Training on the FEAT should be provided to sufficient numbers of UNDAC members to ensure that every UNDAC deployment includes a FEAT-trained member.*

Thematic areas 5 - Expertise

2012 GOAL: *Whenever specialized assistance is requested following a rapid FEAT assessment, the Joint Environment Unit can count on sufficient capacity from supporting countries and organisations to deploy specialized expertise immediately.*

ANALYSIS: Once the initial determination has been made by environmental generalists that a threat exists, there may be a need for specialized expertise. Such expertise may be beyond the competence of generalists and – as past experiences show – may involve a very broad range of disciplines. This poses challenges, including the fact that, so far, only a limited number of countries have provided experts for deployment through the multilateral system.

Among the group of countries that traditionally fund and support humanitarian operations, this study identified that only two have consistently provided environmental expertise to the Joint Environment Unit. Another small group has occasionally provided experts. A third group has never done so in the past but states they are definitely available and willing to do so in the future. Many of these countries have expressed the desire to intensify contacts with the Joint Environment Unit and increasing their participation into the multilateral system for response to environmental emergencies. The Joint Environment Unit should follow up on such contacts to capitalize on the donors' expressed interest in playing a greater role. Interviews conducted with the Joint Environment Unit indicate that they themselves acknowledge doing a less-than-optimal amount of outreach to existing and potential donors.

There is also a question of equitable distribution of burden of providing assistance amongst member states, practical questions such as whether assistance can be provided in a sufficient array of languages, and whether it can be sourced from enough regions globally. There is, therefore, the need to go beyond "traditional" donors and seek support in, for example, Asia and the Pacific, as well as in Latin America.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1: *The Joint Environment Unit should develop and implement a more rigorous outreach plan aiming at broadening its donor base. In particular, they should ensure that specialized expertise is available in all regions of the world.*

RECOMMENDATION 5.2 *The AGEE should consider establishing a working group to guide and assist the Joint Environment Unit in these efforts.*

Among multilateral providers of environmental expertise, the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) of the European Union has special importance. The MIC is run by the Civil Protection Unit of the European Commission Directorate General for the Environment. Its main task is to facilitate the coordinated delivery of EU civil protection assistance to disaster-stricken areas. The MIC has played an active role in the management of the EU assistance to a number of disasters, closely cooperating with the EU Presidency and Member States from the outset of crises. As the central information hub of European civil protection assistance, it tracks EU assistance, maintains contacts between Member States and identifies suitable disaster management experts to be sent on the ground. EU experts receive special training in disaster management and civil protection courses financed by the Commission. The MIC also coordinates with the UN and other relevant organizations.

During interviews for this paper, MIC officials confirmed interest in operating under the leadership of the UN for operations outside the boundaries of the European Union. Examples were quoted from the recent past when cooperation – organized through *ad hoc* agreements based on an existing memorandum of understanding between the two organizations – resulted in efficient and effective assistance. The conditions exist for the MIC to play an increasing role through the Joint Environment Unit and intensify its cooperation with the Joint Environment Unit on a range of subjects. It is worth

noting that many EU member States that contribute to the MIC also cooperate directly with the Joint Environment Unit. This was not viewed as a problem by anyone interviewed for this paper.

RECOMMENDATION 5.3: *The Joint Environment Unit should capitalize upon the excellent results achieved recently through cooperation with the MIC of the European Union and expand operational links. Specifically, the Joint Environment Unit and the MIC should: conduct joint lessons learned exercises to promote and foster further cooperation in emergency response; develop an inventory of resources available at the MIC; identify practical ways to cooperate on the PPER (see recommendations on thematic area 3) and seek jointly opportunities related to training for and application of the FEAT.*

Most countries that cooperate with the Joint Environment Unit either occasionally, or not at all, refer to “internal” problems as the main reason for their limited involvement. In order to effectively provide environmental expertise through the multilateral system, potential donor countries should establish internal systems for the management of at least three interdependent resources:

- *A pool of environmental experts.* Such experts may be employed by the Ministry of Environment, or may work for whatever part of the government deals with environmental emergencies at the national level. Specialised expertise may also be found in academia and the private sector.
- *Sources of funding* needed for experts through the multilateral system at no expense for the affected country. Such funding is typically – but not exclusively – available for international emergency response operations through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or through the government’s international development agency: mobilizing such funds for the response to environmental emergencies requires some additional time.
- *A mobilization procedure*, which manages the roster of experts, liaises with other governmental bodies and, in case of an emergency, receives requests for assistance from the Joint Environment Unit, identifies and deploys the required experts and mobilizes the required funds.

Exceptionally effective internal organization systems have been developed by at least two donor countries, Switzerland and the Netherlands, which are the most consistent providers of environmental emergency expertise. Their experience could be of great benefit to other countries. This activity area and recommendation are linked to Recommendation 2.4, above.

RECOMMENDATION 5.4: *A document of best practices on the internal organization for countries that intend to provide international environmental assistance should be developed and shared. The AGEE should consider the establishment of a Working Group to develop such a document. The Joint Environment Unit should approach, on a case by case basis, potential donor countries to discuss areas of cooperation and kinds of support. The negotiations could lead to the establishment of stand-by arrangements.*

The UNDAC experience shows that national experts are of great value during the response to disasters to close the gap between the national and international responders. The point was made during interviews for this paper that the availability of such expertise in developing countries is not limited to the disaster management field: environmental experts and – especially – environmental generalists are most likely to be available as well. This is important, as the Joint Environment Unit counts primarily on experts from developed countries. The capacity to deploy resources from within other regions is essential not only for effectiveness but also in case of emergencies happening during a period of travel restrictions (for example, in the event of a pandemic). Language and diversity issues are also relevant in this context.

A potential asset in the identification of such expertise is the worldwide network of OCHA and UNEP Regional Offices. Such Offices are generally located in regional hubs for international organizations.

Regional Offices could reach out to national environmental authorities and networks in the region, and these in turn could make experts available in case of need. (The Regional Offices could also play a very useful role in implementing the strategy for environmental awareness discussed under thematic area 1, particularly by targeting UN Country Teams in the respective regions).

RECOMMENDATION 5.5: *Links between the Joint Environment Unit and OCHA and UNEP Regional Offices should be strengthened, with a view of increasing the availability of experts at regional level and of promoting environmental awareness with other partners. Specific actions could include: the identification of national focal points, and the identification by regional offices of sources of national expertise. OCHA and UNEP should facilitate these strengthened links.*

Thematic area 6 - Specialized assessment and assistance

2012 GOAL: *The Joint Environment Unit can count on a stand-by capacity for sampling and analysis.*

ANALYSIS: The response to environmental emergencies often requires the use of measurement and sampling equipment by experts to determine the presence and concentration of hazardous substances. To date, the Joint Environment Unit has approached donor countries on a case-by-case basis to provide this equipment and staff when needed. Without a ‘stand-by’ capacity of standardized equipment and staff, however, the international response to environmental emergencies is faced with a fairly *ad hoc* decision-making process. This can result in gaps and delays. Furthermore, the burden of providing this type of equipment and staff has fallen on a small number of donor countries.

In this context, preliminary contacts have been taken with the members of the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP), a group of donor countries that provides international operational support for multilateral organizations. Such support normally takes the form of either “Support Modules” or “Service Packages”. Support Modules are designed to deploy rapidly to the field to support UN missions. Depending on the environment, a support module may be required to provide any or all of the necessary functions, including communications, office facilities, accommodation, catering and logistics. It might therefore range in size from two or three support staff hand-carrying communications equipment, to a complete facility providing accommodation and office facilities. Service Packages provide technical or logistical services, usually in support of the UN where local capacity is insufficient. IHP partners have various capabilities, ranging from truck convoys to decontamination facilities. A new environmental service package could meet most of the Joint Environment Unit’s requirements for stand-by capacity in case of emergency. It would also be advisable to explore the possible development of similar stand-by capacity through agreements with partners in other regions of the world, notably Asia and the Americas in order to reduce costs of transport and increase the deployment time.

RECOMMENDATION 6.1: *The development of an environment service package under the International Humanitarian Partnership should be pursued.*

RECOMMENDATION 6.2: *The possibility of undertaking similar initiatives (see above) in other regions should be explored by the Joint Environment Unit.*

Thematic areas 7 - Humanitarian and early recovery operations

2012 GOAL: *There is a seamless link between response and recovery phases such that short, medium and longer-term environmental issues are all addressed in an integrated manner.*

ANALYSIS: Recovery focuses on restoring the capacity of national institutions and communities after a crisis. Early recovery is recovery that begins in a humanitarian relief setting immediately following a natural disaster or armed conflict. Guided by development principles, the early recovery phase aims to

generate self-sustaining, nationally owned processes to stabilize human security and address underlying risks that contributed to the crisis. As far as environment is concerned, ‘building back better’ in the aftermath of disasters and conflicts relies on the restoration and protection of critical environmental services. The relative importance of longer-term issues grows as we move from the immediate crisis to later stages of a disaster. However, decisions taken at the earliest stages without environmental considerations in mind can have longer-term implications, and create new sources of risk and undermine the recovery process. Therefore, environmental early recovery and recovery issues should be taken into account where this does not detract from addressing more immediate issues. Such early recovery activities could include:

- Assess and integrate environmental needs within recovery plans and processes
- Provide technical assistance to the UN country team and national partners
- Strengthen national capacity for post-crisis environmental recovery and risk reduction
- Coordinate information and activities in environment sector
- Implement urgent environmental risk reduction and rehabilitation programmes

It is important to avoid overlap, duplication and confusion between immediate and longer term issues. To ensure that such environmental considerations are fully taken into account, while still ensuring an appropriate balance and prioritization between acute and recovery issues, PCDMB and the Joint Environment Unit are discussing the role of an environmental advisor that could be deployed through the Joint Environment Unit to assist humanitarian agencies during the emergency response, recovery and rehabilitation phases.

RECOMMENDATION 7.1: *To ensure a smooth transition from response to recovery, UNEP PCMDDB and the Joint Environment Unit should elaborate Terms of Reference for an Environmental Recovery Advisor, develop options for their selection, recruitment and deployment, and secure funding and other support (e.g. guidance material) for their regular deployment.*

Thematic area 8 – standardization of international response

2012 GOAL: *The international response to environmental emergencies is supported and facilitated by standardised and agreed international guidelines to increase its overall coherence.*

ANALYSIS: Environmental emergency management is not governed internationally to the same degree as certain other humanitarian issues. In their international assistance efforts, the Joint Environment Unit and its partners are exposed to a series of actual or potential challenges that may hamper effectiveness. These include:

- Uncertainties as to what constitute an environmental emergency: what kinds of emergencies are considered? Is there an agreed threshold of severity? If there is one, is it the same for all countries and situations? What about potential threats rather than actual impact?
- The lack of a system and procedures for notification. For example, is there an obligation to report on environmental emergencies? By whom? To whom? How?
- The lack of agreed procedures for the request (on the part of the affected country) and the offer (on the part of the assisting countries) of international assistance. What constitutes an official request or offer for assistance? How are those communicated? What information should be provided as to the nature of assistance requested and offered?
- The lack of regulations to facilitate the entry, stay and exit of experts: can visa requirements be waived, and under certain circumstances? Can special procedures be employed to speed up the process of granting visas? Can entry and exit fees be waived?
- The lack of regulations concerning the import and re-export of equipment and materials: can chemicals and laboratory equipment be legally imported and re-exported? Can custom procedures be sped-up? Can custom fees be waived?

- Uncertainties as to the obligations of the requesting country vis-à-vis the mission of the experts: is the government bound to provide services such as transport, interpretation, in-country accommodation, access to data and local laboratories and facilities?
- Uncertainties as to the obligations of the assisting countries: is assistance provided free of charge? What guarantees are offered in terms of the quality of assistance (e.g. qualifications of the experts, independence, confidentiality) ?
- The lack of official recognition for the role and responsibilities of the United Nations in mobilizing and coordinating international assistance, as it is currently defined by “internal” decisions, which may not be sufficiently detailed and may lack the required levels of resonance at international level.

Problems such as these are not unique to international environmental assistance – they are encountered by all those who provide humanitarian assistance to conflict situations and following natural disasters. The difference is that, while humanitarian assistance for conflict situations is rendered according to a well-defined and practically universally adopted legal framework – the Geneva Conventions – hardly anything exists at the global level for the international response to natural disasters and environmental emergencies.

It is interesting to note that important international treaties exist that address the majority of the above-noted challenges, but their range of application is quite specific to other contexts - emergency telecommunications in the case of the Tampere Convention, nuclear accidents in the case of the relevant IAEA Conventions and transboundary accidents on European territory in the case of the relevant UNECE convention. Such instruments provide a useful reference as to the issues that need to be addressed by a regulatory framework and are briefly presented below.

- The Tampere Convention was adopted in 1998 by the delegations of the 60 States participating in the Intergovernmental Conference on Emergency Telecommunications (ICET-98). Its most important articles are No. 2, which describes the operational coordination, to be carried out by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; No. 4, which describes the procedures for request and provision of telecommunications assistance; No. 5, which defines the privileges, immunities and facilities to be provided by the Requesting State Party; No. 6, 7 and 8, which define specific elements and aspects of the provision of telecommunication assistance, such as Termination of Assistance, Payment or Reimbursement of Costs or Fees, and establishment of a Telecommunications Assistance Inventory; and No. 9, which is considered as the core element of the Tampere Convention, as the Removal of Regulatory Barriers has been the primary aim of the work towards this treaty since 1990.
- Adopted in 1986 following the Chernobyl nuclear plant accident, two IAEA Conventions (Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and Mutual Assistance in the Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency) set out an international framework for co-operation among States Parties and with the IAEA. They define precisely what a nuclear accident consists of, require States to notify their occurrence, and require States to notify the IAEA of their available experts, equipment, and other materials for providing assistance. In case of a request, each State Party decides whether it can render the requested assistance as well as its scope and terms. Assistance may be offered without costs taking into account inter alia the needs of developing countries and the particular needs of countries without nuclear facilities. The IAEA serves as the focal point for such cooperation by channelling information, supporting efforts, and providing its available services.
- The UNECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents was signed by 26 UNECE member countries and the European Community and entered into force on 19 April 2000. The Convention’s scope goes well beyond disaster response, as it aims at protecting human beings and the environment against industrial accidents by preventing such accidents as far as possible, reducing their frequency and severity and mitigating their effects. It promotes active international cooperation between contracting Parties, before, during and after an industrial accident. Its most important articles

in terms of disaster response are No. 10, specifying the timing, format and content of the mandatory notifications in case of accidents and No. 12, which sets out some very general rules concerning the provision of international assistance.

In the international disaster management community, everybody consulted for this study agreed that some form of regulatory framework should be developed to address the specific problems of international environmental assistance. Indeed, the development of a full, legally binding international treaty has been suggested in the past and remains a possibility. However, the development and negotiations of a full legal agreement could be time-consuming and difficult, particularly as a first step. Other, more informal yet useful models do exist. The case of urban search and rescue in particular demonstrates that a more gradual approach, starting with agreement at technical level and progressively gaining political endorsement, is viable and can lead to tangible results. In this case, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) provide a model worthy of further consideration.

If the second, more gradual direction were to be followed, the AGEE could consider a phased approach:

- 1) Develop and agree upon a set of guidelines and standards at technical level. Such guidelines should take as a starting point the operational document introduced in Recommendation 2.4, expanding it as to make it relevant for the entire system (affected countries – United Nations – donor countries) and utilizing lessons learnt and best practices from the field.
- 2) Officially endorse such technical guidelines by a platform such as the AGEE.
- 3) Broadly disseminate, field test and, if relevant, revise the AGEE Guidelines.
- 4) Gain political endorsement through, for instance, a Ministerial Declaration or a Resolution of the UN General Assembly.
- 5) Consider, at an appropriate later stage, whether a formal international agreement would add value.

RECOMMENDATION 9.1: *The AGEE should pursue the development of internationally recognized guidelines and standards for environmental emergency assistance. A phased action plan should be developed by a working group of the AGEE, with specific, well-developed proposals brought forward for consideration at AGEE 8.*

Thematic area 10 - capacity for the Joint Environment Unit

2012 GOAL: *The Joint Environment Unit has enough capacity to fulfil its tasks and responsibilities as entrusted to it by the AGEE, UNEP Governing Council and others.*

The Joint Environment Unit was initially created “to provide international assistance to countries facing environmental emergencies”. Some 15 years ago, however, environmental emergencies were considered exclusively as human-made industrial accidents. It was only with the benefit of experience over the years that the Joint Environment Unit realized – primarily through its OCHA component and AGEE discussions and guidance– that natural disasters have an impact on industrial facilities and trigger secondary technological disasters, and that extensive engagement in natural disasters is needed.

Towards the end of the 1990s, it also became increasingly clear that the so-called “complex emergencies” associated with conflict situations can generate immediate or delayed environmental impacts, including for the life and health of the victims and of the responders. Some recent complex emergencies exposed gaps between the mandates and areas of activity of various international partners

and resulted in the Joint Environment Unit being called upon to respond to situations well outside its original mandate.

Climate change is also creating, and will continue to create, new challenges. According to scientists, climate change is already having effects in terms of the severity, frequency, duration and location of a variety of hazards including storms, droughts and flooding. Moreover, these impacts are being felt with only a fraction of the warming that scientists predict will occur in the coming years. This may increase the number of environmental emergencies and the need for environmental emergencies preparedness activities.

Furthermore, it must be realized that a sizeable share of the work of the Unit is devoted to tasks that are not directly related to its core emergency response mandate. The very nature of the Unit, its institutional placement within two organizations, its relationship with a broad network of stakeholders and the close working association with other institutions create a baseline workload which absorbs a substantial part of the Unit's capacity. In order to properly understand this, one must briefly review the components of the overall work load of the Unit relating to emergencies, longer-term issues and day-to-day activities.

The emergency related work has to do with the ongoing monitoring of major emergencies worldwide and in the formulation of offers of assistance to affected countries (sometimes more than one at the same time). When such an offer(s) is answered positively – or when a request is autonomously made by a state or organisation - the Unit responds by activating its emergency network and deploying experts. This is often more complicated than it seems: in the cases in which experts are not deployed directly by donor governments, the Unit has to engage in multiple activities ranging from the administrative requirements for hiring and deploying a consultant at the beginning of a mission all the way to finalizing and disseminating reports. In other cases, experts are deployed as part of UNDAC missions, which requires intensive liaison work with other parts of OCHA and is typically carried out under emergency-conditions, in which time is of the essence.

As the Joint Environment Unit does not work in isolation, it has to be involved in emergencies even when it's not directly engaged in the response - for example, participating in the meetings of the IASC task forces to ensure necessary headquarters-level coordination and donor briefings.

Last but certainly not least, the Joint Environment Unit is charged with a steady and somewhat “invisible” double workload deriving from its being part of two large organizations. The Joint Environment Unit, for instance, regularly provides policy advice and inputs into studies, policy documents, guidelines and recommendations, resolutions and other documents of the UN General Assembly, ECOSOC, UNEP Governing Council and of other bodies for which an environmental perspective is deemed important. The Joint Environment Unit must also comply with ongoing reporting requirements of both OCHA and UNEP and contribute to their yearly planning and budgeting processes, and participate in a range of administrative and management task forces and committees.

Having to deal with such an increasing – and increasingly diverse – workload, the Unit has always had to cope with limitations in its staff resources.

RECOMMENDATION 10.2: *The Joint Environment Unit should consider and pursue alternatives available within the UN system that would increase human resources capacity, in particular the increased use of interns. Countries are invited to consider providing a Junior Program Officer.*

Finally, donor countries should also consider alternatives to support the work of the Unit that would not entail an increase in the number of positions. Such alternatives notably include the secondment of staff.

RECOMMENDATION 10.3: Countries *should consider supporting the human resources needs of the Joint Environment Unit, including through the secondment of staff, particularly during peak, emergency periods.*

Conclusion

After 15 years of international effort to tackle environmental emergencies, much has been accomplished. There is still, however, substantial room for growth and improvement. Renewed efforts are now required in the face of challenges facing the earth and the people who inhabit it due to pressures of development, population growth and climate changes. Any renewed effort requires a path forward. This document presents ideas that could be achievable in three to five years and, if completely and successfully implemented, can bring about real and vital progress in how the world meets the new challenges.

ANNEX

List of interviews	
Institution	Name
National Environmental Emergencies Centre (NEEC) Environment Canada Canada	Mary-Ann Spicer
Civil Protection Unit, DG Environment European Commission	Peter Billing
Senior Management Adviser, Head of Operations Centre German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) Germany	Richard van Hazebrouck
Crisis Management Director Directorate-General for the Environment Management Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) The Netherlands	Chris Dijkens
Environmental Researcher, Chemical Incident Specialist Department of Inspectorate Research, Emergency Response and Drinking Water Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM) The Netherlands	Sander van Dijk
Head of Corporate Legal Affairs Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning Norway	Hem, Gunnar
Field Coordination Support Section Emergency Services Branch OCHA	Jesper Lund
Regional Disaster Response Advisor, Regional Support Office for Central and East Africa (RSO-CEA) OCHA	Pierre Gelas
Head of Office OCHA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean	Gerard Gomez
Head of International Department Swedish Rescue Services Agency Sweden	Kjell Larsson
Development and Cooperation Division Coordination Office DEZA Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation Switzerland	Franklin Thevenaz
Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) UNEP	Glenn Dolcemascolo
Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) UNEP	Frank Turyatunga
Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) UNEP	Jon Godson
Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) UNEP	David Jensen
Chief Operations Division Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance United States of America	James Fleming