

PROVISIONAL

E/1999/SR.26

29 July 1999

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1999

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Wednesday, 14 July 1999, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. SYCHOV (Belarus)  
(Vice-President)

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SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)

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GE.99-64389 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Fulci (Italy), Mr. Sychov (Belarus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (agenda item 5) (continued) (A/54/129-E/1999/73, A/54/130-E/1999/72, A/54/153-E/1999/93 and A/54/154-E/1999/94; E/1999/82, 97 and 98; E/1999/CRP.2 and CRP.3)

Panel on natural disasters

Ms. LEITNER (Resident Coordinator for China) said that the huge floods experienced in 1998 had been the greatest for a century in the South of China and for five centuries in the North-East. Forewarned by their scientists, the Chinese authorities had been able to do much preparatory work, a large number of civilian and military personnel being mobilized to protect human settlements and the lives of the people. Their efforts had been extremely successful: while some 228 million people had been affected, only 4,100 lives had been lost. Another exceptional feature was that, for the first time ever, the Chinese Government had requested the United Nations system, through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to launch an international appeal for emergency relief. Immediately on receipt of the government request, OCHA, in consultation with the country office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Resident Coordinator, had prepared an assessment mission. The mission had ended with a public appeal that was widely publicized, both nationally and internationally. The document showed the assessed needs, identified the lead agency and limited the duration of the appeal to four months. The choice of items, as well as the modality for channelling the assistance, was left to the donors, most of whom chose the United Nations agency identified as the lead agency in the appeal. International attention had focused largely on the floods in the South, but the United Nations team had succeeded in channelling some assistance to the Northern areas as well, thus contributing to a more equitable distribution of relief funds.

Information published by Chinese scientists over recent decades had shown the cost of natural disasters to be growing as fast as the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Clearly, in the long run, China would be well-advised to invest more in measures for prevention and preparedness, as well as for longer-term rehabilitation. The country team had therefore

launched a second open-ended appeal in support of national preventive measures. Unfortunately, the response so far from the international community had not been very forthcoming.

The lesson that had been learned was that the organizations of the United Nations system could work together successfully, bringing synergies to bear that were of benefit to national as well as internationally-funded relief operations. Because of coordination and cooperation, the rate of response to the first appeal had been almost 85 per cent (US\$ 117 million of the US\$ 139 million asked for). Though the Chinese authorities had mounted a highly successful relief and rescue campaign of their own, they had benefited in several ways from the United Nations involvement. The United Nations system allowed the international donors to disburse their funds quickly and reach identifiable target groups. The system had also monitored the various relief programmes assisted by international funds, reporting regularly over a one-year period.

As a follow up to the relief operations, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, during his visit to China in December 1998, had proposed that the Chinese Government should hold a seminar/workshop for participants from China and other developing countries with a view to comparing disaster management systems. That workshop, hosted by the Chinese Government and co-sponsored by UNDP and OCHA, had been held in Beijing in June 1999. There had been participants from 20 countries, not including China, and from 22 organizations of the United Nations system. The proceedings had ended with a number of recommendations for future technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) in the area of disaster prevention and preparedness as well as relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. A report had been published on the workshop and its results.

Mr. LOCKWOOD (Resident Coordinator for Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh had faced repeated natural disasters, almost annually, for a very long time. Its population currently stood at about 130 million people, some half of whom lived below the poverty line. The country's development process was totally interwoven with the sequence of disasters in the form of floods and cyclones.

In 1998, Bangladesh had suffered one of the worst floods in its history, similar in many respects to the flood in China, both in its severity and in

the capacity of the Government and the donor community to respond to the emergency. An assessment of the situation in Bangladesh 12 months later made it clear that the recovery process had been exceptional, for a variety of reasons. Certain key issues had affected the coordination of assistance and contributed to the successful outcome. First of all, the floods that affected Bangladesh were an annual occurrence. Almost the entire country was a flood plain, lying downstream of two of the biggest rivers in Asia, and those rivers overflowed every summer affecting some 25 to 30 million people. As a result, the population was accustomed to coping with floods, which also brought certain benefits. The main problem was ensuring that the damage to food crops was successfully limited. Damage to the infrastructure, while serious, did not affect the people's survival. In 1998, some three weeks after the start of the flooding, the government of Bangladesh had begun to seek international assistance. The initial government approach had been packaged by UNDP in the form of a single document calling for US\$ 600 million of assistance. The United Nations had immediately fielded an OCHA mission. It was decided that a first appeal should be made for emergency assistance, separate from rehabilitation needs. Within seven days, the Secretary-General had launched an initial appeal for US\$ 223 million of emergency assistance. The response, as recorded by OCHA, slightly exceeded the amount requested. That exceptional response was indicative in part of the gravity of the situation in Bangladesh, and in part an awareness, stemming from many years of experience, of Bangladesh's inability to manage without assistance. It came mainly in the form of food aid commitments, totalling about one million tons, which had enabled the Government to release its own reserves to the most severely affected people.

Another critical factor in the success of the operation was the identification of key rehabilitation needs, including seeds to replace those damaged by the flood. Not only had standing crops been destroyed, but the seed beds for the subsequent winter crop had been devastated, an even more serious consequence. With the help of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Ministry of Agriculture had mounted a very detailed assessment mission which had identified seed and fertilizer needs. A massive distribution effort over the next three months had resulted in a bumper crop in the spring, the main reason for the very successful recovery. The World

Bank's estimates, produced during the floods, of the impact on the economy had predicted a drop in the growth rate to 3.5 per cent. By the early summer of 1999, the Ministry of Finance was able to forecast a growth rate of 5.2 per cent, far better than had first been predicted, because of the successful harvest.

As far as coordination was concerned, it was remarkable how disaster had brought a team together. Daily problems of collaboration tended to be forgotten. The various members of the United Nations country team in Bangladesh had complemented each other in many ways. The bringing together of agencies bearing resources, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNDP, with technical agencies specializing in damage assessment had resulted in an extraordinary package of expertise. The international financial organizations had made a significant contribution by reallocating loans already approved or determining new priorities within them. They had thus greatly facilitated the Government's ability to respond promptly to the needs identified by the assessment mission. It had been presumed at first that a second appeal would have to be made for rehabilitation. That was subsequently found to be unnecessary, as the reworking by the multilateral lending institutions of existing loans reduced the need for new and additional commitments by bilateral donors.

Mr. OBERTI (Resident Coordinator for the Dominican Republic) said that, on 22 September 1998, the Dominican Republic had been hit by hurricane Georges, the most devastating natural phenomenon since hurricane David of 1979. Georges had left behind some 300 dead and 300,000 refugees, or about 4 per cent of the total population. There was also major damage to crops and the yields of basic foodstuffs declined sharply. In terms of loss of infrastructure, the country's telecommunications system and the electricity and water distribution networks had suffered heavy damage. Many bridges and highways were also damaged or destroyed. A mission by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean had visited the country in the aftermath of the hurricane and had estimated the total economic damage at US\$ 2.1 billion.

In the days following the hurricane, several coordinating meetings had been held between United Nations agencies and their national and international counterparts to secure a prompt and coordinated response to the emergency.

Those efforts had been effectively supported by a United Nations disaster assessment and coordination (UNDAC) team sent by OCHA which had prepared a first preliminary evaluation of the damage so as to facilitate emergency relief activities. Based on the mission's recommendations and with initial emergency funds provided by UNDP and OCHA, a comprehensive United Nations programme of emergency assistance and reconstruction was implemented. Its main objective was to provide support to the Government and to secure a smooth transition from the emergency situation to integrated sustainable development.

The programme combined the supply of emergency items, such as water equipment and construction materials, with technical assistance and the introduction of income-generating activities in local communities affected by the hurricane. That idea was to integrate short-term needs and long-term development objectives in some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities. The most important feature of that programme, which was still in progress, was the active participation of the local people in its implementation, through neighbourhood organizations and local community committees. The inputs mobilized included technical, financial and operational assistance from both multilateral and bilateral sources, as well as contributions from several local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and from the United Nations Staff Association, totalling a little over US\$ 660,000. WFP had also made a sustained contribution, amounting to more than US\$ 6 million, including a contribution from the United States.

At the same time, in response to the recommendations of the ECLAC mission, the Government sought to obtain additional funding through loans from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the World Bank, both of which were currently being processed.

A number of lessons had been learned from the operation in the Dominican Republic. First of all, apart from UNDP and OCHA, the agencies did not have any specific emergency funds. They relied on their ongoing programmes or on funds received from donors in response to direct emergency appeals. The need for each agency to address the concerns of its clients made their interventions rather scattered and coordination more difficult. Donors, on the other hand, tended to react to their own constituencies, generally opting for direct intervention, often through local or international NGOs, thereby allowing for little intervention on the part of the central Government or

local governments. In the Dominican Republic, the close cooperation and coordination between the World Bank and UNDP and between the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) had been very helpful. The three organizations had interacted closely among themselves and there had been good liaison with national and local authorities during the emergency phase and, in the case of the World Bank and UNDP, during the reconstruction phase, through the rescheduling of loans so as to attend to basic needs.

The fragility of national institutions in the Dominican Republic had been very noticeable, despite more than two years of technical cooperation provided by UNDP. The bottleneck thus caused had been recognized by the authorities and by the international financial institutions and a significant proportion of the emergency loans approved by the IADB and the World Bank after the event had been designed to address those weaknesses and to promote institutional reform in support of disaster preparedness and mitigation. Most of the reforms recommended had a fair chance of being fully implemented during the current hurricane season.

The strong operational presence of UNDP had proved to be very responsive and efficient in meeting the most immediate needs. Its capacity, however, had been somewhat underutilized, owing to the lack of additional financial support. Its capacity had been made available to the authorities and the major donors, all of which were currently undertaking major efforts in the reconstruction phase. UNDP stood ready to provide the necessary support to any other donor which might wish to work with it and the United Nations system on behalf of the necessary transition, as the country moved from the emergency and reconstruction phases towards sustainable human development.

Ms. MESA (Resident Coordinator for Honduras) said that, when analysing the response of the United Nations system to the disaster in Honduras, it was essential to consider the context in which hurricane Mitch had struck: namely, an environment characterized by poverty, social and ecological vulnerability and inequity. The immediate reaction of the President of Honduras to the disaster had been that it provided an opportunity for fundamental change. The revival of awareness and interest in long-term development issues offered a challenge to the international community in general and the United Nations system in particular.

As far as the immediate response of the United Nations system to the emergency was concerned, she agreed with the Resident Coordinator for Bangladesh that, when a country team was faced with a real emergency, all differences disappeared. At the same time, several problems had been encountered, one being the administrative capacity of each office. Several agencies felt that one important lesson of the emergency, which could apply in all cases, was the need to strengthen that capacity from the outset. That was critical not only for the first phase of an emergency but also for administering and reporting on the special additional resources made available by donors for both the emergency and recovery phase.

The preparation of the Transitional Appeal had been an excellent coordination exercise confirming the spirit of cooperation that had developed in recent years among the entities of the system in Honduras. However, the short timetable for the preparation process, at a time when all energies were directed to managing the humanitarian response, had not allowed for a comprehensive assessment of emergency needs or the development of specific action plans, or the active participation of government officials, donors and NGOs. The Appeal had been launched only a few days before the IADB Consultative Group Meeting, when attention was largely concentrated on the preparations for that Meeting, and the direct response was relatively meagre.

At the country level, once the critical period of search and rescue was over, support for the recovery and rehabilitation phase had started immediately. Sectoral groups had worked on preparing the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and various programme frameworks. The Government had relied greatly on the assistance of the United Nations system in preparing for the IADB Consultative Group Meeting for Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America. Another important contribution of the United Nations system had been to brief and assist the numerous bilateral donor assessment missions which visited the country. Several thematic groups had been established, the most successful being those on infrastructure and environment.

Transport and communication difficulties meant that a field operations network had to be developed to facilitate links with the people and to monitor priority needs and relief activities. It was clear that, in the short- and medium-term, the most realistic and lasting contribution that the United Nations could make would be to strengthen the local level so as to



ensure an adequate transition from relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. A number of projects were developed to that end, bringing in more than US\$ 70 million of financing from bilateral and multilateral donors. Their implementation was being closely monitored but increasing the implementing rate was a major challenge. To that end, the United Nations system was working with the national authorities on possible alternatives, one being direct execution.

Quality of life in Honduras had declined as a direct effect of the hurricane, affecting all segments of the population. The United Nations system was engaged in an effort to assess the impact. Preliminary data showed that the numbers in extreme poverty could be expected to increase from 22 to 32 per cent, an increase of about 600,000 persons or 10 per cent of the population.

The Master Plan for Reconstruction and Transformation, agreed upon by the Consultative Group at Stockholm, emphasized the transformation of society. The Plan covered a vast range of topics, from specific investment projects to community participation, planning and disaster preparedness. The whole context in which hurricane Mitch had struck the country must be changed if an even more destructive disaster was to be prevented.

Mr. PLATTE (Germany) said he would like to know first of all how the resident representatives in the disaster-struck countries had managed the transition to their extra responsibilities as humanitarian coordinators. Secondly, he noted that, while the United Nations disaster assessment and coordination (UNDAC) missions organized by OCHA had done a superb job, the teams were staying for evermore lengthy periods and returning more frequently; he wondered why that was so. Thirdly, he asked on what basis coordination took place between the UNDAC and the resident representatives and whether the terms of reference were the crucial factor.

Mr. KUMAMARU (Japan) asked how the transition from one stage of assistance to another - beginning with relief and through to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development - was managed. His impression was that, in the case of a natural disaster, coordination did not present any problems, but he would like some further confirmation. Moreover, while an emergency brought a team together, he suspected that, once the emergency had passed the team spirit could be at risk and differences could reappear, thus threatening the

development stage. It would be interesting to hear, therefore, how the members of the panel thought good teamwork could be sustained after the relief effort was over.

Mr. CUELLO CAMILO (Observer for the Dominican Republic) stressed the need for countries at risk to reduce their vulnerability and prepare for disasters. Hurricane Georges in September 1998 had caused US\$ 200 million worth of damage to his country, amounting to 14 per cent of its GDP. Half the country's exports - 43 per cent of its income - had been lost. In less than 12 hours, 400 mm of rain - a third of the normal annual rainfall - had fallen. Winds had been over 100 km per hour.

The support of the international community, in particular that of other countries in the region which had themselves suffered, had been most gratefully received. OCHA had helped with the transition from disaster relief to sustainable development for the most vulnerable sectors of the population affected. The Government, too, had established a basic emergency plan, which had set up a disaster management system and improved the quality of life.

Experience in other countries showed how vital a culture of prevention was, difficult though it might be to achieve: it was the only way to secure some degree of affordable protection in the future. Climate change meant that further disasters were probable. He was therefore anxious to hear how Governments and international organizations could reduce the cost of dealing with such disasters and how rapid recovery could be achieved.

Ms. SOLIS CASTAÑEDA (Observer for Guatemala) expressed her delegation's gratitude for the speed with which UNDAC missions had been mobilized, under the auspices of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and with funding from UNDP. OCHA's coordination of the international response immediately after the disaster had also been impressive. In Guatemala, particular attention had been paid to the effects of the hurricane on the vulnerable sectors of the population, such as displaced persons and refugees, in order to reduce to a minimum the threat that they might lose all the gains brought about by the peace process, which had sought to set new development in motion in the country.

One of the recommendations that had emerged from the workshop held at Santo Domingo in February 1999 was that strategies to mitigate disasters and reduce environmental vulnerability should be incorporated into development

projects. Her Government supported that recommendation and, in that context, she would like to know the current situation regarding the project to strengthen the Meso-American Biological Corridor, since it would be crucial to regional activities aimed at modifying development programmes following the hurricane. Lastly, she endorsed the views of the Administrator of UNDP that crisis prevention, mitigation of the consequences of crises and the promotion of sustainable recovery should be incorporated into development plans for the next millennium.

Ms. CHOMIAK-SALVI (United States of America) said she noted that the relative regularity of flooding in Bangladesh allowed for early systematic relief planning and that the result of the appeal for agricultural recovery in that country had resulted in a bumper harvest the following spring. She wondered, therefore, whether it was possible to identify a package of transition-ready components that could be incorporated in relief appeals for sudden emergencies. Secondly, while United Nations coordination had clearly been successful, she asked the members of the panel to give their assessment of the coordination of bilateral assistance. The thematic groups method had been successful in Honduras and she wondered whether it could be applied elsewhere.

Mr. ZHU Cunfang (China) said that humanitarian assistance should always pay due attention to the leading role of the Government. The approach adopted by his own Government following the unprecedented floods in 1998 had been to strengthen the early warning system and increase preparedness by means of coordination at every level. Decision-making remained in the hands of the Government, but civil and military forces were organized on the ground to transfer some populations at risk and local people had been mobilized for disaster relief. Where possible, rehabilitation had been carried out at the same time as relief.

Coordination between the United Nations and the country concerned should be strengthened still further in order to improve the effectiveness of disaster relief. Cooperation between the United Nations and China had, however, been excellent, for which he expressed his heartfelt appreciation. In 1998, before the disaster, the Ministry for Civil Affairs had held, with UNDP, a workshop on disaster prevention and preparedness. OCHA had also sponsored an international workshop. His Government looked forward to further

cooperation in the face of the daunting task of disaster prevention. Developing countries were always hit the hardest, so the international community should redouble its efforts to enhance their ability to cope. The Council should also provide guidance on humanitarian assistance.

Ms. BROWNE (Observer for Ireland) said she was interested in the role of Governments and local communities in disaster management and prevention, with particular reference to Guatemala. She wondered how, following the United Nations reforms, disaster management had been built into development programmes for disaster-prone countries. The need for coordination was illustrated by the fact that there was not enough awareness of the tools available, in the form of UNDAC teams, for example. She also wondered whether resident representatives posted to disaster-prone countries received any kind of systematic training or whether they learned through experience and private contacts.

She further asked about the involvement of NGOs. As a donor country, Ireland made it a precondition of any aid that an NGO should coordinate with the United Nations and, of course, the national authorities. She wondered whether coordination mechanisms existed in the countries where the members of the panel worked; to her knowledge, there had been little coordination in Central America prior to the hurricane. Lastly, she asked OCHA to comment on its role in strengthening capacity in Honduras and in its activities in the immediate post-emergency period.

Mr. RACHIDI (Morocco), having commended the work of the United Nations in helping disaster victims who had suffered most grievous losses, asked what provision was being made for the future. A child who lost his or her parents might be in a state of shock for 2, 3 or even 20 years. He therefore asked if there was any long-term strategy to deal with structural problems. He further asked whether coordination existed not only within the United Nations system but also between the various levels of government.

Miss LICONA ALLAM (Honduras) expressed her deep appreciation for the details given by the members of the panel and for the spirit of cooperation, as well as professional and moral support, provided by the OCHA staff. She reiterated, however, that it was crucial that all countries should be helped to develop their capacity so that they could prepare for disasters.

Mr. LEUS (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that the success of humanitarian coordination depended on the ability to make full use of the specialized agencies. Indeed, humanitarian coordinators were chosen from among the agencies, WHO itself having provided three such coordinators in the past year. That was, of course, particularly important when an emergency could be defined mainly in health terms.

One issue of concern was the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), where WHO saw its primary function as assessing the health impact of an emergency, in coordination with national authorities, and then mobilizing resources for use at the local or national level. While WHO could offer itself as a channel for using those resources, that was not its primary function.

Another matter of concern related to the selection of humanitarian coordinators, in which WHO participated. WHO was also involved in developing criteria, but it had some reservations about the appropriateness of those criteria for emergency situations, for instance, as far as the skills mix was concerned. It would therefore be interesting to hear from successful humanitarian coordinators if they had had to apply a different skills mix or different competences in such situations and whether they had any other comments to make on the topic.

Ms. FAHLÉN (Observer for Sweden) said that the panel's answers clearly illustrated the developmental dimension of natural disasters and the gap between humanitarian relief and structural development assistance. She therefore asked how far emergency activities and UNDAF/CCA were integrated. The answers also highlighted the costs of natural disasters, particularly in relation to the Chinese floods and hurricane Mitch: weather-related costs in 1998 had equalled the total for the whole of the 1980s. There was therefore a need to invest in preventive development.

It was, however, interesting to learn from the Honduras experience that destruction could present opportunities for advancing development. That suggested that a redirection of development policies was required. She wondered whether there had been any experience of how far aid had been effective in supporting such developmental transformation.

Two of the main challenges in an emergency situation were to integrate the poorest people into the development mainstream and to get a viable economy going. It was encouraging that information had been shared on the lessons

learned from China and she wondered whether the same approach was being extended to other areas. In that context, she suggested that an UNDAC team could include members of countries with personal experience of natural disaster response.

Lastly, she noted that natural disasters sometimes coincided with human conflicts, as in Guatemala or Afghanistan. It would be interesting to learn whether the disaster responses had had a positive impact on intercommunal cooperation in societies torn apart by conflict.

Mr. FERRER RODRIGUEZ (Cuba), after expressing his appreciation for the assistance provided to his country by the United Nations and the international community, including NGOs, which had provided drugs and other assistance as part of a general health plan, said that the dead could not be brought back to life but protection could be provided for both people and goods in the future. Prevention programmes and good management policies were required. Natural disasters were inevitable, but they seemed to have become more extreme and that was related to man-made activities, which did not always comply with international environmental agreements. States had a heavy responsibility to observe such agreements in order to mitigate the effects of such natural disasters.

Mr. CHELÍA (Observer for Argentina) said he fully agreed that preparedness, capacity-building and prevention were essential; little mention had been made in the documentation, however, of the contribution that could be made by the developing countries themselves. Such a contribution might be modest, but it would be significant both as a sign of solidarity and as an expression of a need that might have been overlooked. Indeed, by providing assistance a developing country might itself gain some benefit.

Ms. LEITNER (Resident Coordinator for China) said that there was no contradiction between her roles as UNDP Resident Representative and United Nations Resident Coordinator in China. As part of its mandate, the United Nations Development Assistance Group (UNDAG) ensured that the Resident Coordinator's team worked in accordance with the national priorities established by the Government.

From a conceptual and operational point of view, the transition from relief to rehabilitation did not pose a problem. Funding for mitigation efforts was, however, more easily mobilized in the aftermath of a disaster.

In the case of China, it had been environmental degradation, especially in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, that had been responsible for the severity of the recent floods. Although the problem had long since been identified, donors had been more forthcoming following the damage assessments. Wetland restoration activities were being given the priority they had long deserved, inter alia through cost-sharing arrangements.

In elaborating new projects, the country team took full account of the policy of the Chinese Government which was to ensure that reconstruction activities involved not the restoration of what had existed previously, but the introduction of improvements in the hope of mitigating the consequences of future floods.

The existing United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) in China would be operating as a task force under the recently established CCA, the findings of which would eventually be incorporated into the UNDAF.

The key question was how a country might best be prepared to sustain natural disasters and move its people out of harm's way. In 1998, the floods in China had caused losses amounting to some US\$ 32 billion, but it was all too easy, after the event, to state that the situation might have been avoided if a prior investment of US\$ 3 billion had been made. The Chinese experience did show, however, that an emergency situation need not always be chaotic; given appropriate investment in preparedness, it could prove to be a well-managed process.

Mr. LOCKWOOD (Resident Coordinator for Bangladesh) said that, from the field perspective, there was no apparent contradiction between his team's development and humanitarian functions. The frequent disasters to which Bangladesh was prone meant that humanitarian activities formed an integral part of the development agenda. The country experience accumulated by OCHA had proved most useful in helping new personnel settle in the field and had contributed significantly to the effectiveness of the appeal process.

The frequent natural disasters in Bangladesh merely exacerbated the "ongoing, silent emergency" of child malnutrition, which was daily responsible for some 600 deaths. United Nations relief efforts could provide little more than a temporary respite.

In Bangladesh, the United Nations resident coordinator system had always played a central role in mobilizing funds to support the Government's needs

and in ensuring rapid and objective coordination of donor and community efforts, including in the period immediately prior to the arrival of a cyclone.

Mr. OBERTI (Resident Coordinator for the Dominican Republic) stressed that the Government played a crucial role in responding to emergencies, as in the case of hurricane Georges; United Nations activities were intended to further the national efforts. The Government of the Dominican Republic had created a "solidarity fund" through which all resources for dealing with the emergency had been channelled. The Government had also negotiated loans and the deferral of debts to increase the funds available for relief purposes.

It was vital that international assistance should focus on addressing the causes of natural disasters. The Resident Coordinator's team was committed to supporting national efforts to mitigate their impact, inter alia through strategic planning and local involvement in disaster prevention and decision-making. The Government of the Dominican Republic had, moreover, established a mechanism to coordinate the efforts of NGOs with the close involvement of the United Nations.

Ms. MESA (Resident Coordinator for Honduras) said that the World Bank and IADB had contributed significantly to relief efforts in Honduras in the immediate aftermath of hurricane Mitch. The World Bank had further pledged more than US\$ 5 million for addressing long-term issues such as ecological vulnerability. The disaster had served to accelerate the coordination process already under way in the country, including the establishment of a United Nations House for Latin America and the Caribbean in Honduras. Disaster prevention programmes had been incorporated into the UNDAF for the country.

Although it was normally the Government which played the primary role in coordination, the United Nations had provided essential support in the aftermath of the hurricane which had destroyed a number of government premises, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Works.



Following Mitch, the United Nations had provided support to donors wishing to establish bases in Honduras, notably the Netherlands and some Nordic countries. A number of developing countries had provided significant assistance to Honduras in its hour of need, including Mexico, Argentina and Cuba.

Mr. MOUNTAIN (Director, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) said that the role of OCHA had been to provide maximum support to the country through the resident coordinator system in conjunction with the United Nations specialized agencies. Regular bulletins provided a link with the international community.

The United Nations Development Assistance Group (UNDAG) consisted of personnel made available at 24 hours notice by Governments and specialized agencies to provide skilled assistance to the resident coordinators in disaster-afflicted areas, typically for a two-week period. There were currently some 120 persons on the active roster.

Although the current discussion was focusing on the devastation caused by floods and cyclones, it should be noted that OCHA had also recently been dealing with the consequences of forest fires, with earthquakes and with droughts. Over the years, OCHA had also sought to develop local capacity in disaster-prone areas, notably in Latin America, Asia and the South Pacific.

A meeting initiated by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) with inter-agency and OCHA support had recently been held at Santo Domingo, to consider the lessons learned from exercises conducted collectively inter alia in response to hurricanes Mitch and Georges, the floods in China and the earthquake in Afghanistan.

By means of situation reports on natural disasters, OCHA sought to provide details of the contributions made in cash and kind in order to inform both donors and actors on the ground. OCHA worked with UNDP to ensure close coordination with the resident coordinator system and arranged briefings, courses and regional meetings with resident representatives. Meetings were also held regularly in Geneva and New York and two regional disaster advisors were available, together with staff in Geneva, to provide support as required.

Panel on complex emergencies

Ms. CRAVERO-KRISTOFFERSON (Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Burundi) cited the example of a 10 year-old girl from the Burundian

province of Ruyigi whose father and uncle had disappeared and the rest of whose family had been forced to flee to a refugee camp in Tanzania. Thanks to the combined efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the local authorities and WFP, the family had returned and was being helped to rebuild in its devastated village. For that family, the transition from relief to development was not a theoretical construct. It was embodied in an empty school, a non-functioning water system, a closed health centre and a community of adults lacking hope and direction.

Thanks to the generosity of the international community, the family had survived, but there was more to life than charity. The United Nations country team in Burundi was committed to the regeneration of communities once initial humanitarian support had been provided and minimal security achieved. Such regeneration efforts provided an essential impetus for peace.

The team's efforts were hampered in Burundi by a number of factors, most notably the persistent violence. Four provinces were currently paralysed by armed conflict, with "hit-and-run" attacks on the increase in the eastern part of the country. The violence was unpredictable and lacked political or military objectives. It merely served to terrorize the people, disrupt the delivery of humanitarian assistance and threaten progress towards peace. The targets were purely civilian.

A further obstacle to progress was the abject poverty which afflicted the country. Even before the most recent crisis, Burundi had been one of the poorest countries in the world. Over the past six years, poverty levels had increased by 80 per cent, and every social indicator was in decline.

Slow progress in the peace negotiations constituted a third challenge. The deep-seated nature of the conflict indicated that it would take years for agreements to be put in place. In that context, the "wait-and-see" attitude of the international community was to be regretted, involving, as it did, delaying reconstruction assistance pending the "success" of the negotiations. It was a matter for concern that external aid had decreased from US\$ 288 million in 1992 to US\$ 39 million in 1997.

The country team was, however, convinced that progress was possible and that development was inextricably linked to peace. Two-thirds of the country had, after all, known relative stability for a year or more; such areas were in desperate need of development support rather than humanitarian aid. The

team's optimism was also based on its experience with sustainable reinstallation activities, which included the reconstruction of basic services and local infrastructure. That experience had provided the foundation for more systematic, multi-agency efforts.

A further positive factor was the consensus which existed among United Nations agencies, NGOs and national actors with regard to the approach which must be adopted towards the transition from relief to development in Burundi. Local participation in reconstruction efforts was essential and would be greatly facilitated by the recent decision of the Brookings Institution Round Table to accelerate support for community development in Burundi.

Over the past 12 months, the United Nations country team, in collaboration with the Government and a wide range of partners, had developed a broad-based strategy to facilitate the transition to development. That strategy contained three key components. The first was "constructive engagement", which involved ongoing dialogue with all the players working towards reconstruction and peace. It also involved reinforcing basic infrastructure and promoting good governance and human rights. The second element was the "sustainable reinstallation" of displaced and refugee families, which depended on the community's willingness to move and on there being adequate security conditions in the place of resettlement. The third element of the strategy was "direct country assistance" in the form of a UNDP umbrella programme which had inter-agency assistance. The priority of that programme was to help displaced families regain their social and economic viability and to further local capacity-building; it would primarily be implemented through NGOs with long-standing ties to the communities involved. A total of US\$ 12 million would be required for full implementation over the following two years. Significantly, the programme was viewed as a transitional arrangement pending the restoration of bilateral cooperation and government mechanisms.

The girl she had mentioned would certainly thank the international community for keeping her family alive. She would also ask for the killing to stop, and for all Burundians to return home in safety to welcoming

communities. No doubt she would also ask for an education, a decent chance of surviving childbirth, and opportunities for employment. She would probably want more than survival: a guarantee of her human rights and a future of peace, dignity and hope.

Mr. STRIPPOLI (Humanitarian Coordinator for Angola) said that there was a great human tragedy in the making in Angola. Many thousands of people would die without the necessary support from the international community. Despite the country's natural wealth, which included oil and diamonds, the overwhelming majority of Angolans were subject to increasingly abject poverty. Three decades of armed conflict, with only a few years of intermittent respite, had resulted in an alarming deterioration in social development indicators and a persistent structural emergency. Up to 1.7 million people had been displaced from productive agricultural to urban areas, causing a reduction in domestic agricultural production and a greater dependency on imports and relief assistance.

War economy and "war logic" had led to increased national indebtedness and a reduced budget for social development, resulting in a virtual collapse of the public health and education systems. Not only did Angola have one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world, but the past few generations of Angolan children, even those in safe areas, had been characterized by decreased levels of physical and mental development. The downward socio-economic spiral would take generations to correct.

During the most recent period of positive transition from 1995 to 1998, mechanisms had been elaborated to deal with the lack of predictability of the humanitarian situation, which had served as effective tools for managing the current "reverse transition". One such tool was the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) for ensuring a common humanitarian strategy to enable the specialized agencies to address immediate emergency needs jointly, as well as the early phases of rehabilitation. In that context, the land distribution policy recently introduced by the Government was of particular note, serving as it did to provide arable land to internally displaced persons and thus reduce dependency on food aid.

There had been some early joint planning mechanisms, such as the Humanitarian Coordination Group (HCG) created at the national level in 1995 and expanded to the provinces, with sectoral sub-working groups. There was

also the round-table process that identified programmes at the development end of the transition scale. In spite of those mechanisms, the December 1998 resumption of war had complicated the delivery of emergency assistance and had forced agencies to revert from rehabilitation activities to relief assistance programmes, themselves hindered by time constraints and restrictive donor funding mechanisms.

There could be no simplistic approach to relief and rehabilitation in complex transition cycles. Damage to a country no longer at war could still require an emergency response, while such activities in one area of a country did not preclude the need for rehabilitation action elsewhere. Funding should therefore be flexible. The same was true of emergency preparedness, vital in a country like Angola, which could always relapse into emergency once again. The team was helping the Government to assume a more prominent role in assistance coordination and could not afford to await a calmer period. Progress had been made in teaching the nation not only to deal with war-induced emergencies, but also to correct social and economic decline.

Given the deteriorating humanitarian conditions and the dearth of resources, the humanitarian-aid community analysed vulnerability on a case-by-case basis in order to address the most critical needs, such as the condition of host communities, an approach that had reduced competition for scarce resources in and around besieged cities. That being said, humanitarian conditions were expected to deteriorate rapidly, as was the status of the currently "less vulnerable".

There was an understandable donor fatigue regarding Angola, and a rapid deterioration of nutritional and general humanitarian conditions was expected by early 2000, requiring donors to provide spirited and collaborative humanitarian aid and the political will to settle the conflict so that the country could enjoy a lengthy period of sustainable development. He urged the Council to seek effective responses to the plight of Angola and of other nations in conflict.

Mr. MORTON (Humanitarian Coordinator for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the theme of the segment was highly relevant to the country of his assignment. As suggested in the background paper, food self-reliance, called for economic as well as agricultural rehabilitation. With only 20 per cent of arable land and short growing seasons, the country

had been primarily industrial but, with the decline of trading relations with the Eastern European countries in the early 1990s, the fertilizer industry had been hard hit, reducing crop production. The pressure to step up food production had damaged the environment and made it more susceptible to flooding and other natural disasters. While food-production programmes deserved support and could ease costs and suffering, they were unlikely to produce total self-reliance, which also required economic recovery.

However, in the current political environment and framework, donors, although willing to provide humanitarian assistance, were reluctant to give major support to recovery problems. Full coordination within and between the two was vital. There were two directly linked and complementary coordination mechanisms in the country: the CAP for humanitarian programmes, and the round-table process for recovery and rehabilitation programmes. Collaboration was particularly close among the small but close-knit United Nations community, the European Union and NGOs, with well-attended weekly meetings. Also, a working group of United Nations agencies, NGOs and donors had met in 1998 and drawn up a Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) as its 1999 CAP, an approach that had been invaluable for strategy formulation and the inclusion of transition programmes. Details of the programmes were provided in the background paper.

The CHAP had a number of short-term goals relating to food aid, support to health services, agricultural rehabilitation, and national capacity-building in all those areas and in disaster preparedness and mitigation, led by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Sadly, the paltry funding of all the agencies was particularly bad in the case of WHO, whose action was crucial. NGO involvement and confidence was so great that 4 of the country's 10 had chosen to integrate their appeals into the CHAP itself, rather than consign them to annexes.

At the recommendation of the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs, a meeting to review the problem's humanitarian and developmental dimensions had been organized by OCHA and UNDP. It had reached consensus on a joint strategy for the United Nations system and endorsed a position paper prepared by the country team outlining a comprehensive three-track approach to recovery and change, namely continued funding for humanitarian programmes;

gradual implementation of the UNDP Agricultural Recovery and Environmental Protection Plan (AREP) as an exit strategy for emergency activities and a bridge to sustainable development; and agency concentration on capacity-building, including the UNDP training programmes on market economies and transition issues.

In conclusion, while aid had mitigated a humanitarian catastrophe, and conditions had improved for many in the previous two years, there was still considerable hardship, which had increased the mortality rate by 37 per cent. The improved access to the country and to information and the better understanding between the Government and the agencies had to be sustained. While humanitarian aid was promoting recovery and rehabilitation simultaneously with relief, to the extent that they were funded, economic recovery was the ultimate goal.

Mr. MANGOELA (Lesotho) said that, at the start of the segment on the previous day, the thesis had been propounded that many conflict situations stemmed from "horizontal inequalities", Burundi being a prime example of a country where one group excluded others from certain advantages. He agreed with the Humanitarian Coordinator for Burundi that there could be no peace without development, and vice versa, and welcomed her portrayal of Burundi as a country of relative calm. He wondered whether there was any prospect of addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and whether there was any sign that the exclusion of one group by another was being mitigated. The precipitous decline in international assistance to Burundi was unfortunate, since the victims of reduced aid or of sanctions were seldom the actual perpetrators of the evils. He presumed that the Coordinator's remark that Burundi was ignored by the international community referred to the non-African world since he knew that the country's African neighbours had done their best to restore it to a situation in which ordinary people could live in peace.

Mr. STREJCZEK (Poland) said that his country's recent bilateral project in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had provided 50 tons of high-yield seed potatoes to increase food production. That project, which could be adapted to other countries, served as a tool for changing the rice monoculture and overcoming the food deficit. His Government was interested in continuing and possibly expanding that project, with United Nations assistance

in connection with the transfer of new brands of seed potatoes, the organization of workshops, and the monitoring of production, all of which might be incorporated into the AREP.

Mr. KUMAMARU (Japan) said he would like to know what action the coordinators took to ensure the safety of the humanitarian workers and peace negotiators in their dialogues with the Governments of Angola and Burundi.

Mr. BAHAMONDES (Canada), referring to the comment about the importance of an enabling environment for Burundi, said that the reason for hesitation in resource commitment was that the donors were concerned that the political issues at the heart of the conflicts were not being adequately addressed. Without an enabling environment conducive to reconciliation and inclusion, there was a distinct possibility that the relief development transition would move far ahead of any political process, with enormous attendant risks. In the case of Burundi, he thus welcomed the dedicated work, led by Julius Nyerere, that was being done to find sustainable political solutions to a very unfortunate situation.

Ms. CHOMIAK-SALVI (United States of America) said that, in the examples given for both Angola and Burundi, there was all too much evidence of a "cycling back to violence". She wondered whether that could have been prevented by aspects of humanitarian action in the transition from relief to development. She also wished to know how the humanitarian coordinators assessed the improvements made in the 1999 CAP process.

Mr. BACKSTROM (Observer for Finland) said that, on a recent visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, he had met the Humanitarian Coordinator and had been pleased to observe the aid agencies' improved access, and the better understanding between them and the Government. He also welcomed the fact that the CAP process had been found useful. He asked what were the expectations for 1999 and whether any positive developments were envisaged for the near future at a crucial period for the Korean peninsula.

Mr. AHN Ho-young (Republic of Korea) said that he had closely followed the panel discussions on natural disasters and man-made disasters, and had gained the impression that, while natural disasters were tragic, man-made disasters were both tragic and shameful. Humanitarian assistance



was, however, crucial in both situations. The very clear message he had received from the Coordinator's statement was that short-term food relief would not solve the food crisis in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and that economic development was needed. The Coordinator's remark that such development was hampered by the political situation needed some clarification. A multiplicity of policy goals were being pursued vis-à-vis North Korea, one being humanitarian assistance, and others, including those relating to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, among and within which there might, unfortunately, be some conflict, in view of North Korean policies. The Coordinator had also referred to the importance of fertilizers for his own country, although it was currently supplying North Korea with 200,000 tons of fertilizer.

Mrs. FAHLÉN (Observer for Sweden), said that several references had been made the previous day to the work of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in developing aid policy strategies responsive to conflict situations and fragile peace. Speaking as Chairperson of the DAC's work on the issue, she said that it was vital to obtain a suitable mix of humanitarian and other forms of developmental aid, while humanitarian assistance could assume a developmental perspective. The Humanitarian Coordinator for Angola had mentioned two issues that represented severe constraints: a simplistic approach to the aid instrument and inflexible funding mechanisms. Both had been addressed in the DAC guidelines on development cooperation in conflict situations and for peace-building. She hoped that the various coordinators would examine and comment on the DAC guidelines so that they could be adapted to field conditions. More generally, she hoped that the country teams would become actively engaged in the donors' policy work.

Ms. CRAVERO-KRISTOFFERSON (Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Burundi), replying to the representative of Lesotho, said she was optimistic about the prospects for the reduction of structural inequalities, which were being more frankly discussed than ever before. She assured him that she had not meant to imply that Burundi was being ignored; only that development assistance had been denied it for the previous three years. It was far from being ignored either by its neighbours, or in terms of strictly defined humanitarian assistance.

To the question by the representative of Japan as to what was being done to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers, she said that humanitarian activities were usually suspended when safety problems became insupportable, and that left over 500,000 residents of sites throughout the country even more vulnerable than before. Efforts were being made, however, to develop better local security systems, in collaboration with the national and local authorities. In reply to the representative of Canada, she said that assistance was an incentive to develop an enabling environment. One important question was the extent to which deep-seated structural inequalities needed to be addressed before children had access to basic services and what the interplay was between children's access to basic services and the long-term addressing of those structural inequalities.

She informed the representative of the United States that her team believed that one of the ways of preventing a return to violence was to provide basic education that did not repeat past mistakes. It was frustrating that Burundi had received such little response to the CAP, on which her team has done a great deal of work, unless one counted food aid, which was not always supplied through a CAP. She told the observer for Sweden that she looked forward to examining the DAC guidelines.

Mr. STRIPPOLLI (Humanitarian Coordinator for Angola), replying to the representative of Japan, said that humanitarian workers in Angola risked their lives to deliver essential humanitarian assistance to the people in the country's many besieged places who depended on it. The safety conditions had to be assessed on a day-to-day basis. Conflict called not only for increased donor support but also for the political will to resolve the conflict and to achieve an enduring peace.

He informed the representative of Canada that there was nothing dogmatic about his team's behaviour; they seized every opportunity to settle displaced persons temporarily so that they could produce their own food, with the prospect of subsequently returning home.

Replying to the representative of the United States, he said that a more aggressive role of humanitarian assistance in the peace process might have contributed to a continued dialogue between the two parties.

Mr. MORTON (Humanitarian Coordinator for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), replying to the representative of Poland, said that UNDP/FAO welcomed his suggestion regarding the seed potato project. He informed the representative of the United States that, while the CAP had been considered highly positive in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the July 1999 figures showed it to be less effective as a fund-raising expedient. He explained to the observer for Finland that it was hard to predict the crop situation before October, but that there would probably be a substantial shortfall as the country was not basically an agricultural one.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.