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NEW INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ORDER

Humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters
and similar emergency situations

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 43/131 of 8 December 1988, the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of humanitarian assistance for the victims of natural disasters and similar emergency situations and stressed the important contribution made in providing assistance by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations working with strictly humanitarian motives. It invited all States in need of such assistance to facilitate the work of those organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, in particular, the supply of food, medicines and health care. It also called upon all the intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with humanitarian assistance to co-operate as closely as possible with the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) or any other ad hoc mechanism set up by the Secretary-General in the co-ordination of aid.

2. In that resolution the General Assembly recognized that humanitarian assistance is a prime responsibility of Governments; the speed and effectiveness, however, of its delivery can be increased with the help of local organizations, notably non-governmental ones. Governments are therefore called upon to support and increase the capacity of those organizations to provide humanitarian assistance. It also called upon the international community to facilitate the flow of relief assistance. This kind of collaboration should, however, not be interpreted as diminishing the prerogatives of a sovereign State. On the contrary, the resolution underlines the primordial role of States in taking the initiative in the organization and co-ordination of humanitarian assistance.

3. In paragraph 8 of the resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of Governments, intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations with regard to the possibility of enhancing the effectiveness of international mechanisms and increasing the speed of assistance in the best possible conditions for the victims of disasters and similar emergency situations, where needed, and to report his findings to it at its forty-fifth session.

4. The present report is therefore made in accordance with that resolution. It is based on the result of answers to notes verbales sent by the Secretary-General and on a consultative process in the form of informal meetings and questionnaires with United Nations agencies, donors and recipient Governments and non-governmental organizations.

II. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNITED NATIONS

5. The belief in the dignity and value of human beings as expressed in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations is and must be the prime motive for the international community to give humanitarian assistance. The concept of international solidarity so often evoked following major emergencies and understood as a feeling of responsibility towards people in distress equally has its roots in the ethical principles of the Charter. Solidarity in this sense is not charity.

Its essence is spontaneity, as has been so admirably demonstrated in the wake of the events in Romania, the earthquakes in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Philippines earlier this year, as well as in the recent case of persons displaced in Jordan as a result of the Gulf crisis.

6. If, however, full value is to be gained from assistance so motivated, spontaneity needs to be accompanied by a sensible appreciation of the respective situation and the problems it has created for the people concerned. Practical steps to improve the timeliness and appropriateness of humanitarian assistance are therefore of the essence. Delayed relief is virtually no relief, and unwanted material and personnel assistance is a hindrance rather than a help.

7. Humanitarian relief assistance in the form of material and personnel consignments to victims of natural disasters or other emergencies has for the past quarter of a century played an increasing role in the activities of the United Nations system and the international community at large. It has been provided in the framework of the principles of international law, in particular with respect to the sovereignty of the receiving States and in collaboration with their responsible national authorities. At the same time the provision of disaster relief assistance by the United Nations system has been and will continue to be governed by the same principles which are the cornerstone of the Red Cross movement: impartiality and neutrality. To those essential concepts should be added the elements of speed and relevance already mentioned.

8. When, during the 1960s, the United Nations and the international community became increasingly involved in the provision of disaster relief assistance, the United Nations system itself was not equipped to respond quickly and effectively to this challenge. Nor did the donor elements of the international community dispose of noteworthy co-ordination mechanisms.

9. General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXIV) of 14 December, in which the Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to appoint a Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, brought together the recommendations concerning humanitarian assistance which both the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council had adopted since 1968. This, followed by the strengthening of UNDR0 in the mid-1970s, was a significant step forward in improving the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies.

10. The debates in the Assembly and the Council during those years, focused as they often were on particular major emergency situations, reflected to an increasing extent the concern of the international community about the economic consequences of disasters. Natural disasters and similar emergency situations were recognized as formidable obstacles to the development process in developing countries and particularly so in those which were least developed and most seriously affected.

11. A comprehensive survey of the then identified problems encountered in international relief and a list of recommendations for measures to expedite it was undertaken by the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (LRCS) and UNDR0 in 1976-1977. Both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, as

well as the twenty-third International Conference of the Red Cross considered this survey (A/32/64 and Corr.1). In its resolution 2102 (LXIII) of 3 August 1977, the Council requested the Co-ordinator to continue his efforts and, in co-operation with Governments, United Nations bodies and appropriate intergovernmental organizations and voluntary agencies, and particularly the International Red Cross, to pay special attention to the promotion of measures designed to remove obstacles and to expedite international relief assistance. That resolution was endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 32/56 of 8 December 1977. In addition, the International Conference of the Red Cross held in 1977 also endorsed the proposals.

12. In 1981, the Secretary-General presented a report entitled "International efforts to meet humanitarian needs in emergency situations" (E/1981/16) to the Economic and Social Council. This was the first in-depth study of the role of the United Nations system in humanitarian assistance. It analysed the state of disaster preparedness in recipient countries, reviewed the preparations for dealing with emergencies at the agencies' level and inter-agency co-ordination, and discussed technical obstacles in the process of the delivery of international relief assistance. In dealing with the latter subject the report drew heavily on the earlier work done by UNDRO and LRCS in this field. The report concluded that the United Nations system had been able to create within the previous 10 years the basic structures and mechanisms to respond to emergencies. Two years later, in 1983, the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations" (A/38/202-E/1983/94) underscored this finding. The final chapter of that report presented an analysis of the concept of concerted relief programmes on the basis of on-the-spot assessments and the relation between the time required to come to proper assessments of relief needs and their mobilization. In the report it was noted that food assistance, which quite often is the largest single component of relief operations, also suffered the longest delays between its mobilization and final distribution.

13. At the same time, proposals were made for a draft convention to expedite the delivery of international humanitarian relief (A/39/267/Add.2). However, these proposals were not taken any further after their initial presentation to the Economic and Social Council in 1984.

14. More recently, the designation by the Assembly in its resolution 42/169 of 11 December 1987 of the 1990s as an International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has given further impetus and authority to efforts to improve disaster prevention and preparedness for emergencies. Such an improvement would automatically lead to better conditions for the more rapid delivery of assistance to the victims, as well as, hopefully, a reduction in their number.

III. EMERGENCE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE

15. Up to the 1980s, most of the assistance provided to disaster stricken areas came, as far as non-United Nations assistance was concerned, from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as from the International Committee of the Red

Cross (ICRC). Since that time, however, given the growing concern of the general public in a large number of countries for the fate of victims of disasters, which was brought home to them by television and other media, non-governmental groups started to get well organized for quick and speedy assistance all over the world. Increased circulation of information about disasters and larger access to transport facilities resulted in the creation or development of organized groups with effective means of assistance, such as Médecins sans frontières, Catholic Relief Services, OXFAM etc. Some Governments encouraged and financed the creation of such groups.

16. The importance and value of the work of non-governmental organizations in disasters and other emergency situations should not be underestimated. During the recent famine situation in the Sudan in 1984 and 1985, 80 per cent of the relief assistance was provided by non-governmental organizations. In the recent emergency in Jordan following the inflow of displaced persons in the country as a result of the Gulf crisis, some specialized non-governmental organizations, like Médecins sans frontières were the first to provide substantive and most needed support to the Government.

17. In the mean time intergovernmental organizations also appeared on the scene. The most notable and visible of them is the European Economic Community (EEC) which, through its emergency services, plays a very important role in virtually all emergencies.

18. As a result of those developments, Governments of countries stricken by natural disasters and other emergency situations found themselves in a situation whereby an increasing number of organizations would come to their help. This presented some advantages but could also be a source of problems, since lack of co-ordination in assistance could eventually result in unnecessary material and personnel assistance.

IV. MAIN ISSUES RELATING TO THE DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE

19. Humanitarian assistance in the case of natural disasters and other similar emergency situations is primarily the responsibility of the Government of the affected country. By definition, however, when a large disaster strikes, the Government of the stricken country may have to deal with a task that is beyond its own means. Speed and efficiency are of the essence in saving lives and reducing the suffering of those who survive. This is where international organizations and non-governmental organizations can provide quick support and help reduce the size of the disaster. The main issues relating to quick and efficient relief in cases of disasters and other emergencies are summarized below.

A. Assessment of damage and of needs

20. A realistic and professional assessment of the magnitude of the damage after a disaster and an immediate and precise assessment of needs are basic conditions to ensuring an adequate response to the situation. When international assistance is

needed, the reaction of donors is to a considerable extent a function of the credibility of a request, which, for that matter, determines the credibility of the agency presenting it.

21. The lack of specificity in requests has many times hampered the effectiveness of the response of donors and relief agencies. Items commonly needed are available in many different sizes, weights and forms. Clarifications of the precise requirements between staff and headquarters and field representatives are time consuming and, more important, delay the arrival of relief assistance.

B. Dissemination of information

22. Electronic data-processing and communications technology offer means for resolving many problems in achieving effective international disaster response. A useful beginning has been made with the United Nations International Emergency Network and its communication and information data base facilities. Further efforts need to be made to develop it into an operational instrument. The role of technology today could make possible an interactive data base by which to track, in real time, emergency needs, pledges and contributions, outstanding balances and logistics data. That information can then be available simultaneously at multiple decision-making points world wide. Early warning information and preparedness information could be equally accessible prior to and at the onset of a disaster.

23. In this respect mention should also be made of the Principles relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Outer Space (General Assembly resolution 41/65 of 3 December 1986, annex) and specifically to principle XI, which among others, stipulates that remote sensing should promote the protection of mankind from natural disasters. It also calls upon States to share information and data on natural or impending natural disasters as promptly as possible with States that are affected or are likely to be affected.

C. Access to disaster areas

24. The question of assessment of damage and needs raises the issue of access to the disaster area. This is an indispensable condition for disaster relief and humanitarian work. Access to an affected area includes naturally the transport and distribution of relief goods. In this context an important initiative of the World Food Council (WFC) should be mentioned. At its fifteenth session, held at Cairo in 1989, WFC members accepted in the Cairo Declaration 1/ the proposal for an international agreement on the safe passage of emergency food aid. The proposal was understood as a contribution to the discussions at international level following, among others, Assembly resolution 43/131. The question of the safe passage of emergency food aid was discussed again at the sixteenth session of WFC, held at Bangkok in May 1990. 2/ In the conclusions the members recommended that the Executive Director of WFC should consult with concerned organizations and institutions on the development of guidelines for effective measures to ensure the passage of emergency food aid and should seek the support of the General Assembly in that respect.

25. Denial of access either to assess the needs of victims of disasters or to distribute relief goods has occurred in many situations including civil strife or armed conflict. If it is understandable that security reasons might put some restrictions on access to disaster areas, it remains that humanitarian considerations should always be given the necessary priority. Access to the disaster area is also necessary to ensure appropriate distribution of the assistance given. There should, in any case, be no restriction on the gathering and distribution of information on the disaster and on relief efforts.

26. There is no doubt that the unhampered access to the victims of a disaster remains one of the key issues of humanitarian assistance. The idea of establishing relief corridors for relief and rescue workers to deliver essential relief goods might be further developed. Such corridors or passages would be limited in their existence according to the specific nature of the emergency. They would also be limited in their geographic dimension, that is, they would represent the most direct access route to a disaster scene, and finally their function would be exclusively to facilitate the distribution of emergency assistance such as food and medicines. The establishment of life lines of this kind obviously has to be negotiated with affected countries taking into account the exigencies of their sovereignty.

D. Procurement of relief goods

27. Regulations and procedures governing the purchase of supplies have a direct bearing on the speed of delivery of relief assistance. Non-governmental organizations sometimes have great flexibility in this field. As concerns the United Nations system, since normal United Nations procurement procedures do not lend themselves easily to emergency action, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in its resolution 39/207, to modify the existing procedures to permit, on the part of UNDRO, a timely response to the immediate requirements of disaster-stricken countries. Despite continuous efforts of UNDRO in co-operation with the offices concerned to speed up the purchase process in case of emergency, the situation is still not satisfactory and further thought needs to be given in order to resolve the matter in principle. A case in point was the delegation of financial authority to UNDRO specifically for the present crisis in Iraq and Kuwait, which greatly facilitated speedy action on behalf of displaced persons. The fact that financial authorities normally insist on pledges being actually paid before purchase orders can be made also slows down the process considerably.

28. Some agencies within and outside the United Nations system have virtually abolished or have never required formal tendering processes and achieved very fast response times to emergencies. Donors who have authorized their field representatives to make immediate local purchases, up to a certain limit, have achieved similar results. While local procurement is normally the best arrangement, experience has shown that massive local purchases after disasters tend to raise prices and reduce quality. Borrowing from government stocks, if possible, and diversion of supplies already in transit or in-country for other purposes might offer possibilities to respond rapidly to needs. The establishment of stockpiles at strategic points, such as UNICEF at Copenhagen and UNDRO at Pisa, has been found very useful.

E. Co-ordination of relief activities

29. By definition a disaster is a situation with which a Government has difficulty in coping. To permit a quick and efficient response that will save lives and reduce suffering it is important for all external organizations to assist the Government of the disaster stricken country in organizing the response - not to act so as to create further disorganization. There is need therefore to balance the need for immediate dispatch of relief supplies and professional rescue workers with the necessity to ensure an orderly organization of rescue operations that will avoid duplication of action, wastage of scarce resources and congestion of warehouses. One way to achieve that balance is to provide detailed and immediate information to UNDRO on proposed or current actions. The circulation of such information enables various organizations to focus their action in the fields in which assistance is the most needed. There have been too many cases of total wastage of relief supplies and of resulting delays in providing relief to leave this matter unattended. To this effect UNDRO, in collaboration with Austria, is organizing a workshop for international rescue teams to be held in early 1991.

V. PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER ACTION

30. Numerous factors indicate that the provision of humanitarian assistance following natural disasters and other emergencies is likely to become an increasing element of international relations. Foremost among them is the still uncurbed population growth, the migration from rural areas to urban centres, and the concentration of people and infrastructure in vulnerable locations. In addition, environmental changes such as global warming are expected to have a significant effect on the intensity, frequency and geographical spread of certain types of disaster such as cyclones, tsunamis, floods and droughts.

31. In order to review what can be done to improve the present situation, in March 1989 an informal working group composed of representatives of the United Nations and of non-governmental organizations was convened to find out to what extent the problems of humanitarian assistance identified by UNDRO and LRCS in 1976 still existed. The results of the review by the informal working group are presented in annex I. The working group did not formally adopt any recommendations. Annex II briefly summarizes proposed actions that were considered to go some way towards increasing the speed of delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Secretary-General wishes to draw attention to these two important annexes, which he hopes will provide the necessary guidance of an operational nature to Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations for their future action.

32. The Secretary-General also wishes to draw attention to four fields of activity that have a direct bearing on the facilitation of humanitarian assistance and its efficiency.

A. Disaster preparedness

33. Disaster preparedness may ensure an efficient and quick response to save lives in cases of disasters. An important step at the national level should be the implementation or strengthening of disaster preparedness measures in recipient countries. There is broad consensus among donors, international and non-governmental organizations that the lack of reliable assessment capacities, information analysis and communication are among the most serious obstacles to the rapid delivery of the right kind and quantities of humanitarian assistance.

34. At the beginning of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction disaster-prone developing countries should thoroughly review their disaster preparedness arrangements. Donor Governments and intergovernmental organizations, mindful of the effectiveness of their humanitarian assistance, should assist recipient countries in this field by technical advice and increased financial support. The importance of preparedness planning in disaster-prone developing countries for a truly effective response to the needs of the victims cannot be overstated. A sound legal basis, a disaster response office with trained personnel, communication equipment and transport are some of the vital components of such preparedness planning. In view of the inevitable financial implications and the well-known constraints reigning in all developing countries the need and obligation for outside assistance in this humanitarian effort, is, as stated above, obvious.

B. Co-ordination and training

35. Independent of the dimension of any disaster or similar emergency situation, co-ordination among the participating relief organizations is of singular importance. The measure for effective co-ordination is the speed with which the right assistance reaches the victims. Since each disaster and emergency has its individual characteristics, effective co-ordination depends on the flexibility of the established mechanisms and on the capacity of the responsible officials to adapt to the situation. Such a capacity is the result of continuous training and detailed analysis of small and major emergencies at the national and international levels. Co-ordination in the disaster-stricken country means the collection of information on relief needs from a wide range of sources, the effort to achieve an agreed assessment of such needs among representatives of the Government and major donors (embassies, United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations), and concerted arrangements for the prompt and effective distribution of assistance to the disaster victims. At the international level, co-ordination means primarily ensuring concerted action by donors in response to changing needs reported from the disaster area.

36. Humanitarian organizations, international or national, depend for their effectiveness on the quality of their staff, the clarity of the instructions given and the degree of authority accorded to field representatives. With regard to the United Nations system, it is hoped that the United Nations disaster management teams, which, under the guidance of the United Nations resident co-ordinator, are being established or strengthened and whose terms of reference are being jointly

prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNDRO, will contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the local co-ordination of humanitarian assistance. At the headquarters level concerted action by United Nations agencies will, it is hoped, be further developed in the light of experience acquired in major disasters over recent years.

37. UNDP and UNDRO have launched a joint training project and are finalizing a disaster management manual that is expected to contribute to strengthening United Nations response to disasters. Particular attention is being paid to ensuring that national development plans pay due attention to disaster mitigation aspects in the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Relevant United Nations agencies have been involved in an extensive consultation process concerning both initiatives.

C. Co-ordination at the international level

38. At the international level the activities of participants in relief operations continue to require careful co-ordination. The majority of major donors have established national emergency relief services with interministerial links enabling them to respond within hours. Experience has, however, shown that the action of those services is not always well co-ordinated, causing problems of congestion and putting unnecessary strain on transport and personnel resources in recipient countries. This information is even more true when non-governmental organizations, large and small, are taken into account. Accurate information on the overall emergency situation, on met and unmet needs, which is the essence of co-ordination and the mandated task of UNDRO, remains therefore indispensable.

39. Greater co-ordination of international relief efforts could, among other means, also be achieved by a stronger rationalization of international co-operation. In fact each participating body, whether governmental, intergovernmental or non-governmental, should carry out a self-analysis of its methods of intervention with the objective of improvement, specifically with regard to its linkages with the recipient countries. Concentration of efforts and resources coupled with transparency of methods of intervention are key elements in this process.

40. Information and data in an improved form on the sectorial capacity of United Nations agencies having responsibilities in emergencies must continue to be gathered and made available by UNDRO. Such improved information would provide an overview of the resources and modes of intervention available in agencies for particular types of disaster. In addition it would contribute to the exchange of information of programmes, organizations and legal instruments in the area of international co-operation. The Vienna Conventions of 1986, which codify such co-operation for nuclear and radiological emergencies and which attribute a special role in this respect to the International Atomic Energy Agency, are an illustration of what the direction of the above-mentioned overview could be. Another example is the ongoing effort of the United Nations Environment Programme to establish a network of organs to monitor environmental developments, to prepare national authorities for accidents and to evaluate the needs of countries likely to be affected.

D. Legal instruments

41. The suggestions for the improvement of the speed of delivery of humanitarian assistance, as listed in the two annexes and discussed above, are of a predominately administrative, operational and technical nature. Donors, recipient Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations have also expressed their opinion on the desirability of new legal instruments in order to overcome the obstacles in the way of humanitarian assistance.

42. The number of already existing instruments is impressive: in the first place the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions of the Red Cross to name only the most important. Although as previously stated in a similar context, greater respect for the underlying humanitarian spirit of those fundamental instruments, together with their observance, would have made unnecessary a number of related General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions and beyond doubt would have alleviated the lot of victims of natural disasters and similar emergencies.

43. In this connection mention should also be made of the initiative for a convention on the duty of humanitarian assistance to victims of disasters. It appears that a number of Governments, international and non-governmental organizations consider such a convention as an effective means for improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Such a convention should describe the rights and the duties of the parties to it and also incorporate the provisions of other instruments that bear, for example, on the matter of transport of relief goods so that, ideally, all elements for an effective international relief operation would be found in one document.

44. However, a group of important non-governmental organisations has declared itself as not being in favour of such a convention. Their point of view is that all new initiatives in the field of humanitarian assistance should be judged against the ultimate criterion of effectiveness, that is, whether they represent an improvement over the present situation of disaster victims or not. In their opinion a convention would not constitute an improvement. On the contrary, it would risk weakening the progress so far achieved over the years in providing humanitarian assistance. In particular, since it is assumed that the concept of national sovereignty as interpreted by some might reinforce the insistence of Governments on the non-interference in their internal affairs and thus render a convention counterproductive.

45. One could envisage different forms for new legal instruments such as declarations of the rights of victims of disaster to relief and bilateral agreements between donors and recipient countries as well as between recipient countries. With regard to the latter UNDR0 has made a proposal concerning land-locked African countries facing sudden natural disasters and other emergencies at the meeting on co-operation between the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations held at Addis Ababa in 1990. Since those countries depend on their neighbours for the rapid delivery of international aid, intergovernmental agreements should simplify and consequently speed up the transit of humanitarian assistance. In this context it is also useful to mention the Declaration for

Mutual Assistance on Natural Disasters of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In view of the serious consequences of natural disasters on the economic and social development of their people, those countries agreed in 1976 to co-operate in the improvement of communications among themselves as regards disaster warning and to exchange experts, information and documents and to co-operate in the distribution of medical and other relief assistance.

46. It has also been suggested that one of the forms of new legal co-operation may be the adoption of a series of bilateral agreements between the United Nations agency (e.g. UNDR0) and the State. The United Nations agency would be the co-ordinating center that would initiate, negotiate and administer such agreements and, in co-operation with States, would implement them. The basis of negotiations would be a model agreement, which would include provisions based on the practical experience and a comparative study of the existing agreements and proposals. The advantage would be a great flexibility, adaptability to the practical requirements and to the particular conditions and the easier realization and implementation of a new legal framework.

47. In conclusion, the Secretary-General believes it might be useful to analyse the existing legal instruments and resolutions on humanitarian assistance in conjunction with a colloquium on the overall aspect of harmonization of international co-operation. Such a gathering, which might be organized by, through or in co-operation with UNDR0, should bring together experts on international humanitarian law and disaster relief operations, as well as national administrators and representatives of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. The result of the deliberations could well be expected to provide guidance on the means of making improvements in the area of humanitarian assistance that are practical and acceptable.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 19 (A/44/19), part one.

2/ Ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 19 (A/45/19).

ANNEX I

Review made by the informal working group on
humanitarian assistance*

1. Potential recipient Governments should designate a single national relief authority.

1A. UNDR0 had been informed by 151 countries of the names of officials or the titles of departments of government who had been named as national co-ordinators or who would act in that capacity in case of need; 32 of those countries would normally be regarded as donors, and of these, 18 had emergency duty systems operative outside normal working hours.

2. Potential recipient Governments should waive requirements for consular certificates and invoices (provided adequate documentation from relief agencies were provided) and corresponding requirements for import/export licenses should also be waived.

2A. Although little progress appeared to have been made in these areas, the requirements for the documents were not, in practice, considered to constitute a major problem. Some delays of up to two weeks in the issue of licenses were however reported.

3. To the extent compatible with minimum standards of hygiene and animal protection, normal requirements for fumigation certificates and restrictions on food imports should be waived where their imposition would impede the admission of essential international relief.

3A. The requirements regarding health and hygiene certificates continued to constitute a major and extremely serious source of delay in the delivery of food assistance. New difficulties had arisen since 1977 as regards the levels of radioactivity permitted in certain types of food and countries impose different standards. It was felt that the FAO standards should be universally acceptable for food delivered as international relief.

3B. A new problem might well occur as the irradiation of food to prolong its shelf life became more widely practised. This question was one which was being studied by WHO, FAO and the IAEA.

* Participants at the meeting compared the 1977 recommendations of UNDR0 and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies concerning the delivery of international relief assistance (see A/32/64 and Corr.1) with the situation in 1989. The recommendations are presented first (for example, para. 1) and the situation in 1989 is indented (for example, para. 1A).

4. All Governments should waive requirements for transit, entry and exit visas for relief personnel acting in their official capacities as representatives of internationally recognized relief agencies.

4A. The International Conference of the Red Cross had approved a resolution of the Board of Governors on this subject. At least one major non-governmental organization had experienced no difficulty in obtaining the waiver of visas but the potential for delay continued to exist. Many airlines would not carry passengers without visas or other permission to land in the destination country, and did not necessarily recognize the fact that the need for a visa had been waived.

4B. It was regarded as important that waivers should continue to be sought, rather than recommending only that visas should be issued as soon as practicable in cases of emergency.

5. All donors should restrict their relief consignments to those high-priority needs identified by appropriate relief authorities, and efforts should be made to educate donors in the importance of avoiding contributions of non-essential items.

5A. The problems continued to be experienced. One solution was to seek better and more accurate assessment of needs in the disaster country, and allied to this was the need to make more precise the description and specification of the supplies required so that donors did not inadvertently send inappropriate items.

5B. A second solution, applicable particularly where goods were transported by an agency other than the actual donor, would be for the transporting agency to apply much more strictly the "rules of acceptance" appropriate to the situation as it was known.

6. All donors should ensure prompt notification to consignees of impending relief shipments, improve procedures for consigning such shipments, include detailed manifests with each shipment, and seek acknowledgement of receipt from the consignee.

6A. Instances continued to occur in which the distribution of shipments was delayed because of inadequate notification procedures. It was essential that co-ordination should take place not only between donors and consignees but also in-country between the latter, other agencies active in the relief operation, and the national relief authority.

7. Governments of transit and recipient countries should ensure that their customs authorities receive standing instructions to expedite the processing of relief shipments.

7A. This remained a serious problem. It was recommended that, in addition to the procedure outlined in the 1977 recommendation, Governments should exempt relief goods from customs charges of any kind at any stage of their journey and regard them as being "in bond" at a port of transit.

7B. It was also recommended that the instructions to "expedite processing" should be time-limited to allow a maximum of seven days for documentation to be completed.

7C. It was, however, recognized that many delays resulted from incorrect documentation issued by the consignors. It was recognized also that where large consignments had to be transported overland from a port to a land-locked country, considerable damage could be caused to the roads in the country of transit, and that in such a case, external assistance might be needed to repair the roads. The funds necessary ought not to have to be raised by means of imposing taxes on the relief consignments themselves.

8. All Governments should authorize their national airlines to transport relief consignments and personnel free of charge or at minimum rates. Traffic rights limitations should be relaxed where this would facilitate the travel of relief personnel or the carriage of relief supplies.

8A. The national carriers of countries hit by disasters had been helpful in complying with the first part of this recommendation, but transport by other airlines was generally on a "space available" basis and the delays inherent in this procedure had been judged unacceptable especially when co-ordination of the timely arrival of supplies is essential. The concessionary rates offered (usually a maximum 20 per cent discount) did not justify the delays and uncertainties experienced.

8B. No instances were reported in which traffic limitations had been relaxed, but equally no case was cited in which delays had occurred as a result of a failure to do so.

9. All Governments should explore the possibility of according overflight permission and landing rights for aircraft carrying international relief.

9A. It was noted that the matter was covered by the provisions of section d of annex 9 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, but delays in the granting, or even refusals, of overflight permission, did occur from time to time. Landing rights at the final destination had generally been forthcoming without any difficulty. (Only 1 out of 51 relief flights from the United Nations Supply Depot at Pisa during 1988 was refused landing rights, and this was due to earlier problems experienced by the Government with the carrier concerned.)

9B. Landing fees and handling charges at transit/transshipment airports were still a major problem for and expense to donors, and it was recommended that more generous waivers should be given where government charges at such airports were involved.

9C. In-country operations by aircraft belonging to donors could be facilitated by (i) ensuring that a single government focal point was nominated to authorize flights and the use of communications relating to flight operations and (ii) the authorization of the use of airfields nearest the

scene of operations for aircraft arriving from abroad (i.e. without the necessity for first landing at the capital or other airport with permanent customs facilities).

9D. A major problem experienced concerned the difficulty of arranging flights to what were regarded as "war risk" zones. Where civilian aircraft were concerned, prohibitively large premiums imposed by insurers inevitably limited the geographical areas to which relief could be delivered. This constraint was sometimes less important if military aircraft were being used, but here too, authorization from the Government to fly into such areas might not always be granted, and this refusal acted to the detriment of the disinterested and humanitarian character of the assistance and the relief operation.

10. Potential recipient Governments should take advance measures to authorize access to communications facilities by recognized relief personnel.

10A. The recommendations of the World Administrative Radio Conference of 1979 in this regard appear to have had a beneficial effect. It was felt, however, that further consideration of the text of those recommendations would be most desirable, to take account of the development of new facilities such as telefax and satellite communications.

ANNEX II

Actions for improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance

A. All Governments

1. Governments should waive customs charges on relief goods at every stage of their journey, as well as landing and handling charges for the aircraft carrying them.
2. The World Administration Radio Conference should re-examine the recommendations of 1979 to take account of new developments in communications.

B. All Governments and agencies

3. Greater discretion should be given to field representatives to make immediate local purchases in the wake of a disaster.

C. Potential recipient Governments

4. The FAO standards for the amount of radioactivity present in foodstuffs should be adopted for relief supplies.
5. Governments should permit unfettered access to all areas of a country where relief assistance is required, or is being distributed, for the accredited representatives of donor Governments and recognized relief agencies.
6. Disaster preparedness plans should include a draft form of agreement to facilitate the delivery of international relief.

D. Donor Governments and agencies

7. Field representatives should be encouraged to use standard terms and descriptions for supplies required, and act together to lay down such standard terms.
8. Consideration should be given to the costs incurred by transit countries through damage to roads consequent upon the passage of large quantities of relief supplies to land-locked States, with a view to giving financial assistance to the transit States.

E. United Nations

9. Relaxation of the rules covering purchases of relief supplies should be further examined in the light of General Assembly resolution 39/207.

F. Donor Governments, agencies and the insurance industry

10. War risk insurance premiums for aircraft engaged in relief operations should if possible be reduced to a reasonable level and that the premiums should whenever practicable be paid by donor Governments in the same manner as export guarantee insurance.
