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President: Mr. Grauls (Vice-President) (Belgium)

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Grauls (Belgium), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Humanitarian affairs segment

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (A/66/81-E/2011/117 and E/2011/L.33) (agenda item 5)

1. **The President** declared the humanitarian affairs segment open and recalled that the theme of the segment was “Working in partnership to strengthen coordination of humanitarian assistance in a changing world”. The occasion would enable the Economic and Social Council to engage in a frank and open exchange, and afforded an opportunity of obtaining a clearer view of the operational difficulties besetting humanitarian assistance. It was important to consider how the international community might respond more effectively to humanitarian disasters with a view to discerning more satisfactory solutions to future challenges.

2. Humanitarian action and the coordination of assistance were exceptionally complex issues. The humanitarian consequences of conflicts and natural disasters gave rise to needs for various forms of assistance, including food, shelter, health care and protection. Regardless of the scale or media coverage of humanitarian crises, it was the mission of the United Nations to direct and coordinate international humanitarian action.

3. The efforts of humanitarian workers were admirable, especially in view of the fact that they had to face many dangers that jeopardized their activities in the field. It was essential to develop new and more effective risk-management methods and ways of protecting humanitarian workers, and thereby to facilitate relief and assistance missions.

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

4. **Ms. Amos** (Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that the humanitarian affairs segment provided States Members of the Economic and Social Council with an

exceptional opportunity to discuss the most pressing humanitarian issues and how they were changing.

5. The international community should continue to strengthen existing partnerships, not only at the international level but also at the regional, national and local levels. Moreover, it should enter into new partnerships with innovative private-sector actors and other stakeholders that were not associated with humanitarian issues as a rule. Their ideas should serve as a source of inspiration, and their capacities should be put to good use. At the same time, it was essential not to focus exclusively on immediate humanitarian needs, but to address the underlying factors as well, in order to bolster people’s resilience. General Assembly resolution 46/182 (A/RES/46/182), which had been adopted twenty years earlier, was still the cornerstone of the humanitarian framework, containing as it did the guiding principles of humanitarian action, regardless of whether it was undertaken by States, the United Nations or other agencies. However, the humanitarian system had evolved over the years and was now more extensive and capable than ever, while it had also become more forward-looking and accountable. Coordination had been upgraded, funding mechanisms, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund, had been improved, and preparedness efforts had been strengthened.

6. In 2010, the major disasters that had struck Haiti and Pakistan had tested the capacity of international humanitarian action to the limit. By 2025, the world’s population would have grown to 8 billion people. World food production would have to increase by 50 per cent by 2030, and in addition, commodity prices were expected to rise by somewhere between 120 per cent and 180 per cent. In the second quarter of 2010, rising food prices combined with spikes in fuel prices had sent 44 million people into extreme poverty. Because of rising food prices, the 1.2 billion people who lived on less than US\$1.25 a day had been made even poorer, and the world’s many low-income families had become more vulnerable than ever to future crises. In 2010, there had been 373 natural disasters—compared to 328 in 2009—that had cost 297,000 people their lives. Japan had been hit by a tsunami and an earthquake with disastrous consequences, and heavy rains had not only caused the worst flooding that Pakistan had ever experienced, but had also affected Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, Thailand, much of southern Africa, and Colombia. Australia, the Philippines and Myanmar had been hit by cyclones, and

the drought that was currently parching the Horn of Africa had already affected more than 10 million people.

7. Conflicts had also affected tens of millions of people. In 2010, some 27 million people (a figure that was 400,000 greater than the corresponding total for 2009) had been displaced within their countries as a result of conflict, and a number of countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan, had required humanitarian assistance.

8. It was clear from the report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/66/81-E/2011/117) that humanitarian action was required with increasing frequency. There had been over 30 emergencies between June 2010 and May 2011, owing to long-standing humanitarian situations, more frequent and more serious natural disasters, and global problems giving rise to increased vulnerability. In view of the anticipated difficulties, the United Nations and its partners would have to continue to adapt by strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders, especially Governments. Such an approach would enable a shift from a reactive system to a more anticipatory one. In addition, it would be essential to cooperate more closely with development experts, and humanitarian funding would have to evolve in order to ensure that preparedness activities received predictable, appropriate support, and also to facilitate an effective transition between relief efforts and long-term recovery. The humanitarian affairs segment would focus on the two central issues emphasized in the report: how to prepare the humanitarian financing system for the future, and how to strengthen resilience, preparedness and capacities for humanitarian response.

9. Funding needs were increasing: according to the mid-year review of the consolidated appeals process for the current year, those needs totalled US\$7.9 billion. In 2010, Governments, the private sector and individuals had generously donated nearly \$15 billion, \$4 billion more than in 2009, but new donors would have to be found none the less. The humanitarian community would also have to bring about change in the humanitarian financing system, with emphasis on predictability, sustainability, capacity-building, coordination and rapid action. In recent years, humanitarian funding had become more

regular, predictable, flexible and needs-based, thanks in large measure to the Central Emergency Response Fund, the Emergency Disaster Relief Fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and country-based pooled funds. However, there was still room for improvement with respect to financial planning and responsiveness to the needs of countries emerging from conflict. Funding mechanisms that were needs-based, innovative and well-resourced should be established, in cooperation with development agencies and international financial institutions.

10. Preparedness planning was fundamental, as not only did it afford a means of saving lives, it was also more economical than a reactive strategy. Emergency response actions were directed by national and local authorities first and foremost, and it was essential to provide them with effective means of operating by ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of all concerned were clearly defined. It would also be useful to strengthen partnerships with development agencies, and that issue was currently being considered by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, with the ultimate objective of helping countries to be less dependent on international assistance.

11. In addition, States should invest more in early warning systems, and the international community should mobilize more effectively to track global problems with a view to more effective anticipation of future crises and the appearance or exacerbation of humanitarian needs in vulnerable regions. According to the report, recent assessments had confirmed that, despite an improvement in the cluster coordination system, better coordination was necessary, with greater participation by national and local actors. Furthermore, it was essential to strengthen the humanitarian coordinator system and the capacities of country teams, and international actors should be more accountable to the recipients of assistance. Compliance with humanitarian principles was the cornerstone of humanitarian response, and as such was of the utmost importance. Problems of access to assistance remained to be solved. It was vital for humanitarian operations to be pursued, even in difficult and hazardous contexts, and for those operations to remain civilian in nature in all situations, including situations where military personnel participated in them.

12. There was every reason to be confident that the work of the Economic and Social Council would result

in enhanced effectiveness, coordination and operational coherence in humanitarian response operations. The international community should mobilize to forge partnerships for the purpose of helping people in need. By integrating the experience, comparative advantages and capacities of all concerned, that community would be in a position to elicit solidarity with the world's most vulnerable people, thereby making humanitarian assistance an issue of world-wide scope in response to what would undoubtedly be challenging problems in the course of the coming twenty years.

General discussion

13. **Mr. Suarez Salvia** (Argentina), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the theme of the segment afforded an opportunity to consider how Member States, the United Nations system and other actors could continue their efforts to coordinate emergency humanitarian assistance in order to respond effectively to the needs of the growing numbers of people confronted with emergency situations.

14. The remedies set forth in General Assembly resolution 46/182 should be borne in mind. All humanitarian assistance providers should comply fully with the guiding principles, including in particular humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as independence, that should characterize all humanitarian operations and underpin the effectiveness and coordination of the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations and other competent organizations.

15. The Group of 77 and China reaffirmed the primordial role played by States in the launching, organization, coordination and deployment of humanitarian assistance. Consequently, it was important for the institutions of the United Nations system and the international community to help developing countries broaden their knowledge, strengthen their capacities and consolidate their institutions with a bearing on humanitarian issues. In all efforts aimed at the coordination of humanitarian assistance, respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States should remain a fundamental principle.

16. At a time when humanitarian crises were arising more and more frequently, funding remained a problem. Accordingly, in order to provide effective assistance in all humanitarian emergency situations, it

was necessary to ensure that funding was reliably available, predictable and appropriate, and to that end, partnerships and funding mechanisms had to be consolidated. Member States should fully discharge the obligations incumbent upon them under international humanitarian law, including in particular the fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

17. The Group of 77 and China had participated actively in the negotiations on the draft resolution entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations" (E/2011/L.33), and hoped that the text would be adopted by consensus. In order to facilitate a flexible transition between relief phase and development, humanitarian assistance should serve to support recovery and long-term development. To that end, it would be feasible to continue to strengthen coordination between humanitarian actors and development stakeholders, provided care was taken to avoid regarding humanitarian assistance as a substitute for international development cooperation.

18. **Mr. Stanowski** (Observer for Poland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, said that the candidate countries—Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro and Turkey—the stabilization and association process countries and the potential candidates—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia—together with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine wished to associate themselves with his statement. The European Union reiterated its firm support for the activities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It took note of the recent progress that had been made with respect to a stronger role for humanitarian coordinators, the use of common funds and the adoption of a modular approach. The strengthening of links between the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the main representatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee was a gratifying development, as was enhanced cooperation between OCHA and United Nations bodies.

19. However, there was room for further progress in a number of areas. It was to be hoped that humanitarian agencies would continue to work together to promote predictability, timeliness, efficiency and accountability in the module system. Particular emphasis should be

placed on the need for close coordination between modules and active participation by local authorities and civil society. The efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to strengthen its support for humanitarian coordinators were praiseworthy, and humanitarian agents should make more use of joint needs assessment. Furthermore, those agents were striving admirably to be accountable for their activities to all stakeholders, including affected populations in particular. It was essential for humanitarian agencies to strengthen their support for transition and rapid recovery, and it was gratifying to note that they were taking the principles of protection for humanitarian workers into account in the context of the Sphere project. Action to strengthen resilience, preparedness and risk reduction capacities when disaster struck should be the shared responsibility of all development actors and humanitarian agents, and such action should be carried out in a framework of support for the efforts of national Governments. On all these issues, more active cooperation among OCHA, other humanitarian agencies and host Governments on the one hand, and funds, programmes and other development stakeholders on the other hand, was to be encouraged. It was to be hoped that functions and responsibilities would be more clearly defined. Greater participation on the part of the private sector would also be desirable.

20. It was regrettable that, in complex emergency situations, access to affected populations was frequently very limited. The European Union called urgently upon all States and all parties to ensure that humanitarian workers could come to people's assistance in a timely fashion without being endangered and without encountering obstacles. It vigorously reaffirmed that military assets and resources should be used only where absolutely necessary, in accordance with the relevant guidelines, the Oslo guidelines in particular. In the matter of the safety of humanitarian workers, it was gratifying to note that United Nations bodies were assigning greater importance to risk management.

21. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Observer for Nepal), speaking on behalf of the least developed countries, expressed support for the statement made by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. According to a joint World Bank/United Nations report, annual losses world-wide from natural disasters might be expected to triple to US\$185 billion, with

climate change accounting for an additional \$28 to \$68 billion every year. The result would be to set development back by several decades.

22. In the matter of disaster preparedness, it was essential for the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 to be integrated into every country's risk reduction strategy. In the matter of the funding of humanitarian operations, contributions had continued to increase despite the world-wide recession. Relative to needs, however, those contributions had declined overall from 73 per cent coverage in 2006 to 63 per cent in 2010. That being the case, progress was needed in the areas of funding predictability and efficiency. In many instances, funds for preparedness activities were made available only sporadically and inconsistently. Yet it was essential for early warning data and relief efforts to be analysed more effectively at the national and international levels. With respect to coordination, better management of interactions between humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators with responsibility for such operations was indispensable. Moreover, standardized, coordinated needs assessments were a necessary prerequisite for adequate responsiveness to the expectations of affected populations, and for accountability to stakeholders. In preparing for emergency assistance operations, humanitarian agencies must ensure that needs and risks were taken into account having regard to the gender of the persons concerned.

23. According to the Least Developed Countries Report 2010 published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 40 per cent of the people affected by natural disasters during the 2000-2010 period had been inhabitants of those countries—a clear indication that they were the countries that were most severely affected and were confronted with the greatest challenges in terms of reconstruction and recovery. In that context, and having regard to the various additional difficulties, multidisciplinary responses should be envisaged. That issue had received the priority it deserved in the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries. In addition, the Programme emphasized that the least developed countries should promote coherence between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation policies and programmes. However, those countries would be unable to proceed along such lines unless they received significant international support, and consequently they were requesting the effective, timely implementation of the Programme in its entirety.

24. **Mr. Grinius** (Canada), also speaking on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that progress had undoubtedly been made since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182. None the less, humanitarian operations had become more complex than ever, sometimes to the point of overloading the system. It was gratifying that the Emergency Relief Coordinator had committed to joining forces with the main representatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to find solutions to persistent problems and bring about quantifiable new improvements. The new discussion on the functions and responsibilities of the various international organizations concerned with disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness was also a welcome development.

25. In the report of the Secretary-General for 2011, there were four points that appeared to be of particular importance. The first was the need for a clear-cut authority within the international humanitarian assistance system. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the main representatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee should continue their efforts to introduce improvements relating to the roles, responsibilities, selection and capacities of humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators. The second point was the fundamental issue of the coordination of activities within the system. Recent reviews had indicated that there was room for further progress, particularly in respect of improved coordination with the Governments of affected countries, development of a more strategic approach to participation in modules, and strengthening coordination between modules and between civilian and military assets. Thirdly, it would be desirable to enhance the accountability of the United Nations system and other humanitarian actors by, inter alia, promoting communication with affected communities (men, women, girls and boys) and implementing gender equality strategies. In addition, the needs assessment process should be improved, and resource allocation should be more closely targeted. Action to strengthen the humanitarian programme cycle, which facilitated decision-making and results-based programming, merited vigorous support. Lastly, the substantial increase in the numbers of humanitarian actors underscored the importance of the awareness campaigns organized by OCHA, the aim of which was to strengthen partnerships with all stakeholders, thereby generating enhanced coherence and coordination.

26. **Mr. Suganuma** (Japan) thanked all those who had helped Japan cope with the consequences of the great earthquake that had hit the eastern part of the country. In response to the generous support of the African countries, the Government had decided to provide the Horn of Africa, affected as it was by a humanitarian crisis, with US\$5 million worth of food aid. Moreover, Japan would contribute to the best of its ability to the task of building the new Republic of South Sudan. In order to empower the population and prevent a future humanitarian crisis, the international community should facilitate a smooth transition from relief to quick recovery and reconstruction. The Sudan and South Sudan would be well advised to cooperate in order to foster prosperity in both countries and avoid aggravating the ongoing humanitarian crisis. In that connection, it was particularly important for the competent humanitarian organizations to ensure that the affected regions had access to humanitarian assistance.

27. In view of the fact that humanitarian crises were occurring more frequently as a result of large-scale disasters, such as the ones that had struck Haiti and Pakistan, permanent reforms should be implemented with a view to strengthening emergency response capacities. As the Haitian experience had shown, a system that could provide effective management and coordination was crucial in situations where there were large numbers of humanitarian agents and donors in the field. In such a context, it was essential for each group leader's role and powers to be clearly defined, and for the efforts of all concerned to be coordinated under the authority of the competent humanitarian assistance organization.

28. The disaster that had recently struck Japan confirmed the need for preventive measures. In that country, practice drills, awareness campaigns, and "tsunami stones" erected to commemorate former tsunamis and warn future generations had saved many lives on the occasion of the last tsunami. It was noteworthy that good communication, established well in advance, between humanitarian organizations and the authorities was an essential aspect of emergency preparedness. Japan intended to continue promoting global cooperation in the area of disaster risk reduction, and as part of its efforts in that connection would host the third session of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, to be held in 2015. Japan was also preparing to organize an international

high-level conference to facilitate sharing of experiences and lessons learned from large-scale disasters.

29. Moreover, the establishment of various types of common funds, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund, would enhance the flexibility of humanitarian assistance. Although 120 donor countries contributed to the Fund, it obtained the bulk of its resources from a few large donors. Consequently, more donors and larger contributions were essential. OCHA was engaged in a number of initiatives to that end, but it would be desirable to make the distribution of contributions more transparent by improving the oversight and assessment process. Lastly, the effectiveness of the concept of “human security” should be accentuated, as that concept entailed an intersectoral approach structured around the human individual and protection and strengthening of the capacities, both individual and collective, required to cope with conflicts and large-scale disasters.

30. **Ms. Finskas** (Finland) expressed support for the statement by the European Union, but pointed out that during the transition period, activities aimed at enhancing resilience, improving preparedness and strengthening humanitarian operational capabilities fell within the remit of development actors. The report of the Secretary-General might perhaps have contained more specific recommendations on how the United Nations and OCHA should cooperate with funds, programmes and other development actors with competence in that area. Similarly, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Development Group should cooperate and coordinate more closely on disaster risk reduction, including preparedness measures. With respect to the funding of preparedness measures, the report of the Secretary-General might perhaps have emphasized the mobilization of fresh resources to fund preparedness and action to strengthen assistance capacities, instead of focusing on official development assistance. In the matter of civilian/military coordination, the use of military resources should be directed by a civilian authority and should constitute a measure of last resort.

31. In view of the growing complexity of the humanitarian community’s operating environment, OCHA and organizations that were members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee should join forces to implement agreed main lines of action, bearing in mind that authority, enhancement of coordination, reciprocal

accountability and accountability to affected populations were essential for the attainment of their objectives. Furthermore, one prerequisite for effective coordination was a clear-cut distinction between strategic coordination among groups in the field and information-sharing; another was the clustering of the various stakeholders. Lastly, the executive bodies of United Nations funds, programmes and specialized institutions should be more fully committed to the humanitarian activities of the United Nations system.

32. **Mr. Gutierrez Reinell** (Peru) said that in view of the frequency of emergency situations and natural disasters, it was questionable whether social welfare would be achieved throughout the world, especially among the populations of the poorest countries. The combined impact of various global problems was having an adverse impact on the vulnerability of countries and the difficulties that were being encountered in humanitarian emergencies. In that context, Member States should strive to strengthen humanitarian assistance coordination at all levels, taking into account the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Action should be taken to assess the minimum capacities of States, in terms of their institutions and technical resources, for establishing preparedness systems for various types of emergencies, and where necessary, those capacities should be strengthened, primarily through mechanisms aimed at encouraging knowledge and technology transfer. In addition, more predictable and more efficient funding methods for humanitarian assistance should be established. Furthermore, national and regional integrated risk and disaster management mechanisms could be used to advantage in the areas of prevention, preparedness and emergency assistance operations, and could also contribute to the adoption of better practices in humanitarian assistance coordination. It was local authorities that should be the main beneficiaries of efforts aimed at capacity-building at country level, as those authorities played a key role in coordinating disaster prevention programmes. Peru intended to participate in the ongoing consultation process conducted by the United Nations with a view to the introduction of a coordination system that was more effective and tailored to current needs.

33. **Mr. Pintado** (Mexico) said that the seriousness of emergencies resulting from more frequent disasters combined with existing vulnerabilities raised a warning

flag. Adequate preparation for humanitarian actors who were to be deployed in the field was essential, but efforts to foster institutional coordination between donors and recipients were no less essential. At the same time, the challenge represented by the diversity and growing numbers of humanitarian stakeholders should not be overlooked. It was necessary to apply prevention criteria in order to channel humanitarian assistance appropriately and improve the preparedness of recipient States, primarily through mechanisms designed to ensure that assistance reached the affected areas. Continued investment in preparedness, prevention, resilience and disaster risk reduction measures was also crucial. Moreover, tools that could be used to adapt such investment to the needs of States should be developed.

34. Mechanisms aimed at coordinating humanitarian operations were displaying a tendency to proliferate, and that was a source of some concern, inasmuch as the result might be overlapping and duplication that could have an adverse impact on coordination efficiency in the field. The admirable efforts of the Central Emergency Response Fund deserved support, and it was worth repeating that existing accountability mechanisms should be consolidated in order to encourage donors to contribute to the Fund. In recognition of the importance of the role played by risk assessment and early response teams, four Mexican civil protection experts had been assigned to work with United Nations standby disaster assessment and coordination teams, and Mexico had become a member of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group.

35. **Mr. Holenstein** (Switzerland) said that despite noteworthy progress in international humanitarian law, humanitarian operations were confronted with new challenges that were endangering affected populations and humanitarian workers and making it more difficult to provide civilians with protection and assistance. States were responsible for protecting their people and providing them with all necessary assistance; among other things, they were responsible for ensuring that humanitarian assistance reached victims promptly. Accordingly, Switzerland had adopted an initiative consisting of developing practical instruments designed to enable the various parties concerned to facilitate humanitarian access in armed conflict situations. In addition, Switzerland had taken advantage of the opportunity afforded by its presidency of the Good

Humanitarian Donorship group to promote humanitarian principles, including, in particular, action to protect civilians more effectively in conflicts.

36. Short-term reconstruction efforts should be aligned with long-term development programmes, and the best approach to disaster risk management was a holistic, integrated one. Switzerland would continue its awareness and consensus-building activities with other concerned States with a view to the United Nations conference on sustainable development, which was to be held in Rio in 2012. It would also continue its active support for the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit.

37. With respect to accountability, the sectoral approach adopted with humanitarian assistance had yielded satisfactory results, but there was room for improvement in the areas of participation by national structures, cluster management, the definition of responsibilities, and collaboration between United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations. However, the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator had been admirable, as had the initiatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee aimed at enhancing coordination efficiency in the field and promoting the culture of mutual accountability. In accordance with the principle of accountability, affected populations should be more closely associated with humanitarian planning and invited to evaluate the services provided.

38. **Mr. Flores Bermúdez** (Observer for Honduras) said that the aim of the Government's national strategy for the coming 30 years was to turn Honduras into a productive nation that created well-paid jobs, used its resources sustainably and preserved the environment. It had suffered from a series of natural disasters, including in particular Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which had taken a very heavy toll and had had harmful effects on the country's society, economy, natural resources, and development generally. Honduras would be eternally grateful to the international community for its support during those trying times, and it had learned lessons from the disasters. There was a standing committee on emergency preparedness that coordinated the activities of the humanitarian network and the national risk management system, among other things. A natural disaster prevention and mitigation project was currently being implemented with a view to consolidating the integrated risk management and territorial studies system.

39. A training programme on humanitarian issues had been launched in an effort to institute a culture of protection for fundamental rights in the preparedness phase and also during relief operations. The activities of national institutions were consistent with the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. In the light of its own experience, Honduras agreed completely with the recommendation of the Secretary-General in his report (A/66/81-E/2011/117) to the effect that a diversity of humanitarian funding channels should be maintained. Regional initiatives had also yielded positive results: in 2010 the Central American countries had adopted an integrated disaster risk management policy. At the national level, Congress had recently enacted legislation on food and nutrition security. The Government, for its part, had launched a plan for investment in the agri-food sector in an effort to bring about a 10 per cent reduction in the numbers of rural families living in poverty or extreme poverty, and to achieve a 4 per cent increase in gross domestic product in the agriculture sector. In the context of action to combat illegal migration, Honduras was endeavouring to create jobs for its young people, relying mainly on education and economic and social development.

40. **Mr. Stormark** (Norway) recalled that Norway was about to assume the presidency of the Donor Support Group of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. During its term in office, priority would be given to capacity-building, field coordination, the forging of broader partnerships, and shared accountability. The recent series of large-scale disasters had highlighted the need for a stronger international emergency relief system. Despite the progress that had been achieved, there was a need for redoubled efforts to enhance humanitarian worker deployment and mobility, operational support and guidance, and field coordination. It was essential for international actors to cooperate and coordinate their activities with the Governments of affected countries and support national and local authorities, provided the latter were not in conflict with the people. They also had a duty of accountability to local populations.

41. There were lessons to be learned from the disasters that had struck Haiti and Pakistan. Dialogue on the roles and responsibilities of the various organizations and institutions with responsibility for disaster preparedness should be pursued, and greater attention should be devoted to countries at risk from the effects of climate change. The establishment of

new partnerships was a gratifying development, and it was to be hoped that funding mechanisms could be made more flexible, predictable and efficient.

42. **Mr. Sammis** (United States of America) noted that the United States of America funded numerous disaster preparedness assistance programmes at the regional, national and local levels. Such strategic investments made it possible to save lives, relieve suffering and reduce economic consequences, while also helping to make the recipients self-supporting by providing them with the means of anticipating, preventing and mitigating crises. It was essential to establish standards, such as the Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response developed under the Sphere project, that took the interests of affected populations into account. It was also essential to promote dialogue and mobilize additional resources. In that connection, Member States should redouble their efforts in the area of humanitarian assistance and should support action to reform the multilateral humanitarian system.

43. While it was absolutely essential to preserve the civilian nature of humanitarian assistance, in situations where civilian resources were exhausted and the army's were not, the latter should be used, subject to the provisions of the Oslo Guidelines. Unquestionably, the United Nations system should have primary authority in international humanitarian assistance. In view of the essential role played by humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators, the Secretary-General should ensure that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs participated in the selection of applicants for those posts.

44. **Mr. Romero Puentes** (Observer for Cuba) said that humanitarian assistance should conform fully to General Assembly resolution 46/182; it was unacceptable for it to be made contingent on ambiguous concepts that could easily be manipulated to justify acts inconsistent with the aims and principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations. States that were in need of humanitarian assistance were responsible for requesting and authorizing such assistance from the international community. Humanitarian assistance should never have any connection of any kind with the activities of military coalitions in the field.

45. Cuba was frequently affected by natural disasters, and had relied on its civil defence to protect the population and physical assets. Thanks to lessons

learned from various weather-related disasters, the country had been able to strengthen its standard-setting, legislative and institutional frameworks with a bearing on risk reduction. Compulsory guidelines and additional statutory instruments had been adopted, and local risk assessment and risk management capacities had been upgraded. Furthermore, disaster risk reduction was a feature of educational curricula.

46. It was essential to continue to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and international cooperation in the area of humanitarian assistance. At the same time, it was important to recognize the role that States should play in initiating, organizing, coordinating and delivering assistance in their own territories, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

47. **Mr. Rosocha** (Slovakia) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Poland on behalf of the European Union. Although Slovakia was not greatly at risk from natural disasters, it had developed its own disaster preparedness and emergency relief capacities. It was prepared to share its experience and skills with other countries, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 46/182, by helping to set up early warning and drought preparedness systems, training country teams, and the like.

48. To encourage donors to increase their financial support, it would be desirable to invite them to participate in preparedness and relief activities. An effort should be made to devise innovative funding mechanisms. The private sector represented one potentially useful source, and international loans were another, provided the principles of sound financial management were observed. Disparities between official pledges and actual contributions should be reduced in order to facilitate activity planning and management. The international community should continue to monitor compliance with humanitarian principles, protect civilian populations, improve access to populations in conflict areas, and forge closer links between relief, recovery and development activities.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.