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ADVISORY GROUP ON ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

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A Publication on 15 Years of Multilateral Response to Environmental Emergencies

Note by the Secretariat

Introduction

This paper serves to present participants of the 8th meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) with a proposed outreach initiative in the form of an informative publication to celebrate 15 years of multilateral response to environmental emergencies. It should be recalled that in July 1994, the UN established, upon the recommendation of member states, a single mechanism for the multilateral response to environmental emergencies – the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (Joint Environment Unit).

This 15-year anniversary offers an excellent opportunity to draw attention to the importance of multilateral cooperation in preparing for and responding to oil spills, industrial accidents, secondary environmental impacts from natural disasters and other environmental emergencies. A publication depicting success stories would contribute to advocacy and awareness-raising, highlighting the need for integrating humanitarian and environmental action.

The book could emphasize important contributions made by various donor and recipient governments, organizations, and individuals. In addition to these actors, the general target audience would be people interested in the field of environmental emergency response.

This idea has already received initial support from a number of countries, and participants of AGEE 8 are invited to consider supporting this initiative, as well as to provide feedback and inputs in the early stage of production.

As secretariat to the AGEE, the Joint Environment Unit would drive the process and coordinate among the different actors. The organization and division of responsibilities would be outlined and delegated among various actors from the beginning, with the Joint Environment Unit orchestrating and streamlining the inputs.

Inputs from countries

In order to gain a good overview of the history and trends within the field of environmental emergencies in the last 15 years, interviews with multiple individuals and organizations would be undertaken. The publication will take the broadest outlook possible and will highlight the benefits provided to affected communities and countries.

The Joint Environment Unit would highly appreciate support from its donors in developing this publication. Contributions, financially or in-kind through secondment of staff or the use of editing facilities, are very welcomed. Based on similar publications, the total cost for 3,000 copies is estimated to be around US\$50,000.

Description

The publication would take the form of an engaging hard-cover coffee table book that documents, through pictures and text, the trends and major developments in the field of environmental emergency response. The book would be rich in text, highlighting arresting instances of the solidarity between countries during disasters. In order to communicate the importance of rapid response to global emergency situations, the book would contain captivating photos illustrative of actions taken.

An electronic version of the book, which could more easily be circulated, will also be made available. Such a version would also have the additional value of contributing to information used for outreach advocacy in other fora, such as the Joint Environment Unit's website, donor web sites, newsletters, and media releases.

Themes / Outline

The book could be structured according to the outline below. However, inputs related to both form and substance would be most welcome from all participants at this early stage of production.

Acknowledgements of donors

Donor support will be much appreciated, and such support would be readily acknowledged in the final publication.

Foreword

As the tone-setting piece, the foreword would touch on key milestones in the work that has been done in the environmental emergencies field, as well as give a picture of current trends and future challenges.

Introduction

This section would include a short summary of the book's chapters, including one chapter dedicated to governments, organizations, and individuals who have made important contributions in preventing, preparing for, and responding to, environmental emergencies. In this regard, it could also feature the first-time winners of the *Green Star Awards* for environmental emergencies.

Main Sections and Conclusions

The following sections outline different aspects of environmental emergency response work, describing the activities under preparedness and response, new and collaborative partnerships, as well as major trends.

- A history of environmental emergencies, featuring case studies and best practices, interviews with practitioners and academics. Highlighting particular successful multilateral efforts during environmental emergencies that received global-wide media coverage will make the book more ‘newsworthy’.
- Major trends, lessons learned and future challenges:

Effective and efficient UN integration: Reform of the UN leading towards “One UN”. The Joint Environment Unit is a product of such a process. It is the result of cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme’s technical expertise, and the humanitarian response coordination structure of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This collaboration optimizes the use of limited resources and provides a model of pragmatic cooperation within the UN family;

Integration of the Humanitarian and Environmental fields continues to be a main driving factor – while much has been done in this respect, further integration remains a continuous process;

Collaboration enhances assistance: From bi-polar Cold-War world towards integration and globalisation. Working towards expanding the networks and partnerships to include new regional organizations and a wider geographical distribution of experts;

New technology paving the way for effective collaboration: Technological inventions can be utilized to facilitate rapid response, exemplified by the Environmental Assessment Module. In cooperation with the International Humanitarian Partnership, the Environmental Assessment Module, consisting of a mobile laboratory mounted on two small trucks, can be deployed for on-site sampling of air, water and soil and analysis of hazardous and toxic substances;

Environmental preparedness should be a priority as experience shows that disaster preparedness significantly helps save lives and reduces the costs associated with responding to and recovering from environmental emergencies;

Climate change is already creating new challenges for environmental emergency response work. In light of global climate change trends, there is widespread consensus that extreme weather-related disasters will increase in frequency and intensity in the coming years. There is consensus among the international scientific community that the recent trends support the contention that these changes are already underway. Environmental emergencies – which so often follow natural disasters – are likely to experience a significant increase as well. This makes the publication of such a book all the more timely and important.

Concluding remarks

The AGEE is invited to support the proposal to publish a book celebrating 15 years of multilateral response to environmental emergencies. Feedback and ideas from participants are most welcomed in the initial stage of production.