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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 15 July 1998, at 10 a.m.

President:

Mr. SYCHOU
(Vice-President)

(Belarus)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)

The PRESIDENT drew the Council's attention to a request by the Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI), an organization in general consultative status with the Council, to make a statement under agenda item 5, "Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance". He took it that the Council agreed to hear that organization's statement.

It was so decided.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (A/53/139-E/1998/67 and A/53/172-E/1998/86)

The PRESIDENT said it was the first time that the Council had devoted part of its session to humanitarian affairs. He welcomed the high level of participation on the part of the Member States and of the United Nations system.

Mr. VIEIRA de MELLO (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs), introducing the Secretary-General's report entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations" (A/53/139-E/1998/67), said that a complex but essential interrelationship existed between the peace process, the human rights situation, the recovery programme and the need for humanitarian assistance in recipient countries. Issues affecting the security of the civilian population and the development of government structures had a determining influence on a country's ability to consolidate peace and embark on genuine economic recovery; hence the importance of ensuring that agencies were able to deliver timely humanitarian assistance, to repatriate and reintegrate refugees and internally displaced persons, and to rapidly promote self-sufficiency. The benefits of a common assistance strategy based on consultation and joint ownership were also clear.

A new effort was required to strengthen national prevention strategies and response capacities, and it was gratifying that the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) had recognized the importance of the functions carried out by the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) secretariat and had suggested that the Council should address that issue in 1999. He also hoped

to further develop the capacity of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to assist Governments in natural disaster response and preparedness, and he thanked donors for the generous assistance that had been channelled to disaster victims through his Office.

He stressed the importance of facilitating the development of a concerted response to complex emergencies and natural disasters, in which each actor was able to fulfil its mandate within a jointly agreed framework. Prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response must be strengthened at the country and regional levels through improved coordination among the United Nations agencies, interested Governments and regional organizations. South-South cooperation in those areas also required the Organization's support, and considerable attention would be given to developing guidelines for dealing with complex emergencies.

OCHA must also redouble its efforts, in close partnership with the High Commissioners for Human Rights and Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to promote compliance by all parties with humanitarian principles. The erosion of respect for those principles could be stemmed through measures to enhance accountability and through a credible threat of targeted sanctions against violators. Moreover, people and countries indirectly affected by war, floods or earthquakes, especially countries and communities hosting refugees, also required assistance.

The United Nations must lead the effort to identify more effective ways of ensuring that help reached those needing it in a timely, principled and cost-effective manner and with the best possible use of resources. Practical policies and guidelines for humanitarian operations should be developed based on the experiences of affected communities and of agencies working with them in the field. The Organization must also work with others to reduce the risks being run by humanitarian workers, and the international community must adopt more vigorous measures to ensure the accountability of those who perpetrated attacks on them.

His Office would work with the members of the Council and other States to ensure that the resources required to meet needs identified in the consolidated appeals process were made available in a timely way. To do so, however, such appeals had to provide a clear picture of planned United Nations actions and to define common objectives, priorities and divisions of responsibilities in the system's response to a particular crisis. Further donor support was needed as

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well, as the current low levels of response to the appeals were having serious adverse consequences for beneficiaries. Rehabilitation projects should be incorporated into the consolidated appeals process and should not only introduce development-oriented activities at the earliest possible stage but also substantively assist countries to move out of the critical emergency phase.

He was determined to discourage protracted humanitarian programmes and to initiate rehabilitation, reconstruction and development at an early stage, without curtailing humanitarian assistance where it was called for. Better reporting and monitoring of specific programmes were also of great importance, and should be provided for within the consolidated appeal itself. A final challenge for his Office was to convince Governments, agency partners, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements and non-governmental organizations that it provided real "added value" and to promote a sense of joint ownership through increased consultation, transparency and accountability in its activities and services.

Mr. WIBISONO (Observer for Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the past year's continued reforms of the United Nations humanitarian sector and the establishment of OCHA but expressed concern at the further curtailment of that Office's activities due to lack of resources and said that satisfactory resolution of the funding problem was required. A further source of concern was the continued decline in the response of the international community to appeals for humanitarian assistance. It was particularly troubling that in some instances such assistance had been hindered because the crisis had failed to capture the attention of the international news media and thereby elicit a response.

He stressed that the consolidated appeals process should not be based on priorities set by a few donor countries but should reflect the genuine needs and merits of each crisis situation. Any improvement of the process should involve all United Nations agencies, donors and Governments and include strengthened provisions for development and rehabilitation activities. The role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator was of great importance, given the dispersal of assistance responsibilities to entities throughout the United Nations system and the consequent need for the coordination of activities. Efforts of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to achieve greater coherence in field-level coordination and a clearer division of responsibilities were to be commended, as

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were efforts to ensure adequate monitoring of humanitarian responses, for which reliable data and sound analysis were essential.

The increasing role of the United Nations in responding to natural disasters and environmental emergencies was also of importance to the Group of 77 and China, which commended the work of the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination (UNDAC) teams while noting the need to strengthen the effectiveness of that response. The initiative to utilize capacities existing in developing countries was particularly welcome in that regard.

The Group of 77 and China reiterated the need for a comprehensive approach linking development and relief programmes from the outset. Strategic frameworks involving all major stakeholders should be formulated with a view to associating the humanitarian response with the long-term view of rehabilitation. The Group also reiterated its support for United Nations efforts to provide timely and effective responses to humanitarian crises throughout the world, while stressing the need to avoid any trace of political motivation in those initiatives.

Mr. SUCHARIPA (Observer for Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associate countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that the European Union attached great importance to the coordination of humanitarian activities and was interested in improving governance arrangements. It welcomed the activities undertaken by the new Emergency Relief Coordinator to more effectively focus the mandate and responsibilities of the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs, now the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The European Union was surprised that no mention was made in the report of any work undertaken with regard to a gender perspective and children in armed conflict. It urged OCHA to work closely with key partners in the system to raise awareness and promote mainstreaming of those issues and requested the Secretary-General to give full attention to them in future reports on humanitarian assistance coordination.

The European Union shared the Secretary-General's concern regarding the erosion of respect for international humanitarian law and principles, in particular the Geneva Conventions and the principles set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182. It fully supported the thrust of the proposals in the final section of the report designed to address those concerns. It also fully supported the creation of an effective and independent International Criminal

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Court and urged States to work together to find a solution acceptable for all which would give the Court sufficient powers to bring to justice the perpetrators of atrocities.

The decline in international response to appeals for humanitarian assistance was indeed a matter of concern. While welcoming the recent decline in the numbers of people worldwide who were dependent on emergency humanitarian assistance, the European Union recognized the continuing need for greater efforts to meet the requirements set out in consolidated appeals and urged that the financial basis for consolidated appeals should be broadened to include both "traditional" and "non-traditional" donors. It also urged that the anomaly of the core United Nations function of coordinating humanitarian affairs not being fully funded from the regular budget should be redressed as soon as possible.

The European Union welcomed the Secretary-General's reforms in the field of humanitarian activities, along with their evident impact to date at the field level in the context of increased coordination at the headquarters level. The use of inter-agency teams to negotiate the acceptance of humanitarian principles in specific situations was particularly welcome, as was the elaboration of guiding objectives for OCHA.

The European Union welcomed the arrangements for increased field coordination and looked forward to progress reports highlighting the training, selection, terms of reference and appraisal of resident coordinators and their staff. Field-level coordinators must at all times have the lead responsibility to ensure provision of space in conducting humanitarian activities. The European Union also supported the guiding principles for internally displaced persons and was pleased that the Emergency Relief Coordinator had been designated as focal point for inter-agency coordination of assistance to them. The World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the ICRC should continue to be involved in developing best-practice guidelines for internally displaced persons while taking fully into account the specific roles and profiles of protection agencies. The European Union further commended the approach to resource mobilization outlined in the report, and strongly supported the development of the strategic framework concept. All elements of that concept should be factored into the consolidated appeals process, a strategic instrument whose development must involve all stakeholders. The European Union also would welcome some elaboration on

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improvements in prioritizing needs in that process and on the modalities for a comprehensive review of humanitarian programme funding. It recognized the potential humanitarian impact of sanctions and called for the provision of humanitarian exceptions to them where appropriate and the monitoring of their effect on civilian populations.

Natural disasters and environmental emergencies were an important dimension of humanitarian assistance, requiring regional cooperation. There was an evident link between natural disaster mitigation and development, and the United Nations system should continue working to develop the capacity of Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society in disaster-prone countries. The European Union would welcome an elaboration of the proposal to utilize existing capacities in developing countries, and believed that the Council should address the final phase of IDNDR at its next humanitarian segment.

The subject of relief and development was of crucial importance for all Council members and should be a major component of the agreed outcome of the segment. While endorsing much of the report's content in that regard, the European Union would have preferred a more action-oriented approach, along with the inclusion of such coordination-strengthening proposals as the integration of emergency planning in development programmes and vice versa, and the initiation of development planning during conflicts in order to build a constituency for peace and stability.

Ms. TAFT (United States of America) said that her Government strongly supported the measures taken by the Secretary-General to strengthen the coordination of the emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, including, in particular, the establishment of OCHA.

The mobilization of international humanitarian assistance to victims of natural and man-made disasters was one of the Organization's most important and ennobling missions. The magnitude of the task of strengthening the coordination of such aid was exemplified by the humanitarian tragedy in Sierra Leone, which she had recently visited together with a delegation whose members had been appalled at the inhumanity of the rebels towards innocent civilians, just as they had been moved by the generosity of neighbouring countries in providing shelter for the refugees. The world could not ignore those countries and their people, and it was for the United Nations to mobilize an effective humanitarian

response. Much needed to be done to address the problems of operational coordination, and the United Nations must be given the resources to do the job.

The challenge of humanitarian coordination, however, arose not only at the operational level but also at the strategic policy and planning levels. It was incumbent on OCHA to coordinate the United Nations inter-agency team in humanitarian emergencies, while recognizing the linkages between humanitarian and political, peacekeeping, development and human rights strategies and addressing the root cause in a comprehensive manner. Only in that way would the recurrence of complex humanitarian emergencies be prevented.

Her Government supported the role of OCHA in the three core functions of policy development and coordination, advocacy of humanitarian issues and coordination of humanitarian emergency response. It welcomed the focus within OCHA on making the coordination system a top priority both in the field and at headquarters, and it supported the principle of developing a coordinating mechanism for complex humanitarian situations, such as the strategic framework and common programming strategy for assistance to Afghanistan developed by donors, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. In that connection, she had been appalled at the restrictions imposed by the Taliban on humanitarian assistance provided by non-governmental organizations and the United Nations and at the limitations on services for women and girls. Such restrictions were totally unacceptable and undermined the principles of the common programme, demonstrating the limits of what could be achieved when donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations were faced with a hostile environment created by the local authorities.

Resource mobilization was essential in order to meet all the challenges of humanitarian response. In that context, her Government had been encouraged by the analysis made by the United Nations the previous year of the shortcomings of the consolidated appeals process, which had to be addressed in order to sustain the confidence of donors. As a major contributor, her Government intended to look to the consolidated appeals process to clarify lead roles for various sectors and to express clear priorities. The core functions of OCHA must be financed through the regular budget; at the same time, the Office should be encouraged to continue its efforts to broaden its donor base to secure voluntary contributions for its non-core activities.

In connection with the work of the United Nations in post-conflict situations, her delegation was pleased to note that the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/139-E/1998/67) acknowledged the primary role to be played by local and national actors in rebuilding their societies in the aftermath of crisis. In that regard, the primary role of the United Nations and other external actors should be to revive and nurture local capacity.

Her Government strongly supported the analysis made by the Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in particular with respect to the need to protect civilians in situations of conflict and the specific recommendation of the establishment of an international mechanism to assist host Governments in maintaining the security and neutrality of refugee camps and settlements.

Her Government was gravely concerned by the high incidence of killing and kidnapping of humanitarian staff, whose sole purpose was to bring relief and protection to victims in need, but who then became victims themselves, and it urged the United Nations to identify ways of extending security to the relief workers of the United Nations and of the non-governmental organizations that were the partners of the specialized agencies.

Ms. JOHNSON (Observer for Norway) said that the present decade was plagued by humanitarian emergencies as the escalation of ruthless internal conflicts and the collapse of State structures disrupted and destroyed the lives and livelihoods of masses of civilians. Her country had always been strongly committed to its humanitarian responsibilities and was among the largest donors to international humanitarian efforts. It had called over the years for improvements to the international humanitarian response capacity and had advocated that humanitarian issues should be addressed in a more comprehensive and coordinated manner. It therefore welcomed the establishment of a humanitarian segment in the Council's agenda.

Traditional approaches to humanitarian action had proved to be inadequate and there had been too many recurrent cases of human suffering on a vast scale. Among the major contributory factors were the magnitude of new internal conflicts, the lack of political will on the part of the parties concerned to reach a peaceful solution and insufficient crisis management capacity in the international community. An improved and innovative coordinated international

approach should provide a better link between political and humanitarian players and relief and development.

Tens of millions of people around the world were dependent on humanitarian emergency assistance. In addition to the many complex man-made emergencies there were large-scale natural disasters affecting entire regions such as the El Niño phenomenon. Environmental emergencies were also increasing worldwide and the outlook was particularly grim for those affected when humanitarian disasters were aggravated by natural catastrophes.

Humanitarian action could never, on its own, provide solutions to the underlying social and political causes of emergencies, and it could not be a substitute for political inaction. It was therefore important to address the prevention of conflicts and of potential social and ethnic tensions. Integrated approaches to crisis management should be developed, linking humanitarian considerations, respect for human rights and political, security and development policies in a coherent framework.

While there was a great need for coordinated efforts at all levels in situations where large numbers of people were affected, coordination could not be a goal in itself. Operational coordinating mechanisms must be geared to the particular requirements of individual countries and situations. She was therefore encouraged by the report of the Secretary-General, and particularly by the ongoing reform process within the United Nations, which emphasized more efficient coordination of development activities at the country level, an approach that could also provide a better basis for bridging the critical gap between the relief phase and long-term development.

It was important to have common assessments of needs and analyses of problems, shared goals and common programming of operations, the overriding goal being to secure and sustain people's livelihood, based on respect for human dignity and the human rights of every individual. Assistance and development strategies should be designed to meet that goal so that local capacity could be strengthened, local vulnerability reduced and recovery from crisis facilitated. The United Nations should include a stronger component of local capacity-building in the consolidated appeals, and the strengthening of human rights should be integrated into the construction efforts in post-conflict situations and into strategic frameworks for countries in crisis. In that context, the question of women's rights in Afghanistan was of particular concern.

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The impartial delivery of humanitarian assistance and relief to persons in need was a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be upheld by all parties. The persistent denial of access to people in need and the deliberate violence and attacks on civilian populations, particularly affecting women and children, were a matter for deep concern. Firm measures must be taken against parties that deliberately attacked civilian staff members of the United Nations and the personnel of humanitarian organizations. In that connection she announced her Government's intention to contribute \$100,000 to the recently established Trust Fund for the security of United Nations personnel in order to support training and enhanced security management.

The atrocities by regimes and the abuses by non-State actors often implied violations of international humanitarian law and her delegation urged all Member States to ensure the successful conclusion of the current negotiations on the establishment of an independent, strong and truly credible international criminal court.

The United Nations must also pursue its efforts to control the proliferation of small arms in conflict zones and maintain an integrated approach to anti-personnel landmines. That was an area in which the United Nations had a particularly important role to play in support of the objectives of the Treaty that was designed to rid the world of the scourge of landmines, an objective that her country strongly supported.

There was no linear relationship between the relief phase and long-term development; what was needed, therefore, was a broad approach covering both humanitarian crises and the challenge of development. It was necessary to take into consideration the origins of the conflict and its possible solution in strengthening local communities, developing viable judicial systems, supporting good governance and building civil society. Efforts in education and the social sectors were among the most effective ways of linking humanitarian assistance with rehabilitation and reconstruction, thus providing crucial building blocks for long-term development. The infrastructure that could never be destroyed by war was the infrastructure developed in the minds of people. The right to humanitarian aid must be reaffirmed, and the international community must send clear and unambiguous messages in that regard. The donor countries were responsible for providing the necessary funding and must ensure that the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, including the newly established

OCHA, had an adequate and predictable resource base. The signs of growing donor fatigue, as exemplified by the continuing decline in official development assistance from the North to the South and in donor response to the consolidated appeals, gave cause for concern.

Most humanitarian crises, and all humanitarian activities and efforts, were man-made. That was why both Governments and the United Nations had a humanitarian mandate, especially a mandate to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian activities in order to fulfil the imperative of saving lives and preserving human dignity.

Mr. ORDJONIKIDZE (Russian Federation) welcomed the meticulous analysis of the Organization's activities in the humanitarian assistance field contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/139-E/1998/67). His delegation believed the Secretary-General was right to emphasize the necessity of seeking urgent solutions to a number of challenges facing humanitarian operations, in particular ensuring access to the populations in need, providing protection for humanitarian personnel against violence and expediting the contributions of donors to humanitarian assistance.

The more effective provision of humanitarian assistance to the victims of complex emergencies and natural disasters largely depended on the successful reform of the humanitarian activities of the United Nations. He commended, in particular, the measures taken to focus the activities of the newly established OCHA on its three priority functions: the measures designed to rationalize the division of labour among the participants in humanitarian activities, the streamlining of the structure of the Office and the reduction in headquarters personnel. At the same time, his delegation shared the Secretary-General's concern over the continuing inadequacy of the available funding for the activities of the Office.

All possible measures should be taken to ensure the safety of the personnel involved in humanitarian operations, and there should be greater respect for international humanitarian law and for the protection of both the civilian population and the staff of humanitarian agencies. In that context, his delegation considered it essential to inform all parties to a conflict, especially combatants, of the necessity of respecting international humanitarian law.

The initial results of improvements in the ways of mobilizing financing for the humanitarian activities of the United Nations was encouraging, and support should be given to the idea contained in the report of preparing a review of the funding mechanism of humanitarian activities, with the participation of interested Governments. The response of donors should be focused on meeting the real needs of the population and not be bound up with political goals or priorities.

Further progress was needed in enhancing the potential for response to natural, technological and environmental disasters. Experience had shown that the aftermath of many such disasters was of a long-term nature which required the use of more effective planning tools and long-term programming. His delegation hoped that there would be continued support by the international community for the international programme of assistance to areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster, and it expressed its appreciation of the activities undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations to mitigate the consequences of various natural disasters, in particular in response to the recent floods in the Russian Federation.

His country was prepared to participate constructively in the development of a convention on the use of telecommunications in emergencies and of a draft convention on early warning in the event of environmental emergencies.

His delegation noted with satisfaction the involvement of the World Bank in the process of post-conflict peace-building and believed that the Bank's activities and resources had the potential to strengthen substantially the overall efforts to deal with a humanitarian crisis in a particular country or region.

His delegation was in favour of developing a holistic concept of humanitarian activity by the international community in conflict situations which would operate both at the stage of peacekeeping operations and at the subsequent stages of peace-building, rehabilitation and development.

His delegation agreed on the necessity of informing the Security Council in good time of the humanitarian consequences of the sanctions regimes being imposed and the importance of practical measures capable of limiting the adverse effects of sanctions on the future development of a country.

In the context of the activities of the United Nations in the field of emergency humanitarian response it was important to make use of the potential

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for interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council in accordance with Article 65 of the Charter.

In conclusion, he confirmed the willingness of his country, together with other States, to develop a more effective framework for humanitarian assistance to populations in need. Russian humanitarian organizations continued to provide whatever donor support they could to foreign countries facing critical emergencies and were interested in expanding their cooperation with relevant international humanitarian agencies.

Mr. BAALI (Algeria) said that the discussion of humanitarian affairs as a segment of the Council's agenda was a positive innovation and one that his delegation welcomed. The report submitted by the Secretary-General provided a good basis for discussion of the issues and drew attention to aspects of the highest importance for the future of emergency humanitarian assistance.

In addition to natural, ecological and technological disasters, which affected a considerable number of countries, conflict and post-conflict situations made it clear how essential it was for the international community to have the means necessary to respond promptly and adequately to the demands made on it. The restructuring of the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs which had been undertaken by the Secretary-General in the framework of his reform proposals had taken place so recently that it was difficult to evaluate it, but there were already positive signs which augured well for the future.

Coordination, coherence and effectiveness were highly important factors for the success of the efforts of the Organization in the field of humanitarian assistance, and any measures tending to strengthen them should be supported. However, the Organization's ability to act depended on the resources available to it. As the Secretary-General had pointed out in his report, there was an alarming tendency for such resources to decline. The Secretary-General's proposal that more resources should be made available under the regular budget of the Organization to meet expenses for humanitarian assistance therefore warranted careful consideration. However, any increase in resources should not affect the level of resources currently earmarked for development.

The discussion suggested by the Secretary-General on the financing of emergency humanitarian assistance operations would inevitably clarify the role of donors, particularly as they were becoming increasingly involved in the formulation both of appeals for assistance and of humanitarian assistance

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strategies. It would be regrettable if the involvement of donors in what should be an essentially disinterested activity became dependent on selective political or other objectives. Such limitations might be at least as damaging as the total absence of aid.

Another point to be noted was that international humanitarian assistance sometimes overlooked such fundamental principles as the consent of the national authorities of the States concerned and the need to consult them fully. In that connection, General Assembly resolution 46/182, which set out basic principles for the international community in its action to provide emergency assistance, should be borne in mind.

It was pleasing to note that the United Nations, like other international intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies, was taking an increasing interest in the mitigation of environmental disasters. In that context, the idea of developing an international legal instrument to facilitate the reporting of environmental emergencies was worthy of serious discussion among Member States. As a priority, the international community and, first and foremost, the United Nations system, should focus on promoting the creation and strengthening of national capacities, particularly in the developing countries, with respect to prevention, evaluation and intervention in order to mitigate the consequences of such environmental disasters. Another aspect to which the international humanitarian community should pay great attention concerned the transition from the emergency assistance phase to that of reconstruction and post-conflict rehabilitation. The relevant bodies of the United Nations and donors should engage in the delicate task of collaborating together in close consultation with the national authorities of the countries concerned with a view to promoting sustainable development for the benefit of populations. His delegation hoped that the present discussion, and the one that would take place in the General Assembly, would be conducive to improving coordination in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. AZAIEZ (Tunisia) said that the Secretary-General's report (A/53/139-E/1998/67) considered the question of humanitarian assistance both in the event of natural disasters and environmental emergencies and in the context of situations created by armed conflict or by sanctions imposed on Member States of the Organization. In view of the vulnerability of the planet to natural disasters and the need for structures to prevent disasters and coordinate

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assistance, his delegation welcomed the idea put forward by the Secretary-General in paragraph 56 of the report concerning the creation of a reserve under the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance. Interaction between OCHA, UNEP, UNDP and the other United Nations bodies involved should be encouraged. That implied not only the exchange of information but also the development of joint activities. It went without saying that any action should be undertaken in close coordination with the Government of the country.

With regard to humanitarian assistance in regions experiencing armed conflict, it was essential for the international community to ensure respect for the basic principles of international humanitarian law. The United Nations needed to be able to protect civilian populations in conflict zones, ensure the security of staff on humanitarian missions, and develop a legal framework to protect displaced persons. Member States should strive to achieve consensus on the guiding principles on internally displaced persons.

As the report stated, sanctions, especially if protracted, could have a serious impact on the civilian population. It was therefore of the utmost importance that all sanctions regimes should include a mechanism for their conclusion. Moreover, humanitarian assistance should be provided on a voluntary basis and should not draw on the already meagre resources of development assistance. Donor countries should respect the priorities determined by the United Nations and provide sufficient resources without specifying their destination.

Mr. VALLE (Brazil) said that consideration should be given to ways and means to further enhance the role of the Council. For example, the Council should be available throughout the year to brief Member States on the action taken to deal with natural disasters and complex emergencies. Informal briefing sessions could be organized to exchange information on specific situations. It would also be desirable to hold separate meetings of the Council to conduct thematic discussions on issues relating to the future of the United Nations system of humanitarian activities.

A number of misconceptions had arisen in the area of humanitarian assistance. Developing countries were frequently regarded as mere recipients of humanitarian assistance, while decision-making was the exclusive domain of a small group of donor countries. Yet, in reality, developing countries made a substantial contribution by absorbing massive refugee flows as well as the heavy

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political, economic and social costs of regional humanitarian crises. Those efforts could not be measured in simple financial terms. Developing countries also contributed in the form of human resources, training programmes, South-South cooperation and the supply of food, clothes, drugs and vaccines. The Council therefore needed to promote a broader participation of developing countries in humanitarian affairs, especially in the areas of decision-making and policy supervision. Brazil's bilateral cooperation included active support to reconstruction and social reintegration efforts in Angola. Over US\$ 2.5 million had been provided in humanitarian assistance, mostly by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency.

Another misconception related to the division of labour among the main bodies of the Organization. While attention tended to be concentrated on the Security Council, there was a need to further strengthen the role of the Council and the General Assembly; they should be permanently engaged in the promotion of activities related to post-conflict peace-building, humanitarian relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

The role of operational activities for development was of crucial importance in complex emergencies and in post-crisis situations; the United Nations funds and programmes should be involved at an early stage in efforts to address the relief/development gap in countries emerging from crisis. It was important to develop a comprehensive approach in order to integrate development activities into humanitarian emergencies.

It was a matter of great concern that the international response to appeals for humanitarian assistance had been declining in both absolute and relative terms. The response to international appeals must be commensurate with needs and should not be subjected to political considerations or limited by the level of media coverage of a specific crisis. The principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality must apply in all emergency situations, and attempts to impose conditionalities on the recipients of humanitarian assistance were in total contradiction with those principles.

His delegation was concerned about the rising toll of casualties among humanitarian personnel and was a sponsor of General Assembly resolution 52/167. Another issue of great concern was the humanitarian consequences of economic sanctions and trade embargoes, and particularly their negative impact on vulnerable segments of the population. His delegation participated actively in

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ongoing discussions to promote the development of "smart" sanctions with minimal impact on the civilian population and the long-term development process of the affected countries.

Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Observer for Kazakhstan) said it was very important that there should be effective cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance between the United Nations, international finance institutions, donors, and recipient Governments. The need to unite international efforts was demonstrated by the serious socio-economic and environmental consequences and enormous damage resulting from the ecological disaster of the Aral sea, the El Niño phenomenon, the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl and the nuclear tests conducted in Semipalatinsk. The active efforts being made in the United Nations to improve coordination in the area of emergency humanitarian assistance and the Secretary-General's recommendations for structural changes in the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs were particularly timely and appropriate.

Her Government hoped that the recent visit to Kazakhstan by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs would facilitate greater understanding by the international community of the environmental disasters in Kazakhstan. In the course of the visit, Kazakhstan had signed a cooperation agreement with the United Nations for the purpose of combating natural disasters. Kazakhstan possessed major capabilities for such cooperation, including storage facilities, airports and infrastructure.

As noted in paragraph 59 of the report (A/53/139-E/1998/67), an inter-agency mission had recently visited the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan. She appealed to Governments, especially of donor countries, to provide to Kazakhstan the necessary financial and technical assistance to carry out programmes and projects for the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region.

Her delegation believed that greater efforts were needed at the international level to overcome the serious socio-economic and ecological consequences of the Aral Sea disaster, which directly affected a region with a population of several million people. It fully agreed with the Secretary-General's view that the resources of a single country were often not sufficient to cope with the humanitarian consequences of natural catastrophes. It shared the concern about the decline in contributions to humanitarian assistance programmes and supported the proposal for a comprehensive review of the funding of humanitarian programmes and for a study of the relationship between funding

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provided for emergencies and resources made available for development programming.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) paid tribute to the aid workers throughout the world who were risking their lives in order to bring vital assistance to those in need.

It was encouraging that there had been a decline in the numbers of people worldwide who were dependent on emergency humanitarian assistance. His delegation appreciated the coordinated action by the United Nations system in response to natural disasters and environmental emergencies. It welcomed the restructuring of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, but was alarmed by the decline in resources; the international community must reverse that trend.

His delegation underscored the need for adequate funding for humanitarian activities; underfunding should not result in changes of priorities or cancellation of activities. It hoped that donors would replenish the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance. A sound financial basis must be ensured for OCHA. The provision of humanitarian assistance should not be driven by political considerations or media coverage, and the level of assistance must be commensurate with the real needs of the victims of disaster or emergency.

Further improvements were needed in the coordination of humanitarian activities at the field level. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee should take the necessary steps to enhance coordination. The consolidated appeal process should be seen as a continuum from strategic programming through to monitoring and evaluation. A comprehensive peace-building strategy should be put together, involving the national authorities, civil society and external stakeholders. Non-governmental organizations, including members of civil society, should be involved in efforts to raise awareness of humanitarian issues.

In conclusion, he said that humanitarian relief should be viewed as an inseparable component of development.

Ms. SMITH (European Community) said that the report of the Secretary-General demonstrated the close links between humanitarian assistance and issues like development aid, human rights, international law, and international politics in general.

The European Community expressed full support for the creation of OCHA and agreed that the Office should be funded fully from the regular budget of the

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United Nations; it commended the action of some Member States in filling the gap with voluntary contributions in the meantime. The Community welcomed the development of the strategic framework and hoped that the framework would help stop the downward trend of funding levels for humanitarian assistance. It believed that, while the criticisms of the concept of humanitarianism were somewhat unfair, it would be useful to review the concept and at the same time address the ever-increasing tendency to use humanitarian aid as a substitute for political action.

Human rights aspects should become an integral part of humanitarian activities, because the international community could not close its eyes to abuse of human rights and disregard of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. The European Community called on all delegations to support the establishment of an international criminal court, with a strong charter to allow effective action against breaches of international humanitarian law resulting in situations of de facto impunity. In that connection, it highlighted the importance of security and humanitarian space in complex emergencies; the lack of access to those in need, and the deliberate targeting of relief workers, had severely hampered humanitarian assistance. It agreed on the need to link relief, rehabilitation and development.

Mr. FOWLER (Canada), speaking on behalf of the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand delegations, said that the effectiveness of the United Nations in meeting humanitarian challenges depended heavily on the manner in which the humanitarian institutions worked together and with the other humanitarian actors. Of particular concern was the success of the Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, an enterprise that required the full cooperation of all the other agencies involved, including UNDP. The emphasis on field-level coordination was welcome, and a number of the issues raised by the Emergency Relief Coordinator warranted serious attention.

The Australian, Canadian and New Zealand delegations welcomed the decision to designate the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the focal point for the coordination of humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced and agreed on the need for close cooperation in that respect. They shared the profound concern expressed in the report regarding the erosion of respect for basic humanitarian principles and the need for greater protection for humanitarian workers; in that regard, they emphasized their commitment to an independent and

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effective international criminal court, whose statute should explicitly recognize attacks on humanitarian workers as a war crime. They fully agreed with the Secretary-General's conclusion regarding the potential role of strategic frameworks and welcomed his call for a strengthening of links with the relevant components of civil society in all parts of the world. They supported the work of the Deputy Secretary-General in developing an approach to peace-building strategies for countries emerging from protracted crises.

Member States must provide the requisite political and material support to enable the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the humanitarian agencies to fulfil the tasks assigned to them; it was particularly important to fund the Coordinator's basic functions from the regular budget, and a plan should therefore be devised to transfer financial responsibility for OCHA from the donor community to the United Nations budget over a period of several years. Australia, Canada and New Zealand strongly supported the Secretary-General's stated intention to increase regular budget financing for the Office and urged him to put the necessary proposals before the General Assembly at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. KONISHI (Japan) said that his delegation welcomed the establishment of OCHA, which should continue to focus more on coordination than on implementation. To that end, Japan supported the streamlining of the Office's structure. A greater proportion of the Office's staff should be funded from the regular budget, rather than from extrabudgetary resources, and every effort should be made to put its financing on a sound and stable basis.

His delegation strongly supported the establishment of the Mine Action Service in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Since the Service was a focal point for so many agencies and bodies of the United Nations system, prioritization and coordination of programmes and activities was of cardinal importance. His Government had already contributed more than \$7 million to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance and was prepared to make an additional contribution to the Mine Action Service.

His delegation supported the efforts of OCHA and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to facilitate the process of approving humanitarian exemptions to sanctions regimes. Further discussion was necessary in order to clarify the role that humanitarian organizations should play in that regard. The impact of sanctions in specific situations and the effectiveness of the sanctions

monitoring system must be gauged. Closer cooperation between the Department of Political Affairs and OCHA would increase the flexibility of the sanctions mechanism. In addition, the guidelines for the formulation of strategic frameworks might elucidate the roles that the Office, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs could play in planning and implementing assistance programmes in a more comprehensive and coherent manner.

As a short-term measure to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers, each humanitarian coordinator could play a leadership role in collecting information on and increasing protection for humanitarian workers in his or her region. The cooperation of all agencies and organs in a given region, including those which possessed relevant political and military information, was vital. At United Nations Headquarters, OCHA should enhance its coordination with other United Nations bodies and maximize its advocacy role in order to restore security. At the grass-roots level, implementation of the programmes of the various specialized agencies would in the long run promote respect for international humanitarian law.

Mr. SHARMA (India) expressed his delegation's full support for the statement delivered by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. His delegation attached great importance to the provision of humanitarian assistance on the basis of the guiding principles contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182. Refinements in the format and structure of humanitarian affairs segment of future Council sessions could be made on the basis of the experience of the current session.

His delegation welcomed the streamlining of OCHA and the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to engage the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in proactive and collaborative efforts to deal with a limited number of key humanitarian issues (A/53/139-E/1998/67, para. 17). It was concerned, however, that the Office's effectiveness might be curtailed by the lack of predictable resources, since more than 60 per cent of its costs were funded from extrabudgetary resources. All field-level coordination arrangements should be decided in full consultation with recipient Governments. His delegation welcomed the close involvement of the donors and the national authorities of recipient countries in the consolidated appeals process and hoped that, as a result, adequate and unearmarked funds would be increasingly available for the

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appeals process. Concerned at the recent decline in funding for humanitarian assistance, his delegation strongly supported the proposal of the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive review of the funding of humanitarian programmes. Consolidated reports by the Humanitarian Coordinator on the implications of underfunding, including forced changes in priorities and cancellation of activities, would be an important first step in that direction. In order to ensure that humanitarian assistance reached those who were genuinely in need, a distinction must be drawn between the functions and requirements of peacekeeping and peacemaking, on the one hand, and the principles of humanitarian access, on the other.

His delegation welcomed the report's emphasis on emergency assistance in response to natural disasters, particularly in countries that were ill-equipped to cope with them. In that connection, the work carried out by the UNDAC teams was laudable. The use of developing countries' capacities would make the response to natural disasters more timely and cost-effective.

He requested additional information concerning efforts to enable development agencies to work in "failed" and "weak" States (A/53/139-E/1998/67, para. 72). Despite the problems involved, a close linkage between relief and development, particularly through poverty eradication and sustained socio-economic development, was crucial.

Mr. PÁLIZ (Observer for Ecuador) expressed his delegation's support for the statement delivered by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. International support for sustainable development, including economic growth, would strengthen the disaster prevention capacity of developing countries. Conversely, natural disaster prevention would help to alleviate poverty and ensure sustainable development.

The increase in the number and scale of natural disasters in the world confirmed the need for an effective disaster prevention system and an international platform for action in the twenty-first century. His delegation shared the concern of ACC at humanity's increasing vulnerability to natural and environmental disasters. Accordingly, it welcomed the ACC recommendation that the United Nations system should continue to assume responsibility for disaster reduction in the twenty-first century. International cooperation for the reduction of natural disasters and environmental or technological emergencies would remain vital. Strategies for the twenty-first century should be based on

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the experience acquired during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Ecuador had been severely affected by the El Niño phenomenon in 1997 and 1998, suffering loss of life and environmental damage. According to a report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the hardest-hit sectors in its economy had been basic infrastructure, housing and agriculture, representing damage of \$2.6 billion. A \$2.2 billion national reconstruction and recovery effort was currently under way. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the action being taken by the Resident Coordinator pursuant to the mandates contained in General Assembly resolution 52/200 on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon. He also expressed appreciation to the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño, particularly its scientific and technical body. Within the framework of resolution 52/200, an intergovernmental meeting of experts would be held in Ecuador at the end of 1998. His delegation hoped that Member States and representatives of the United Nations system would support and participate in the meeting.

Mr. YUAN Shaofu (China) said that his delegation appreciated the work already carried out by OCHA and endorsed the proposals contained in the introductory statement of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, particularly with regard to intensifying humanitarian assistance on a regional basis. The Office should play a leading role in coordinating the activities of all United Nations agencies involved in humanitarian and disaster relief assistance and maximizing the overall advantages of the United Nations system to that end.

He expressed deep concern at the steady decline since 1994 in the level of resources mobilized through the consolidated appeals process for emergency disaster relief and endorsed the view contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the need to strengthen cooperation with Member States and to conduct a comprehensive review of the funding of the humanitarian programme. Noting the report's detailed analysis of the linkage between relief and development, he stressed the need to prevent natural disasters and minimize their consequences, particularly in developing countries. More effective cooperation among the various United Nations specialized agencies and a stronger linkage between

humanitarian activities and operational activities for development were necessary to that end.

Mr. LONDOÑO (Colombia) expressed his delegation's support for the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator on behalf of internally displaced persons, whose numbers had swelled with the rise in armed conflict throughout the world. Colombian nationals who had been displaced by violence were assisted by the National Council for Economic and Social Policy and by special units within the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the President. Under a special programme established in 1996, resources derived from the confiscation of illegally acquired lands were earmarked for agrarian reform and social programmes to benefit displaced persons. Although his Government had invested nearly \$100 million in assistance to internally displaced persons, its efforts had been insufficient to deal with such a large-scale problem.

His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that international humanitarian assistance to displaced persons should not be limited to the conflict period but rather should form an integral part of the entire reconstruction process. To that end, financing for such assistance must be predictable and clearly targeted, and assistance personnel must engage in the training of national agents. His delegation noted with interest the decision by the Board of Directors of the World Bank to endorse A Framework for World Bank Involvement in Post-Conflict Reconstruction (A/53/139-E/1998/67, para. 74).

The decline in official development assistance and humanitarian aid to victims of conflicts and natural disasters was regrettable. However, his delegation welcomed the progress achieved in the removal of anti-personnel landmines and the intensification of worldwide efforts to control the proliferation of light arms. In conclusion, he said that his delegation hoped to see increased coordination among the agencies and programmes of the United Nations with a view to improving outputs.

Ms. LEU AGOSTO (Observer for Switzerland) welcomed the progress achieved by OCHA in its short existence, in particular the appointment of Mr. Vieira de Mello as its head. Her delegation fully shared the concern expressed by the Secretary-General in his report with regard to the security of humanitarian workers (A/53/139-E/1998/67, para. 49). The risks to humanitarian workers could be minimized by better coordination among humanitarian organizations, and between those organizations and political or military bodies.

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A clear definition of the responsibilities of each actor and respect for the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance were prerequisites for security. The theme of security had been discussed during the First Periodic Meeting on International Humanitarian Law, convened by Switzerland in January; that debate would be continued during the twenty-seventh Conference of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to be held in Geneva in 1999.

Her delegation deplored the indiscriminate use of landmines. Convinced that the only solution was a total weapons ban, it had completed the destruction of all its stocks in late 1997. It had already ratified the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines and urged all States that had not yet done so to accede to it at the earliest possible date. Her delegation accorded priority to mine clearance and assistance to victims. In that context, an International Humanitarian Mine Clearance Centre had been established in Geneva for the collection and dissemination of information, in cooperation with the United Nations, ICRC and non-governmental organizations.

Her delegation welcomed the designation of the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the focal point for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance (A/53/139-E/1998/67, para. 28). It wished to highlight the vital role played by ICRC in assisting displaced persons. The guiding principles elaborated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons were a practical interpretation of how existing rules should apply to the situation of displaced persons; those principles should be disseminated and implemented. A comparative analysis of field coordination experiences could form a useful basis for the decisions to be taken by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Mr. ZABALLA (Argentina) welcomed the establishment of OCHA and expressed satisfaction at the guiding principles for the restructuring of the humanitarian sector of the United Nations.

Argentina's White Helmet Initiative had earned the praise of the Secretary-General during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. In March 1998, a Ministry of "White Helmets" International Humanitarian Assistance had been established directly in the Office of the President of the Republic. The new Ministry was required to coordinate its work with that of other Ministries and had signed agreements and taken joint action with non-governmental organizations, including with Green Cross. It had provided

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assistance to the peoples of Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and others in the Latin American region and, in turn, was grateful to the international community, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for helping it to cope with flooding in Argentina.

The new integrated approach to humanitarian assistance, with the participation of civil society and the Bretton Woods institutions in the post-conflict reconstruction process, should result in rapid economic and social recovery. His delegation shared the concern of the Secretary-General at the persistent and deliberate disruption of the work of humanitarian organizations by armed groups.

In conclusion, his delegation strongly supported coordination among the various humanitarian assistance organizations, while stressing the need for a rapid response, a victim-centred approach and the development of local capacities. His delegation also attached great importance to the participation of all actors in pre- and post-conflict situations; flexibility in planning operations; the availability of adequate resources from the regular budget of the United Nations; and an increase in donor contributions.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.