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UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

JOINT UNEP/OCHA ENVIRONMENT UNIT (JEU)



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ADVISORY GROUP ON ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

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Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit Proposed Work Plan

Note by the Secretariat

Introduction

The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (Joint Environment Unit) proposes to conduct the following activities in accordance with the mandate of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), relevant decisions of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council, and previous recommendations of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE).

The core business of the Joint Environment Unit remains the coordination and mobilization of international assistance to environmental emergencies. The Joint Environment Unit will continue to focus on notification, brokerage, mobilization and coordination of assistance for countries experiencing environmental emergencies. As requested by past AGEE meetings, it will also continue response preparedness activities aimed at helping countries improve domestic ability to manage emergencies.

Activities and projects that will be undertaken as part of the Rosersberg Initiative are fully integrated into this proposed workplan. The activities are grouped according to the following four main pillars:

1. Mobilization and Coordination of Assistance
2. Advocacy and strengthened international response capacity
3. Strengthening International Governance Systems
4. Operational aspects of providing and receiving international assistance

1. Mobilization and Coordination of Assistance

The Joint Environment Unit will continue playing a key role in mobilizing international assistance by monitoring, notifying and acting as a broker between donating and receiving countries. Activities related to the coordination of assistance will also continue to be a major focus. Mobilization of assistance often includes a need for independent and impartial expert assessments, sent upon the request of affected countries.

1.1. Monitoring of Emergencies

The Joint Environment Unit communicates with donors and affected countries primarily through its network of National Focal Points, UN Resident Coordinators, United Nations Development Programme Resident Representatives, UNEP Regional Offices, and OCHA Country and Regional Offices. It monitors news services and web sites to track emerging environmental incidents, and promptly seeks and disseminates pertinent information.

Action:	Continue monitoring of environmental emergencies and share information with the international community
Result:	International community is timely alerted to any environmental emergencies and can consider providing assistance if so requested

1.2. Early identification of secondary environmental risks following natural disasters

Natural disasters can trigger secondary environmental risks from infrastructure including installations that hold hazardous materials. These risks are often neglected in the immediate response phase, however, resulting in preventable deaths and injuries among the affected population and emergency responders. Secondary risks require identification and full consideration in the response phase. To address this need, the Joint Environment Unit developed the Hazard Identification Tool (HIT) to alert first emergency responders (e.g. United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams), UN Country Teams and national authorities to any secondary risks within the area of the natural disaster, in cases of sudden-onset natural disaster requiring emergency assistance.

Action:	To continue screening major sudden onset natural disasters for potential secondary environmental risks and impacts by using the Hazard Identification Tool (HIT)
Result:	UN Country Teams/National Authorities/UNDAC teams are alerted to any potential secondary risks and can integrate these in the acute response phase to prevent casualties amongst the already affected communities and first responders

1.3. Mobilizing international assistance

The Joint Environment Unit will continue to coordinate and mobilize international assistance to environmental emergencies, natural disasters with major environmental consequences and complex emergencies, based on the results of assessments and/or when requested by countries. For that reason, the Joint Environment Unit intends to continue to deploy generalists who are fully prepared to make environmental emergencies assessments by using the Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT); and to deploy specialists in different areas (e.g. disaster waste management, landslides, oil spills) who can provide specialized assessments in these fields.

Action:	Coordinate and mobilize international assistance to countries facing environmental emergencies and other man-made or natural disasters
Result:	Reduce the impacts of environmental emergencies and, where possible prevent unnecessary death and injury caused by secondary impacts and risks following natural disasters

2. Advocacy and strengthened international response capacity

Lack of capacity and awareness are two great challenges to effective response to environmental emergencies. The Joint Environment Unit will continue to work with governmental, international and non-governmental organizations to raise awareness of the environmental dimension of natural disasters and complex emergencies and the international effort to respond, prepare for and prevent environmental emergencies. The Joint Environment Unit encourages countries to continue working through their respective competent national authorities to promote greater understanding of the environmental dimension of crises and the importance of addressing these as an integrated part of humanitarian response.

2.1. Environmental Emergencies Training

The overarching aim of the Environmental Emergencies Training is to strengthen the capacity of environmental experts' knowledge, skills and understanding of the specific circumstances and conditions of international deployments for environmental emergency response, to enable them to respond effectively during an international deployment in an austere environment throughout the disaster mission cycle of preparedness, mobilization, operations, demobilization and post-mission.

Action:	To assist in the organization of the Environmental Emergencies Training upon request of supporting countries
Result:	International capacity of environmental emergency response through national experts is more robust and standardized

2.2. Continue to undertake awareness - raising initiatives

Since 2007, the Joint Environment Unit has, under the Rosersberg Initiative umbrella, stepped up its communication and awareness-raising activities among policy-makers and other key stakeholders, and proposes to continue doing so, making best use of existing channels and timely opportunities. For example, the 15-year existence of the Joint Environment Unit in 2009, provides a good occasion to advocate for environmental emergencies. The Joint Environment Unit will also continue to issue newsletters on the Rosersberg Initiative and mission reports from important response missions.

Action:	Continue an awareness/communications campaign about environmental emergencies
Result:	Public awareness about environmental emergencies maintained and improved

2.3. 15 Years of Multilateral Response to Environmental Emergencies

The year 2009 marks 15 years since the UN established, upon the recommendation of the Member States, a single mechanism for the multilateral response to environmental emergencies – the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit. This 15th year anniversary offers an excellent op-

portunity 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. In addition, the book could emphasize important contributions made and roles played by various countries.

Action:	Publish and distribute a book on 15 Years of Multilateral Response to Environmental Emergencies
Result:	Advocacy and awareness-raising in environmental emergencies strengthened

2.4. Expanding the resource network

The capacity to deploy resources from all regions of the world is essential not only for effectiveness and efficiency but also in case of emergencies occurring during a period of travel restrictions (for example, in the event of a pandemic). Language and diversity issues are also relevant in this context. The Joint Environment Unit will continue pursuing the expansion of its donor network, making best use of existing regional partnerships and organizations, in particular the regional Humanitarian Partnerships and the USAR community.

Action:	Outreach to individual countries and regional organizations and partners
Result:	An expanded and more representative resource network to respond to environmental emergencies

2.5. Closer cooperation with regional organizations

The need for closer cooperation with regional organizations is essential in order to improve the response for and preparedness to environmental emergencies. The Joint Environment Unit’s experience with the European Commission – Monitoring and Information Centre (EC-MIC) should be used to explore similar arrangements with regional organizations in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Action:	Engage with regional organizations to identify complementary activities in the field of environmental emergency response
Result:	Improved awareness and response capacity at the regional level

2.6. Environmental emergencies centre

A major step toward strengthening capacity to respond to environmental emergencies could be the establishment of a center(s) to provide technical assistance, raise awareness, and build capacity for national governments. It would be a combination of information clearinghouse, resource for technical assistance, and training center, and could be a physical center and/or a virtual, on-line center. It could be linked to international trainings, such as those of UNDAC, UNECE, and UNITAR, and offer training on the newly developed Flash Environmental Assessment Tool (FEAT) and on the Environmental Assessment Module (EAM) of the International Humanitarian Partnership. However, to avoid duplications, the need for such a centre should be established through a survey of existing initiatives at global and regional levels, which would be mapped and analyzed regarding their geographic and thematic scope, objectives, target audience, methodology, set-up, staff and resources required. Survey results would

help determine any need to establish an environmental emergencies centre, and would provide recommendations regarding its potential scope.

Action:	Undertake a survey to map existing training/capacity building initiatives to establish the need for an environmental emergencies centre
Result:	The need and scope for the possible establishment of an environmental emergencies centre has been analyzed and determined

2.7. Revive the UNEP Trust Fund for Environmental Emergencies

Envisioning more practical ways for countries and organizations to support the response to environmental emergencies, the Joint Environment Unit proposes to revive the UNEP Trust Fund on Environmental Emergencies. The activities and projects carried out with finances from the Trust Fund could either co-finance core activities, and/or be used to support additional projects and activities.

Action:	Develop project proposals under the Trust Fund for Environmental Emergencies to allow for an expanded workplan and activities for environmental emergencies
Result:	Countries have greater flexibility in supporting the Joint Environment Unit and an increased output of activities in environmental emergencies can be achieved

2.8. Support the medium term strategy of UNEP

UNEP’s Medium Term Strategy (MTS) has prioritized Disasters and Conflict as one of its six thematic focus areas. The Joint Environment Unit will continue to work with UNEP’s Post Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB) to assist in the implementation of the strategy. The UNEP objective is to minimize threats to human welfare arising from environmental causes and consequences of conflicts and disasters. Building on the excellent cooperation between the JEU and PCDMB, the JEU will continue to lead the coordination and mobilization of the response to environmental emergencies, promote the smooth hand-over of environmental issues from relief to recovery phase, and work closer with UNEP’s Regional Offices on the implementation of the medium term strategy.

Action:	Support UNEP’s implementation of the MTS on disasters and conflicts
Result:	A more cohesive partnership on environmental emergencies between UNEP and OCHA through the Joint Environment Unit and PCDMB

3. Strengthening International Governance Systems

Due to the unusual nature of environmental emergencies, international law and policy to facilitate response to such emergencies has been characterized by piecemeal development – responding to specific threats and concerns – that has created a patchwork of conventions, guidelines, and institutions. The elements of this patchwork do not always fit neatly, leading to gaps, overlaps, and lack of clarity of role and responsibilities.

3. 1. Promote the opportunities captured in ‘Vision 2012’

Environmental emergency response is one of the few environmental areas that operate without an overarching international convention or agreement. This means that there are no formal,

binding requirements that apply globally for notification in the case of an industrial accident, in contrast to a nuclear accident. Similarly, there are no formally established arrangements for requesting, offering, providing, or receiving assistance in the event of an environmental emergency. The *Bruch Report* highlights global gaps and overlaps regarding environmental emergencies, and recommends that legal and policy issues should be addressed. In assessing the feasibility and desirability of this option, the year 2012 provides an important benchmark.

Action:	Support and promote the opportunities captured in ‘Vision 2012’ to the international community
Result:	Countries are aware of the opportunities to address existing gaps and overlaps, and to provide greater clarity regarding roles and responsibilities

3.2. Support to UNDAC Disaster Response Preparedness Missions

The Joint Environment Unit will continue to cooperate with the UNDAC Disaster Response Preparedness (DRP) Missions by working closely with OCHA and UNEP colleagues to ensure that environmental emergency response issues are fully addressed in such missions.

Action:	Promote and support inclusion of environmental experts in UNDAC DRP missions, through the development of guidance materials
Result:	National capacity for integrating environmental issues within humanitarian response structures is strengthened

3.3. MSB – NATO/PfP Course on International Environmental Disaster Operations

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) and the Joint Environment Unit have been organizing the International Environmental Disaster Operations course as part of the NATO/Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP). The purpose of the course is to contribute to participants’ abilities to organize and implement international response in case of environmental disaster. During the course, participants can establish a network of environmental disaster response specialists from different nations. An evaluation and possibly update of the programme will be discussed between the Joint Environment Unit and MSB.

Action:	Continued assistance with planning and presentation of NATO/PfP courses
Result:	Improved preparedness for international environmental emergency operations

4. Operational aspects of providing and receiving international assistance

To improve operational efficiency and effectiveness of notification and assistance in responding to environmental emergencies, there are a number of initiatives that States, the Joint Environment Unit, and others can undertake. Broadly speaking, these measures can facilitate institutional coordination (including in the transition from emergency response to early recovery), provide additional detail and clarity (particularly where existing frameworks are overly general), and improve standardization in the delivery of assistance.

To assist potential donor nations in deploying national assets internationally, the Joint Environment Unit has supported *Rosersberg Initiative Thematic Area Three* by developing a document listing best practices that potential donor nations could follow. A consultant has drafted a report and guidelines that identify ways to organize internal national processes in order to en-

sure timely deployment of assets on international missions. This will focus on three areas: identification of available experts, sources of funding, and mobilization procedures.

4.1. Dissemination of guidelines

The Joint Environment Unit has produced several guidelines to improve preparedness and response of countries for environmental emergencies, thereby contributing to capacity-building of different stakeholders. The Joint Environment Unit intends to more widely disseminate these guidelines to ensure that countries and other stakeholders are fully equipped better prepare for and respond to environmental emergencies.

Action:	Disseminate guidelines on the <i>Best Practices Guidelines on providing and receiving of International Assistance; Environmental Emergencies Contingency Plan</i> and <i>Environmental Emergencies Response Mechanism</i> through appropriate channels.
Result:	Capacity to prepare for and respond to environmental emergencies improved

4.2. National Focal Points

The UNEP and OCHA regional offices are assets that should be used in the promotion of the Joint Environment Unit’s services. They are also an important means to identify key people in various countries who could be added to the list of National Focal Points (NFP). Having an officially designated NFP for environmental emergencies is a key aspect for countries in order to provide and/or receive international environmental emergency assistance in the most efficient and effective way.

Action:	Based on recommendations contained in the ‘ <i>Study of operational aspects of providing and receiving international assistance to environmental emergencies</i> ’ improve the National Focal Point system for environmental emergency response
Result:	Countries are better prepared to provide and /or receive international environmental emergency assistance

4.3. Study of monitoring and notification

Prompt notification of emergencies enables multilateral assistance to be effectively organized and deployed. Its absence inhibits the international community’s ability to be alerted of the need for assistance, thereby causing delays in response. 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. 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.

Action:	Support a comprehensive analysis of current activities and capacities of the systematic monitoring and notification of environmental emergencies, aiming at identifying gaps, overlaps and potential for synergies.
Result:	A thorough understanding of how the international community is informed of an environmental emergency, and concrete recommendations for improvements