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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 14 July 1999, at 3 p.m.

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

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SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.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)

Mr. BACKSTRÖM (Observer for Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that it was vital to establish the International Criminal Court without delay, in order to improve respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. Humanitarian crises and human rights violations were often related and the European Union welcomed the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), as well as the enhanced interaction between the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Security Council, including in the area of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The European Union also commended the Secretary-General, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and IASC for their concern to improve security conditions for humanitarian action. In conflict zones, humanitarian responses must go hand in hand with political solutions so as to prevent further suffering. In that regard, the European Union welcomed the fact that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union and their partners were conducting their operations under the single umbrella of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). The success of strategies to prevent either natural or man-made disasters depended on the coordination of scientific, technical, humanitarian and development activities.

The European Union welcomed the efforts made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to strengthen disaster preparedness and early warning systems. Local capacity-building was central to disaster prevention. At the end of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, an inter-agency task force should be set up under the authority of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. The European Union was of the opinion that the resources allocated to OCHA from the regular budget were still insufficient, despite the increase of 9.6 per cent contained in the budget proposal for the biennium 2000-2001.

In the transition from relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, the unique features of every situation had to be taken into account. Measures should be taken from the beginning to consolidate peace and embark on the process of economic and political reconstruction. In view of the difficulties, it was vital for all agencies to respect the established coordination structure. The European Union was encouraged by the implementation of the first strategic framework, in Afghanistan, and welcomed the strategic framework initiative for Sierra Leone, where the regional aspect should be taken into account. He expressed concern, however, at the insufficient levels of cooperation between the aid agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations. Whenever possible, the participation of local actors must be ensured in the planning of activities, so that the latter were in line with their own priorities.

The European Union welcomed the measures taken by the United Nations system to maintain, to the extent possible in emergencies, development activities such as primary education and immunization. AIDS prevention was an example of an area where development and humanitarian concerns met. UNICEF's new human rights-based programming strategy provided a framework linking relief, recovery, rehabilitation and development. The European Union encouraged the other specialized agencies of the United Nations that had not yet done so to use that initiative as a model in their own policy formulation and programming. Lastly, he urged the Economic and Social Council to develop common priorities for humanitarian activities.

Ms. ELLIOTT (Observer for Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the humanitarian assistance machinery of the United Nations system was under severe strain and the resources allocated to it were inadequate. Donor countries should play a stronger funding role though not to the detriment of resources for development assistance, which was needed more than ever. The international community should try to coordinate their activities so as to ensure optimum utilization of the resources. The Secretary-General's recommendation to allocate increased resources to OCHA from the regular budget was a further indication of the extent of the need.

It was important to enhance intergovernmental support and strengthen the inter-agency machinery for emergency relief and for the transition to development. The Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) should be strengthened and

applied in an impartial manner in order to ensure the neutrality essential to the credibility and legitimacy of humanitarian operations. The restoration of relative peace and stability after a crisis required the investment of considerable resources and the promotion of productive sector activities and areas such as education and health from the very outset of reconstruction. Specific measures should also be taken to protect the most vulnerable sectors, i.e. women, the elderly and the young. The Group of 77 and China supported the appeal to end the recruiting of children for combat, with a view to ensuring full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They also reaffirmed the need to safeguard United Nations personnel engaged in humanitarian activities. To that end, it was essential for the international community to establish clear guidelines and rules based on the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations and in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182.

Given the magnitude of some humanitarian crises, it was imperative for all concerned - not only States but also non-governmental organizations and regional arrangements - to be involved. In any case, the activities should be conducted in accordance with the wishes of the recipient State and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Ms. TAFT (United States of America) commended OCHA's accomplishments and endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation to increase OCHA staffing and funding from the regular budget for the biennium 2000-2001. She hoped for further progress in improving the Consolidated Appeal Process and the functioning of IASC.

Her Government welcomed the initiative taken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the President of the World Bank, in collaboration with the Brookings Institution, to introduce greater coherence into policy formulation and programming to bridge the relief to development gap. It was not a matter of creating new structures, but of improving existing ones (CAP, strategic frameworks, etc.). There must also be a new partnership between donors and the humanitarian aid agencies on the one hand, and the host Governments and affected populations - for example in Liberia and Afghanistan - on the other.

The success of the transition from relief to development depended on a number of factors: the humanitarian aid agencies must obtain the necessary

resources from donors; local authorities and non-governmental organizations must be involved in planning activities in support of reconciliation, in order to facilitate reintegration of refugees and displaced persons; and the cooperation of all the actors was vital. In Kosovo, conditions were right for a smooth transition. Donors were giving political support and providing the necessary resources, and the local stakeholders were participating in the humanitarian operation. It would be important to reinforce the regional and local economies. But the other areas of crisis requiring humanitarian assistance from the international community should not be forgotten.

Mr. SATOH (Japan) urged those countries that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel as soon as possible. His Government had contributed US\$ 1 million to the Trust Fund for Security of personnel of the United Nations system in the field, in the hope that humanitarian personnel could be given security training.

He emphasized the importance of legal instruments designed to prevent or mitigate humanitarian disasters. Japan would provide US\$ 83 million to activities relating to the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, to which it was a party. The establishment of the International Criminal Court and the adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour were also important steps forward.

He welcomed the establishment of OCHA and IASC. Japan had contributed US\$ 1 million to the Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance and would continue to assist OCHA's extrabudgetary activities; it also supported the increase in OCHA staffing and funding from the regular budget. He hoped that the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction would be followed up with activities focusing particularly on the transition from relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

In April 1999, the Government of Japan had pledged to donate US\$ 100 million to the United Nations human security fund that the Prime Minister had suggested establishing in 1998, to be spent on repatriating Kosovo refugees and displaced persons as well as on rehabilitation and reconstruction activities. That was in addition to a contribution of

US\$ 100 million to be used to fund the activities of UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations and to assist the Governments of Albania and Macedonia in their efforts to accommodate refugees from Kosovo.

Clearly, the transition from relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development would require different approaches depending on the situation. Well-planned coordination of activities in the field, which was an essential factor, might be facilitated by the preparation of clear guidelines.

Mr. MARTINEZ-AGUILAR (Mexico) said that, given the magnitude of the tragedies caused by natural disasters and armed conflicts and their consequences, strengthening humanitarian assistance was a priority for the international community, within the framework laid down by General Assembly resolution 46/182. Humanitarian action should be conducted in accordance with the principles of neutrality and impartiality and in full respect for the sovereignty and integrity of States. The notion of complex humanitarian emergency needed to be better defined. The assistance provided in such situations should not be subordinated to any political consideration and did not justify interference or the use of force.

The adoption of codes of conduct by Governments and all the parties to a conflict was the best way to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers. The effectiveness of humanitarian assistance depended on the definition of an integrated strategy that would make it possible, bearing in mind Governments' priorities, to coordinate all actions by the international community in affected countries. It also required adequate, balanced funding.

The efforts made in the context of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction should continue and international collaboration should be strengthened, for example by following up the work of the Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño and the recommendations of the joint mission to assess the consequences of Hurricane Mitch, and by organizing, on the basis of experience gained, systematic awareness and information campaigns.

Ms. RUSTAM (Indonesia) said her delegation endorsed the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Humanitarian action should be based on global strategic planning. Indonesia, which had suffered its share of disasters, had collaborated with OCHA and the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team to put in place various

forest fire prevention and control mechanisms and to organize awareness campaigns. Prevention activities should be part of the overall relief and development strategies.

While welcoming the strengthening of the Consolidated Appeal Process, she underlined that it should be based on the needs of beneficiary countries and not on the priorities set by a few donor countries. Global appeals should also be extended to development activities. Her delegation was in favour of a review of the operation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund so that it could also be used for natural disasters.

Her delegation supported the IASC initiatives to strengthen the field coordination systems and reiterated its view that the resident coordinator should continue to play a prominent role. Further refinement of the development assistance framework, based on the common country assessment (CCA), would undoubtedly facilitate collaboration and programme coherence. Lastly, greater flexibility in funding mechanisms was necessary to any integrated relief and development strategy.

Mr. STAHELIN (Observer for Switzerland) said that, for humanitarian action to be carried out in complete safety, all the parties concerned must be required to observe the rules of international law. Action should also be taken to see that, inter alia, the Statute of the International Criminal Court came into force without delay.

To be effective, the international community's response to humanitarian crises in a context of transition to development should be based on strategic planning, clearly defined priorities and local capacity-building. It was important for the military not to take the place of local labour during the rebuilding stages, in order to allow economic recovery to begin.

As stated in the Secretary-General's report (A/54/154-E/1999/94), United Nations agencies already had at their disposal a large number of coordination mechanisms. Rather than creating new ones, agencies should ensure that their respective spheres of activity were clearly defined, so as to avoid the appearance of "black holes" (such as responsibility for internally displaced persons), and should act in a spirit of greater cooperation with other bodies.

The implementation of a strategic framework prepared in close cooperation with the beneficiary countries was the only viable way to arrive

at an integrated approach covering all aspects of the transition phase. Donors should opt for more flexible funding mechanisms that did not compartmentalize humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, and should avoid the unbalanced funding of consolidated appeals based essentially on media coverage of conflicts.

Mr. GALLEGOS CHIRIBOGA (Observer for Ecuador) said that, as a highly disaster-prone country, Ecuador attached great importance to the role played by the United Nations system in helping affected populations. International cooperation remained vital to disaster prevention and mitigation. The El Niño phenomenon had caused enormous damage in 1997 and 1998, and there was reason to believe that in the future it would strike with greater frequency and force, threatening the economic recovery and even the political stability of affected countries. The Special Inter-Agency Team set up by the United Nations system to increase cooperation in that area was a multisector mechanism bringing together various partners, including the scientific community, which made it possible to take coordinated action by integrating the prevention, mitigation and reconstruction phases. The experience acquired through the work of the team - which was a model of its kind - could be put to profitable use in preparing a natural disaster prevention strategy for the twenty-first century.

Mr. LAHIRI (India) endorsed the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The principles outlined in General Assembly resolution 46/182 should continue to guide the humanitarian activities of the United Nations system; nothing in the Charter of the United Nations, however, provided for any legal "right" of humanitarian intervention.

Despite limited resources, India provided humanitarian assistance in a spirit of South-South solidarity. His country noted with concern that, in 1998, some international appeals had been funded to the extent of barely 4 per cent. There was an urgent need to increase the volume of financial resources for humanitarian activities, without diverting resources from development aid. Geographically unequal funding threatened to undermine the basic principle of humanitarian assistance. In order to use the available funds more effectively and cut costs, greater use should be made of the capacities of developing countries closer to the disaster zone. Funds for reconstruction should be released sooner and with less cumbersome procedures.

In any United Nations action, clear distinctions should be made between the humanitarian - access and security - and the political aspects of conflict resolution. Additional responsibilities had been given to the Emergency Relief Coordinator in order to bridge the gaps in assistance to internally displaced persons. In carrying out those tasks, it was important to guard against uncritical endorsement of new concepts. Similarly, it would be premature as yet to incorporate humanitarian assistance into the World Bank's comprehensive development framework, which was still at the pilot stage.

The complex problems relating to the post-crisis transition stage - whether arising from conflict or from the financial upheavals triggered by globalization - highlighted the need to strengthen the authority and capacity of the State, in order to allow it to take responsibility for reconstruction and see the task through.

Mr. Young Cheol CHA (Republic of Korea), recalling the reasons why humanitarian assistance and development aid should be coordinated, said that effective coordination required the institutional and financial reinforcement of OCHA. An increase of US\$ 300,000 in OCHA's budget, as proposed by the Secretary-General, would allow more timely response to natural disasters. Concerned at the decline in requests for the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), his delegation endorsed OCHA's suggestion that the Fund should also be used for natural disasters.

In the field, it was necessary to strengthen coordination between the Resident Coordinator and the country team, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and IASC, and he hoped that the current efforts to develop a global database on internally displaced persons and an inter-agency training module for field personnel on internal displacement would bear fruit. Effective measures should also be taken to ensure the protection and security of humanitarian workers in the field, who performed an indispensable task with courage and devotion but were now becoming the targets of deliberate violence.

Greater political determination and a heightened awareness of humanitarian principles were essential to the success of humanitarian assistance. His Government had decided to provide 30,000 blankets to Kosovar refugees and in 1998 had provided US\$ 2 million to 21 countries affected by hurricanes Georges and Mitch. He underlined the importance of direct and frank consultations between the United Nations agencies, donors and recipient

Governments in the relief process, long-term planning so as to ensure complementarity between humanitarian and development aid, and access to aid for all who needed it.

Mr. McGILL (Canada) said that, in order to ensure the overall effectiveness of the United Nations humanitarian response, it was necessary to continue to enhance cooperation and coordination. The focus should be on broad, cross-cutting policy and the modalities should remain relatively informal: management of specific issues should be left to the governing bodies of the agencies concerned. The intensity and volume of the recent humanitarian emergencies was placing a considerable strain on the capacity of the global system, as witnessed in particular by the funding shortfalls in the Consolidated Appeal Process. Canada would continue to make every effort to ensure that its financial support was predictable and remained at acceptable levels, and encouraged continued attempts to strengthen the CAP, particularly by stepping up the analysis of appeals and considering how the efforts of non-member States could be incorporated.

With the targeting of civilians becoming more and more often a deliberate war aim, it was vital to ensure access to affected populations, to enhance the security of humanitarian personnel, to ensure compliance with the law and to redress impunity. Comprehensive and innovative strategies in the political, humanitarian and military spheres were vital to respond to those challenges. Canada was looking forward to the report to be presented to the Security Council in September by the Secretary-General. A good way of enhancing the protection of civilians was to mainstream individual rights, define more clearly the relationship between human rights and humanitarian action and integrate the gender perspective into humanitarian policies.

The relief-to-development transition required flexible, comprehensive, integrated strategies and, above all, grass-roots involvement, which was the key to sustainable peace and development. Donors should reach a common understanding of the tasks to be undertaken and establish predictable and flexible funding arrangements that could better support the transition. That had been Canada's aim in establishing its Peace-Building Initiative. With regard to natural disasters, it was important to improve response-preparedness and local capacity; speedy disbursement of rehabilitation funds was also vital. In complex emergencies, prevention and peace-building activities were

of major importance and every opportunity to initiate reconciliation and rehabilitation should be seized. Humanitarian assistance also required partnerships, an emphasis on peace and human rights, collective action, moves towards demobilization and disarmament and the re-establishment of the rule of law and democratic values. Humanitarian action could only be successful when accompanied by political measures to address the root causes of crises.

Mr. LAGOS PIZZATI (El Salvador) fully endorsed the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the calls made by several delegations for emergency humanitarian relief to be based on the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. He noted with concern that the level of humanitarian aid provided to a given country was in many cases directly proportional to the amount of media coverage given to that country and he recalled that the population groups worst affected by crises were the poorest and most vulnerable. The issue of the transition from relief to development was of special importance to El Salvador, which had received invaluable assistance from the international community with re-establishing peace and promoting democracy and economic stability. It was still a topical matter for El Salvador, as well as for the other countries of the region that had been hit by hurricane Mitch. Following the phase of immediate relief and rehabilitation, those countries wished to see a continuation and strengthening of international cooperation for reconstruction and development. Unfortunately, as emphasized by the Secretary-General in his report, the United Nations inter-agency transitional appeal for relief and immediate rehabilitation, an innovative measure taken by the United Nations coordination system, had not received the financial support required. By the same token, while the responses to the Consolidated Appeal Process for the region amounted to some 80 per cent of the overall aid requirement, they covered barely 10 per cent of the needs of El Salvador, whose infrastructure and agriculture had been gravely damaged by the hurricane and which was suffering from the regional economic consequences of the emergency. His Government had prepared an ambitious reconstruction and transformation plan, which it had presented in Stockholm in May to the second Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America. It was determined to work to promote both democratization and development and counted on the support of the international community.

Mr. LEUS (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that WHO was particularly concerned by health and disease dynamics in disasters and complex emergencies in vulnerable countries. It was mainly such countries that were affected not only by AIDS but also by diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and polio. The problems arising during the relief-development transition were attributable not only to the crisis but also to poorly conceived responses by both relief and development agencies. Humanitarian assistance was not value-neutral and could even be positively harmful. It was only necessary to recall the volume of inappropriate medical donations that were offered contrary to WHO guidelines. It was therefore important to introduce or promote development-oriented approaches in health strategies during the emergency phase, in order to respond not only to short-term needs but also to long-term requirements.

WHO was aware that it could only fulfil its role effectively by working with other agencies with a mutually acceptable division of labour; it acknowledged the vital coordination role played by IASC and looked forward to a continuation of the efforts being made to harmonize that work in order to avoid duplication and to ensure that rapid and informed decisions were taken. However, it was also of prime importance for the future development of health systems to involve local authorities early in the humanitarian phase of intervention and to cooperate with those responsible for health programmes. The consensus statement adopted at a meeting in Harare organized by WHO on health and security in societies affected by conflict and transition called for new ways of approaching development realities and new methods of programming. Lastly, WHO echoed the concern at the low levels of funding seen over the last few years for protecting public health services and basic social services.

Mr. VALDIVIESO SARMIENTO (Colombia) said that 1998 had been a very difficult year in the world, but particularly for Colombia, which in January 1998 had been hit by one of the strongest earthquakes in its history. Apart from the heavy losses of human life, it would take Colombia four to five years to regain its pre-disaster level of development. The international community's rapid response had been decisive in meeting the immediate needs of the affected population. Colombia had a department and a national system for disaster prevention and management, but needed technology transfers in order

to establish effective, sound prevention mechanisms, based on the exchange of information at the national, regional and global levels. In order to mitigate the effects of natural disasters and reduce the population's vulnerability, Colombia would have to adopt a strategy incorporating anti-poverty measures, land-use planning, earthquake-proof housing construction and disaster-management training. Colombia welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendation for an increase in the budget and staffing of OCHA and endorsed the many appeals to donor countries to guarantee funding for humanitarian assistance programmes.

Another serious humanitarian problem facing Colombia was the issue of forced displacement of people as a result of armed conflict. The Government had taken several measures to prevent families being displaced as well as to help displaced persons and facilitate their return. Most of its energy went, however, into seeking a conclusive settlement to the conflict, since clearly the only solution lay in the restoration of peace. A memorandum of understanding had been signed in early 1999 between the Government of Colombia and UNHCR on cooperation in that area and a plan of action for the implementation of the memorandum had been submitted to the international community, which had received it favourably.

Ms. NASCIMBENE de DUMONT (Observer for Argentina) said that her country attached the highest importance to the preparation of a set of principles and activities guaranteeing the transition from relief to reconstruction and rehabilitation, on the understanding that implementation of such activities must always depend on the needs and priorities defined by the countries concerned themselves. It was therefore important that donors helped in strengthening countries' capacity to cope with new emergencies, especially in disaster-prone regions. Argentina was aware of that need and had begun with its "white helmets" to train teams of local volunteers in the affected countries not only to provide emergency relief but also to undertake rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities. Although itself no stranger to natural disasters, Argentina had used that system in providing aid to Central American and Caribbean countries hit by hurricanes in 1998.

It was important, both in emergency situations and during the rehabilitation and construction phases, to pay special attention to the situation of women and to abide strictly by the standards laid down in the

Convention on the Rights of the Child. The international community should also do its utmost to ensure respect for and effective implementation of international humanitarian law. Attacks on local and international humanitarian workers must stop and Governments or parties to a conflict must refrain from denying humanitarian organizations access to affected regions for political ends. Meanwhile, Argentina reaffirmed its determination to promote and implement human rights and the principles of humanitarian law.

Mr. MARTINS (Observer for Angola) said that the hope for peace recently glimpsed in Angola had been fleeting and war had returned, fiercer than ever, with its toll of victims: 1 million displaced persons, 340,000 refugees abroad, 100,000 orphans, 10,000 homeless children and 80,000 disabled ex-service personnel. In the face of this tragic situation, the Government of Angola had requested aid from the international community but, unfortunately, the Consolidated Appeal Process had been able to collect no more than 29.3 per cent of the US\$ 105 million requested. He called once more on the international community to increase its aid in order to avert the deaths of thousands of people.

The Government itself had taken a number of initiatives to remedy the situation. It had implemented a programme to distribute arable land to displaced persons and other vulnerable groups, the aim being to reduce their dependence on food aid and eventually to improve their standard of living. Efforts had also been made to begin demining and to raise awareness among displaced populations of the danger of mines. All those programmes required substantial funds, which Angola urged creditor countries to bear in mind during negotiations on rescheduling Angola's external debt.

In response to the international community's concerns regarding access by humanitarian agencies to the whole population in all parts of the country, the Government of Angola reiterated its position that humanitarian aid should be distributed according to the principles of neutrality and impartiality and in accordance with international humanitarian law. The insecurity that prevailed in the country was the work of UNITA rebels, who did not respect humanitarian workers on the ground, as shown by the recent murder of two members of the staff of a Portuguese non-governmental organization. All

Angolans who desired peace wanted the United Nations, the non-governmental organizations and all the humanitarian organizations to continue to work in the country.

Ms. ESCALER (International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that, while little progress had been made in resolving or preventing humanitarian crises, the international community had managed to improve the effectiveness of its emergency response. OCHA had enormously improved coordination, both at headquarters and in the field. As an active member of IASC, IOM appreciated the real efforts that had been made to consult, focus on priority issues and implement policies in a dynamic way. IASC still needed to be made more effective, however, and better use could be made of existing mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

Following the numerous disasters so characteristic of the past year, IOM, working with national and international partners, had concentrated on needs assessment, providing timely and accurate information to the affected people, sheltering or stabilizing vulnerable populations and strengthening the capacity of local authorities to cope in the short and the medium term. It was essential that relief programmes did not create dependency but paved the way for sustainable development. In complex emergencies, it was also important to pay due attention to demobilization and the reintegration of former soldiers into civil society. That was a crucial programme that required predictable funding, for the temptation to return to violence was much greater when no alternative was offered.

Mr. ANDO (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that there was a growing interface between UNFPA's mandate - population and development - and humanitarian assistance. For that reason, the majority of the projects undertaken under the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development were related to humanitarian assistance, notably emergency relief and rehabilitation activities. In complex emergencies, UNFPA action had focused in particular on reproductive health and the gathering of data on sexual violence both in countries in conflict and in natural disaster affected countries. UNFPA believed that inter-agency coordination was best served by each United Nations agency fulfilling its mandate under all circumstances, with a view to promoting and protecting human rights.

Nevertheless, a number of obstacles stood in the way of humanitarian action. Chief among these was of course the lack of financial resources, which meant that all attempts to ensure the compatibility and complementarity of operational activities became a real challenge. There was also the problem of underutilization of mechanisms such as the strategic frameworks, which were intended to promote uniformity and therefore predictability of actions. In addition, the Consolidated Appeal Process had not yet proved a reliable tool for emergency resource mobilization. Despite the challenges, UNFPA was committed to fulfilling its mandate within the international community and assisting vulnerable populations in times of emergency.

Mr. PERERA (Sri Lanka) said it was regrettable that the international community's humanitarian response did not always match the frequency, intensity or ferocity of the emergencies that arose from time to time throughout the world. Past experience showed that the international community within and outside the United Nations system should make a concerted, effective effort to mitigate the long-term effects of such disasters. A coherent approach entailed a combination of emergency relief and rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes. His delegation therefore strongly urged that contributions to the Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance should be predictable and that coordination between the Economic and Social Council, IASC and OCHA should be improved. Local and regional capacity-building must not be forgotten, and in particular the establishment of early-warning and disaster preparedness systems, taking into account the needs and priorities of local communities.

Such activities were not enough on their own, however, and needed to be supplemented with an international environment conducive to the economic growth of developing countries. Numerous conflicts continued throughout the world, notably terrorist campaigns that undermined well-established democratic societies and hurt the most vulnerable segments of society such as women and children. He expressed grave concern at the use of women and children for violent activities, including suicide bombings. In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, described by several countries as a terrorist group, continued to recruit and use children in terrorist actions against the people

and the democratically-elected Government of the country. His delegation therefore noted with great appreciation that the Council had expressed its concern at the use of children in terrorist activities.

Mr. SFEIR-YOUNIS (World Bank) said that, while the most important dimension of natural disasters was the human tragedy that affected millions of families around the world, the economic and institutional dimensions should not be ignored. On the economic front, the experience of the World Bank confirmed that preventing such disasters was an essential instrument in the fight against poverty. In most situations it was the poor - especially women and children - who suffered the heaviest human and economic losses. The damage to land, water resources and vegetation decreased their ability to create wealth and thereby escape from poverty.

Natural disasters also had serious macroeconomic effects: they prevented the achievement of long-term development objectives, undermined government financial planning, created public-sector deficits, upset the balance of payments and led investors to require higher rates of return in order to compensate for the risks. At the global level, disasters also affected trade, migration and foreign investment. The World Bank had therefore taken steps to assist countries with natural disaster mitigation, including a US\$ 14-billion lending programme for disaster-related operations.

On the institutional front, World Bank efforts focused on disaster management and the establishment of partnerships to back up countries' efforts at disaster prevention and mitigation. In terms of prevention, emphasis should be placed on environmental conservation and management, on matching the institutional infrastructure to needs and on the search for sustainable solutions.

In Kosovo, the World Bank's role was first of all to assist the many refugees and repatriated Kosovars. Later, it would help to prepare a reconstruction and rehabilitation programme, advise on economic management and provide selective financial aid for economic recovery. The World Bank would also see that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's neighbours had access to sufficient funds to enable them to cope with the adverse macroeconomic effects of the crisis.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ-CUADROS (Observer for Peru) said that the frequency of natural disasters and the extent of the damage they caused, along with the

proliferation of humanitarian crises around the world, posed major challenges to the international community. The strengthening of coordination and cooperation in order to deal with complex emergencies and reconstruction needs required a global approach on the part of the bodies of the United Nations system, one that centred around forward planning and the definition of priorities that took into account the action of the various specialized agencies.

His delegation wished to emphasize the need to strengthen early-warning and prevention mechanisms. It was also vital to set up funding mechanisms that would not only meet immediate needs but would also address long-term development requirements.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.