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SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE: OFFICE OF
THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR

International efforts to meet humanitarian
needs in emergency situations

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its decision 1981/178 of 23 July 1981, the Economic and Social Council decided to transmit to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session a draft resolution entitled "International efforts to meet humanitarian needs in emergency situations", 1/ together with a number of documents before it on the subject. The Council also invited

"the Secretary-General to provide to the General Assembly at that session with such additional information and/or suggestions regarding co-ordination of international efforts to meet humanitarian needs in emergency situations and might be necessary and appropriate, with a view to developing those views expressed by delegations in the Third (Programme and Co-ordination) Committee at the second regular session of 1981 of the Council which were reflective of consensus."

2. The documents transmitted by the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly cover different aspects of the work of the United Nations system in this broad area. In addition to the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) (A/36/259) and the relevant sections of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) 2/ and the Joint Meetings of CPC and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (E/1981/86), these documents are the following:

1/ For the text of the draft resolution, see A/C.2/36/L.4.

(a) Summary report on ways and means by which the United Nations system has carried out over the last decade its role of co-ordinating and implementing humanitarian emergency assistance in cases other than those caused by natural disasters, submitted to the Council pursuant to its resolution 1980/43 of 23 July 1980 (E/1981/16 and Corr.1);

(b) Report on the results of discussions in the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) on the strengthening of the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies (E/1981/37 and Corr.1, chap. IV, sect. A, and annex IV);

(c) Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) containing an evaluation of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) and suggestions on new approaches to United Nations disaster relief co-ordination on a system-wide basis (A/36/73);

(d) Comments of the Secretary-General on the JIU report dealing with the role and operations of UNDRO and with the broader issues of co-ordination raised by the JIU (A/36/73/Add.1).

3. In his comments on the JIU report, the Secretary-General noted that these various reports and initiatives seemed all to be inspired by a common premise, i.e., a reaffirmation of the role of the United Nations system in disaster situations, and a new emphasis on the search for ways to make its contribution more effective and relevant. The same considerations and objectives have been evident in the discussions in the Economic and Social Council, as well as in the earlier discussions at the twenty-first session of CPC and at the Joint Meetings of CPC and ACC on 29 and 30 June and 1 July 1981. A broad agreement has emerged on the need for further efforts to enhance the capacity of the United Nations system to meet the assistance requirements of countries stricken by disasters and other emergency situations. Emphasis has been placed on the importance of avoiding duplication and ensuring the best use of available mechanisms and resources through, inter alia, flexible co-operative arrangements which would ensure effective, speedy and concerted responses, while fully respecting national sovereignty and reflecting the mandates and spheres of competence of all organizations involved.

4. Since, apart from these general considerations, no consensus has as yet been reached at the intergovernmental level, the Secretary-General is not in a position, under the terms of the request addressed to him in Economic and Social Council decision 1981/178, to provide additional information and suggestions, beyond those contained in the ACC report referred to above and in the relevant sections of his comments on the JIU report on its evaluation of UNDRO.
