



United Nations

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA AND CENTRAL ASIA - ROMENACA

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)

## CERF -- A Sound Humanitarian Investment

How suddenly can a person's world fall apart? Nobody could have foreseen the tsunami in December 2004 and few Lebanese were prepared for the armed conflict that broke out in July 2006. When crises of this scale erupt, funds to cover the humanitarian response are needed -- fast and in ample amount. Although the donating public is ready and willing to assist the survivors, it takes valuable time for donations from around the world to be made available in the crisis area.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a new vehicle to provide more timely, reliable and accountable humanitarian assistance to victims of natural and man-made disasters. It was established in December 2005 through a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Before its official launch on 9 March 2006, it took weeks and sometimes even months before funds provided by governments in response to UN appeals reached a disaster area.

The guiding principle behind the CERF is to save lives by accelerating the allocation and disbursement process. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) allocated US\$ 174 million through the CERF's grant window between March and the end of October 2006. These funds were entrusted to ten agencies, which have used them to carry out 270 urgent projects in 26 countries.

All these operations were able to be funded thanks to voluntary contributions of US\$ 267 million by more than 50 public and private donors. (The complete list is available at <http://cerf.un.org>.) The UN expects the CERF to reach its goal of US\$ 500 million by 2008.

## Towards Greater Predictability

In natural or man-made crises, whether earthquakes, floods or political conflicts, the first 72 hours are critical for life-saving activities. In the past, the humanitarian community had to wait for days or weeks for donor pledges to arrive following the launch of a UN appeal. Today, the CERF allows humanitarian workers to begin saving lives on day one.

Such predictability is an important step towards more effective humanitarian assistance. Historically, so-called flash appeals launched immediately after sudden-onset

### Agencies receiving CERF funding:

- » Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)
- » UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- » UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS)
- » UN Population Fund (UNFPA)
- » UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- » UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- » UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
- » World Food Programme (WFP)
- » World Health Organization (WHO)
- » International Organization for Migration (IOM)

crises did not attract the needed funds quickly enough. Between 2002 and 2005, donor countries pledged, on average, only 16% of the funds required within the critical first 30 days of an emergency.

Since the CERF's establishment, the provision of financial assistance has accelerated tremendously. For instance, approval of start-up funding for aid programmes in rapid onset emergencies such as the armed conflicts in Lebanon and Timor-Leste came within 72 hours. This speed enabled UN agencies to deploy assistance immediately by drawing against their reserves.

In addition to acting quickly, the UN is also focused on what it is trying to achieve. Needs assessment works as a bottom-up process in which field offices select and prioritize humanitarian projects. The UN country teams, under the leadership of the resident or humanitarian coordinators, then analyze the humanitarian situation, evaluate the implications of unmet needs, and project the level of needed funding. At UN headquarters, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) makes the decision

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), two allocations totaling US\$ 38 million have sped the establishment of life-saving programmes including malaria control and cholera response in conflict-affected areas. CERF funds were also used for mine action activities for returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and for the protection of IDPs. With US\$ 38 million, the DRC is so far the largest recipient of CERF funds.

to allocate CERF funds, taking into account humanitarian priorities worldwide.

While NGOs cannot apply directly for allocations, they participate in the country team discussions in which priorities are established and act as implementing partners for CERF-funded projects.

### Accountability

The Secretary-General provides an annual report on the CERF to all UN Member States in a public document that is accessible online. Prepared by OCHA, the document is based on narrative reports from the relevant UN agencies in each country that has received CERF funding. Each agency provides an overall annual report in April for the previous calendar year, while the UN coordinators report twice a year -- in April and in August. In terms of financial reporting, agencies provide a certified income statement for each CERF disbursement, as well as final financial reports. OCHA also maintains a website dedicated to the CERF, which provides the latest figures on commitments and information on how the money has been spent in each country.

Furthermore, the CERF's activities are monitored by an independent Advisory Group. Its twelve members are technical experts appointed by the Secretary-General. They meet twice a year to provide policy guidance and technical advice on the use and the impact of the CERF.

### The Importance of Flexibility

Unlike many other funds, the CERF is flexible. It can be used for virtually any humanitarian activity, so long as it is time-critical or life-saving. This quality is essential as humanitarian organizations must be able to meet local needs, which differ from one crisis to the other. Additionally, the CERF funds are neither earmarked nor time-bound.

In the initial stages of the response to the crisis in Lebanon in July 2006, the CERF provided US\$ 3 million to the World Food Programme (WFP). These funds helped the United Nations hire a trucking fleet to move humanitarian necessities such as food and medicines into the country and to charter an aircraft for the delivery of vehicles. Aid operations stop cold if the logistics do not work. The CERF is flexible enough to provide common logistical services if they are key to launching a humanitarian operation.

### An All-Inclusive Response to Humanitarian Crises

The CERF does not just make allocations for sudden onset emergencies, but also gives grants to underfunded emergencies. Consolidated as well as flash appeals for a country or a region are almost never 100% financed by donor contributions. Different aid activities and countries receive different levels of coverage. To redress these imbalances, one third of CERF funds are set aside for injection into underfunded projects to ensure an all-inclusive response that addresses all categories of need, including food, health, water, sanitation, shelter, education and demining, among others. In 2006, the CERF made it possible to direct US\$ 77 million in 2006 to projects in neglected and forgotten emergencies, which were unlikely to have been funded otherwise.

### Improving the Timeliness of UN Response

Timely funding can help save lives -- and money. For instance, in early 2006, when violence against civilians in Darfur greatly increased the number of IDPs, US\$ 25.5 million from CERF funds allowed agencies to deliver assistance to more than 200,000 newly displaced persons and 14,000 Chadian refugees before the advent of the rainy season. Had the allocation come later, reaching many areas would have been difficult, if not impossible.

In contrast, during the locust crisis in the Sahel in 2005, a UN agency appealed to donors for US\$ 9 million to spray the locust larvae and prevent them from hatching, but no funds materialized. The larvae soon hatched, and locust swarms ate their way across twelve African nations, costing US\$ 100 million in food aid -- more than ten times the amount originally requested.

With a well-resourced CERF, the UN can ensure that people caught in an emergency get the assistance they need. It can help jump-start operations and fill financing gaps, especially for underfunded emergencies. As one member of the Advisory Group pointed out, the "CERF is a sound humanitarian investment".

In 2002, Somalia was nearly polio-free. Then, in 2005, the disease broke out again. CERF funds have helped UNICEF and WHO to procure vaccines for a round of immunizations in 2006. The number of new polio cases has now dropped to 26 in 2006, against 185 in 2005.

*The information in this brochure is accurate as of November 2006.*