

**HIGHLIGHTS OF BRIEFING BY UN EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR
JAN EGELAND, AND MARIKA FAHLEN, CHAIRMAN, CERF ADVISORY GROUP,
ON THE CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND**

Just six months after it was created, the United Nations' Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has received more than 260 million USD which will be used to save lives by providing quick funding for victims of natural disasters and armed conflict, the United Nations top humanitarian official said today.

Speaking at a press conference at the United Nations Office at Geneva, Jan Egeland, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said to date a total of 54 donors have contributed to the Fund, 52 Member States and two private organizations. Those donations have expanded the Fund to a capacity of 273 million USD which could be disbursed in a moment's notice to emergencies around the globe. Of this amount, only 11 million USD was in outstanding pledges. Since it was established in March this year, the CERF has been able to commit 174 million USD for 250 projects in 26 countries experiencing humanitarian crises around the world. Of this amount, some 97 million USD was invested in emergencies requiring a rapid response and nearly 77 million USD for those crises which have become either neglected or under-funded.

"The CERF is living proof that the United Nations can reform, is reforming and is getting better", Mr. Egeland said. "It's also living proof that the Member States believe in the institution of the United Nations". Thanks to the Fund, there are no longer discussions on why there wasn't enough money for these crises. At the same time, 2006 has fortunately been a year where the world hasn't been plagued with an overwhelming number of emergencies. "The Emergency Relief Fund has helped avoid a crisis not being met by humanitarian response due to a lack of money".

Turning to the situation in Darfur, Mr. Egeland said the United Nations was able to provide 20 million USD from the CERF shortly after it was set up to fund relief operations for the 230,000 newly displaced persons in that region in March and April this year. "If we hadn't had the Emergency Fund I don't believe we would have been able to cover for them", he added.

Similarly, once there was clear evidence that there would be massive displacement in Lebanon resulting from the war there, 5 million USD in CERF money was quickly rolled out to finance operations to assist those newly displaced by way of providing trucks, telecommunications equipment, sanitation services, food rations and emergency health supplies. Other cases where CERF finances were used to jump start humanitarian operations include Timor Leste and Sri Lanka.

Another 38 million USD from the CERF helped fill the funding gap in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the most money was spent for the "forgotten" emergencies, Mr. Egeland added. It was in this country where the most amount of CERF money has been invested for such neglected crises. "There was no other country on earth where so many people died of neglect and disease as the Democratic Republic of the Congo", he stated.

“Equally important was that with this Fund we could for the first time inject some equity into a system where some emergencies are hopelessly forgotten and neglected, whereas others are very well covered by the glaring light of the international community”, he said.

Speaking in her capacity as Chairperson for the Advisory Group of the CERF, Marika Fahlen explained that the Group was comprised of 12 members from various regions and with different areas of expertise in humanitarian response who were charged with looking at the impact and effectiveness of the Fund. The Advisory Group was holding its second meeting at the United Nations Office at Geneva today.

“We have been impressed by the results and achievements of the CERF during its first half-year”, Ms. Fahlen said. The Advisory Group has carried out an extensive review on the use of the money from the Fund at the country, sectoral and beneficiary level. The Group viewed the CERF as an effective instrument to strengthen coordination and building partnerships at the country level to maximize capacities to respond to humanitarian crises. The CERF has already demonstrated its impact in line with the goals of the UN reform to strengthen solid country-level responses.

The Advisory Group was also exploring partnerships with non-UN actors and seeking out new potential donors. Additionally, the Advisory Group members were looking at the best possible ways to reach the target set by the General Assembly of having 500 million USD in the Fund by 2008. “All people who are in need of humanitarian protection have a right to such support. The CERF has proven that it has contributed to the international community living up to its obligations”, Ms. Fahlen said.

Asked to provide a breakdown of the commitments made to the CERF, Mr. Egeland said the United Kingdom was the biggest donor to the Fund with 70 million USD donated, followed by Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Canada. In terms of recipients of rapid response money, Sudan was on top with 25 million USD, and then Afghanistan with 12.8 million USD and Kenya with 12 million USD, which was in relation to the drought affecting that region. Altogether, some 30 million USD was spent for drought relief efforts in the Horn of Africa. As to underfunded emergencies, he said the health sector often bore the brunt of little financial assistance and therefore the CERF targeted nearly 35 per cent of its funds to those causes.

Responding to a question, Mr. Egeland said should a disaster strike tomorrow the CERF would be able to provide up to 30 million USD for a rapid response to finance urgent needs. That money could materialize for any given emergency within 48 hours. “Going through this Fund is a more intelligent way of getting more coherent, early action”, he added.

Mr. Egeland said that on the initiative of the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea, Ban Ki-moon, his country had donated 5 million USD to the Fund. Now that Mr. Ban had been nominated for Secretary-General, the United Nations has a believer in the Fund, as was the case with Kofi Annan whose initiative led to its creation.

In response to a question, Mr. Egeland said irrespective of the political controversies and regrettable acts of the regime of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, the international community has an obligation to feed the people in that country. It was hoped that the donor community would meet the appeals for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea so that money wouldn’t have to be spent from the CERF on that situation. If the situation in that country changed to one demanding a rapid emergency response or as an underfunded crisis, then the United Nations would assist through the CERF.

Asked about comparisons to other existing funds generated by the United Nations system, in particular the recently launched Peacebuilding Fund, Mr. Egeland said the CERF was unique in that it was the only fund to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance.

The CERF was meant to jump start operations and fill gaping holes in humanitarian efforts, not to substitute other existing appeals and donor mechanisms, Mr. Egeland said in response to a question.

Responding to another question, the Emergency Relief Coordinator said some 5 billion USD was spent for humanitarian crises each year, which was much too little. That amount was double what Europeans spent on ice cream and nearly half of what Americans spent on their pets annually.

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