

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**FIRST REGIONAL MEETING ON ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL
HUMANITARIAN PARTNERSHIPS CONCLUDES**

(Mexico City, 11 September 2008): On 10 and 11 September, the Government of Mexico, together with the support of the Government of Canada and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), hosted the First Regional Meeting on Enhancing International Humanitarian Partnerships. Over 80 delegates from 20 countries in the Latin American and the Caribbean region participated, as did representatives from UN humanitarian agencies, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and the media.

The meeting was convened in the immediate aftermath of the deadly series of hurricanes and tropical storms – Fay, Hannah, Gustav and Ike – which have killed hundreds of people, caused billions of dollars in damage, and resulted in emergency humanitarian needs in Haiti, Cuba, Turks and Caicos and other countries. These events were a stark reminder of the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters—not only hurricanes but also droughts, floods, earthquakes, and cold waves..

The meeting covered several topics including international support, country-level response, regional and sub-regional disaster management mechanisms, civil-military coordination, and capacity building on disaster preparedness. High level disaster management officials were able to engage in frank dialogue about their experiences in coordinating disaster response, particularly in working closely with international humanitarian support. All agreed that closer cooperation and collaboration between all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean could result in both better preparedness for disasters and improved disaster response.

The meeting also highlighted gaps – most importantly the need to ensure timely and high quality information both before and during a crisis and the need to harmonize various response mechanisms existing in each country. While a number of countries and organizations at the regional and international levels have established information management platforms, there was a recognition that this could be optimized further.

John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, offered condolences to the survivors of the hurricanes and storms. “We, the UN, are here to support national efforts. It is extremely important to know each other better, have solid understanding of our common strengths related to disaster preparedness and response, and see how we can work together to alleviate suffering. The discussions during this meeting definitely highlighted that action between national, regional and international humanitarian actors can indeed be very complementary. However, as a first step, it is essential to establish the basic compatibility of national response systems with the international system, tools and mechanisms.”

OCHA’s Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean highlighted its own role in working closely with governments in the region, stressing that OCHA aims to add value to national and regional efforts in coordination on the ground, information management, advocacy for humanitarian issues and mobilization of funds.

“OCHA can only do so through closer cooperation with national governments, and crucially between governments,” Mr. Holmes emphasized. “It is my sincere hope that this first meeting, under the initiative of Mexico, will prove a great first step to deal with such sensitive but important issues in a collaborative manner with the ultimate commitment to jointly alleviate suffering. I hope that the spirit of this meeting is reinforced by further joint action in the run up to the next regional meeting to be hosted by Brazil in 2009, so much so that more countries would ‘graduate’ from being recipients of aid to becoming net donors through international instruments such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP),” he added.