

## TODAY AT THE GA

### PLENARY MEETINGS ON STRENGTHENING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE 19/20 NOVEMBER 2007

#### PLENARY DEBATE

Agenda Item 71: Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

#### Speakers

UKRAINE  
PORTUGAL  
BELARUS  
SAUDI ARABIA  
AUSTRALIA  
KUWAIT  
JAPAN  
SWITZERLAND  
PERU  
INDIA  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION  
PAKISTAN  
PALESTINE  
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
CANADA  
NORWAY  
EGYPT  
CHINA  
PHILIPPINES  
LITHUANIA  
THAILAND  
GUATEMALA  
SUDAN  
MEXICO  
ICELAND  
RWANDA  
SOUTH AFRICA  
INDONESIA  
COLOMBIA  
DJIBOUTI  
HOLY SEE  
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS  
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION  
SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA

#### Summary

OCHA's efforts in coordinating humanitarian assistance was widely welcomed by Member States during the discourse on humanitarian assistance at the General Assembly. Disaster risk reduction was almost on everyone's agenda and recognized as key in addressing future disasters.

While many Member States expressed their concern about the lack of access in humanitarian emergencies, some underlined the principle of sovereignty. **India** e.g. stated that the 'sovereignty and territorial integrity must be fully respected by humanitarian assistance' and that it should be provided 'with the consent of the host state.' Several Member States expressed their concern about violence against civilians and in particular gender-based violence and sexual violence.

Many delegations expressed strong support to the CERF and acknowledged its performance in responding rapidly to natural disasters. Others highlighted their preference to bilateral donations in contrast to their contributions to the CERF, such as **Saudi Arabia** and **Kuwait**. **South Africa** called for more funding for OCHA's regional offices.

Several delegations welcomed the implementation of the humanitarian reform, in particular the encouraging results from the cluster pilots, and are looking forward to the cluster evaluation. Delegations also encouraged the UN to continue its efforts to strengthen partnerships within the humanitarian community.

**Switzerland** stated that there is no clear overview of the development of humanitarian principles and norms in GA resolutions and advocated for a study on this issue.

#### Highlights

##### Disaster Risk Reduction

Many Member States expressed their condolences for the people of Bangladesh in the wake of Cyclone Sidr and stressed the importance of preparedness and early warning systems. Many commended the Government of Bangladesh's own early warning systems which had saved a number of lives.

There was a broad consensus that disaster preparedness is key in reducing the impact of future disasters. Many delegations acknowledged the trend of increased vulnerability among the poorest and increasing impact and frequency of disasters recorded over the past decades. **Egypt** also highlighted that the economic impact of such disasters was an obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Many delegations encouraged international efforts and support in strengthening disaster preparedness at all levels. Delegations underlined

the particular importance of stand-by capacities, early recovery, enhanced humanitarian coordination on a regional level and the dissemination of best practices. **The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** further highlighted the importance of legal preparedness as a vital component of disaster preparedness, with the objective to strengthen governments that have to deal with international humanitarian assistance.

Several delegations, including **Bangladesh, Canada, Djibouti, Korea** and the **IFRC**- linked disaster risk reduction explicitly with the current discussions on climate change.

#### **The Central Emergency Response Fund**

There was a broad consensus among Member States that the CERF is useful for enabling faster and more effective coordination and response to humanitarian emergencies. Many delegations were eager to flag their full support to the CERF. **China** called upon Member States to contribute generously to CERF to help it reach its \$500 million target in 2008. However, there were calls from several delegations, such as **India, Russia, Guatemala, and the US**, to further improve the accountability of the CERF by enhancing transparency of its disbursements. **Russia** also stated that they are looking forward to the two year CERF evaluation.

#### **Violence against civilians, sexual violence and gender-based violence**

Several Member States expressed their concern about violence against civilians, including **Australia, the EU, Mexico** and the **US**. Violence against women and children in particular was condemned by **Australia, EU, Guatemala, Iceland, Korea, Mexico, South Africa** and the **US**. **Norway** suggested that the United Nations should take the lead in establishing more effective preventive and protective measures to address sexual and gender-based violence. Many Member States also supported the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into humanitarian assistance.

**Egypt** emphasized that humanitarian actors must avoid acts -- such as sexual abuse and child trafficking -- that violated the principles of the United Nations Charter, as well as national law and international humanitarian law.

#### **Access**

Many delegations, including **Australia, Brazil, EU, Mexico, Iceland, Korea, Nepal, Peru, Switzerland, the Holy See** and the **US**, expressed their deep concern about the lack of access to humanitarian assistance. **Australia, Switzerland, Kuwait** and the **EU** condemned attacks on humanitarian personnel and called for improved safety and security of humanitarian personnel. **Canada** urged all States to sign the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

**Colombia** and **India** underlined that all humanitarian assistance must fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host state and should be provided with the consent of the host government. **India** further elaborated that humanitarian assistance should be provided in a transparent manner, in close consultation with the host government, and along with **Sudan**, stated that humanitarian actors must respect national laws and customs.

**The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ICRC)** highlighted the importance of developing and maintaining contacts with all those who have a significant impact on the course of an armed conflict. In its view, such contacts are crucial in gaining access to populations in need for humanitarian assistance.

#### **Humanitarian Reform**

Many delegations acknowledged the important role of the United Nations in humanitarian assistance and mentioned recent efforts by the ERC and OCHA to strengthen humanitarian response and coordination. **Australia, Canada, Korea, Mexico, South Africa, the EU** and **Switzerland** all expressed their support for the implementation of the cluster approach and commended the first encouraging results. However, **Columbia** insisted that the decision to activate the cluster approach is the responsibility of the host government.

**Australia, Thailand** and the **EU**, which acknowledged that the first responders to a crisis are often local communities and partners, expressed their support for an enhanced partnership with NGOs, and in the case of **Peru**, also with private partners.

**Russia** welcomed OCHA's efforts to improve humanitarian assistance but stated that there is a lack of transparency in its approach with regard to partnerships with NGOs. **Russia** requested that NGOs should be accountable to the UN.

The **ICRC** acknowledged that coordination is as important as ever, given that more actors, often with different objectives, operating standards and activities are entering the 'humanitarian world.' However, it pointed out that humanitarian coordination should take place first and foremost in the field.