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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 12 July 2001, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. WEHBE (Syrian Arab Republic)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE
(continued)

Panel discussion on emergency humanitarian assistance for groups with special needs

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In the absence of Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon), Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic), Vice-President, took the Chair

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

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE
(agenda item 5) (continued) (A/56/95-E/2001/85)

Panel discussion on emergency humanitarian assistance for groups with special needs

The PRESIDENT said that it had been agreed to hold a discussion, after preliminary presentations by a panel of experts, on emergency humanitarian assistance for groups with special needs. The moderator of the discussion would be one of the panellists, Ms. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the four core mechanisms for humanitarian assistance established by General Assembly resolution 46/182 and mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (A/56/95-E/2001/85) played an increasingly important role in coordinating humanitarian response to emergencies by the United Nations system and other key humanitarian actors. One of them, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, had a critical role as the main coordinating forum.

Over the past 10 years, the nature and magnitude of emergencies and conflicts had changed. Most recent crises had stemmed from internal conflicts, and in Afghanistan, for example, the international community faced the challenge of coordinating humanitarian assistance in areas controlled by non-State entities. In West Africa, the key challenge had been the need for regional cooperation to provide humanitarian assistance to deal with such difficulties as cross-border refugee flows and the use of child soldiers. The current conflicts called for a political as well as a humanitarian solution.

The Security Council had become an important new forum on behalf of children and other vulnerable groups in armed conflicts, notably through its resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 (2000) on the protection of children in armed conflicts.

Staff safety and security remained a priority concern for all humanitarian agencies. Since 1992, over 300 United Nations staff members had been killed, and recent attacks had included the murder of a UNICEF field security officer in the Central African Republic. Humanitarian

agencies, including UNICEF, were working closely with the Secretary-General to address that critical area, and assured funding from the Member States for adequate security measures was urgently needed.

Armed conflict also exacerbated the spread of HIV/AIDS; the Declaration of Commitment adopted by the General Assembly at its recent special session on the subject carried a specific section on action to address HIV/AIDS in conflict and disaster situations. It was vital, in that regard, that the recently established inter-agency task team on HIV/AIDS and children in conflict situations should work closely with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee structure.

UNICEF was also the United Nations agency responsible for mine awareness; in that regard, she urged consideration of more systematic ways to link the subject with humanitarian activities.

She also drew attention to the forthcoming General Assembly special session on children, which would have before it a fresh report on the impact on them of armed conflict. The priority areas to be considered included education which, although not generally seen as a life-saving initiative, was of crucial importance to child survival and development, providing not only a climate of relative stability for children in the midst of war but an opportunity to learn skills that would enable them to work, provide family support, contribute to society and perhaps, in time, help to govern it.

Speaking as Moderator of the discussion, she introduced the other panellists: Mr. Ruud Lubbers, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Mr. Jean-Michel Tauxe, Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross; Mr. Michael Sackett, United Nations Resident Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan; and Ms. Carolyn McAskie, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that the situation in West Africa was a good example of the problems faced by his organization. The experience gained from his first field trip to that region illustrated the need not simply for humanitarian emergency assistance but also for measures to prevent the recurrence and exacerbation of the problems. A major disturbing factor was what could be described as a culture of conflict for power, involving such unscrupulous practices as traffic in diamonds and the use of child soldiers. Efforts to alleviate the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons had been complicated by objections raised by the authorities in Guinea, who had stated that they could not cope with further flows, which in any case were suspected of containing

armed rebel groups. It had also become virtually impossible to distinguish internally displaced groups from cross-border refugees. Nevertheless, UNHCR had sought to convince the Guinean Government to allow continued access to the various groups and, if possible, to arrange safer locations for them.

In the hope of achieving some stability by improving the political climate, UNHCR had approached not only the Guinean authorities but also representatives of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) movement in Sierra Leone, whose incursions into Guinea were viewed by the authorities there as an act of terrorism. As a result of various understandings reached over several months, relief programmes were currently being applied with some degree of stability; for example, it had been possible to conduct a vaccination programme even in RUF-dominated areas. In Sierra Leone itself, the war-torn landscape was being constructively improved, the Government being assisted by United Nations bodies as well as military units from the United Kingdom which were giving professional training to the Sierra Leone army.

Although the situation remained difficult, with many sporadic incidents, the RUF had gradually become more cooperative; in any case, the Guinean army had more or less regained control throughout the country. On the other hand, a further problem had arisen on account of the substantial numbers of refugees entering the country from Liberia, where no political solution was in sight.

The sufferers with special needs were, of course, such vulnerable groups as women, especially the mothers of young children. Also to be considered, however, was the plight of child soldiers, who could be viewed as a group with special needs. A further group, of course, consisted of internally displaced persons (IDPs), of whom the young ones had been deprived, inter alia, of access to the education needed for income generation and the sound living conditions essential to lasting peace and stability.

One of the problems faced by UNHCR was a lack of help by other bodies and agencies, including those of the United Nations system, in promoting opportunities for the return of refugees to their homelands or their resettlement elsewhere. The problem of refugee flows, to deal with which was the task of UNHCR, was one thing; but the situation of persons who had spent, perhaps, their entire lives in refugee camps, with such attendant risks as trafficking in persons and other crimes, was quite another, attention to which should be considered by others in the United Nations system and not left to UNHCR alone.

Mr. TAUXE (Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that the situation in Afghanistan illustrated the humanitarian challenges faced by ICRC. There had been a resurgence of fighting in the country and, following the latest meeting of the Afghan Support Group, donors had expressed willingness to discuss with the Taliban an increase in humanitarian assistance, based on conditions yet to be defined but including the need for a safe environment for humanitarian personnel.

In addition to the increased fighting, the prolonged drought and the movement of hundreds of thousands of newly displaced persons added to the humanitarian challenges in the country. Likewise disquieting was the increase in instances of threats to humanitarian personnel from both sides to the conflict. In that regard, Taliban should take its security commitment seriously. Since there could be no true dialogue if international humanitarian actors talked only of respect for human rights and Taliban talked only of respect for Islam, a fresh approach should be sought, exploring common ground on which all parties to the dispute could agree, such as food security for all and respect for non-combatants, on a neutral, independent and impartial basis.

Afghanistan was currently the scene of the largest ICRC operation, with over 60 experts in the field and 1,200 national employees. Problems existed in providing assistance in certain areas, such as Ghor province, where access was particularly difficult. ICRC programmes were based on a pragmatic approach, with no discrimination apart from the additional, specific needs of women and children. ICRC-supported hospitals offered equal access and treatment, and its employment policy benefited many women. ICRC also cared for mine victims, a large proportion of whom were women and children; it produced an average of 4,500 artificial limbs per year, and provided school opportunities for 340 disabled children. It also participated in UNICEF and WHO vaccination campaigns.

Although ICRC had good relations with most United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), problems still arose from the fact that the decision-taking centre for ICRC was in Kabul whereas other bodies had to refer to their headquarters in Pakistan. A strategic framework and a common principled approach, while necessary, must be able not only to deal with matters of individual rights but, first and foremost, to tackle more basic operational issues, based on common evaluation methodologies and common humanitarian positions.

In West Africa, the entire region remained prone to further destabilization. In Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia government forces faced a loose coalition of rebels and the fighting moved from one country to another. The situation was unstable and increasingly risky for humanitarian personnel; it was exacerbated by pressures at the global level relating to world market interests, as well as at regional and local levels by power-seekers, and by the fact that an international presence, including substantial assistance, prevailed in some countries such as Guinea and Sierra Leone, but hardly at all in Liberia, as a result of the United Nations sanctions.

Considerable humanitarian challenges stemmed from the interlinking of those various conflicts and the problem of the security of humanitarian workers. They included the dispute over the numbers of refugees in Guinea; the difficulty of implementing coherent programmes in an economically weak context, especially regarding assistance to the most vulnerable groups; the United Nations integrated approach in Sierra Leone and the need for impartiality; planning and implementation in territory held by the RUF; in Liberia, an accurate assessment of what was really happening in Lofa and whether the war had been provoked by economic sanctions; and the dearth of credible interlocutors which hindered access to the area.

Among the main ICRC activities in favour of women were its assistance to some 60 per cent of all Guinean women, who were IDPs and the reunification of some 10 unaccompanied children per month with their families in Sierra Leone. Women had been successfully grouped into associations in Sierra Leone and given agricultural inputs to enable them to restore their traditional economic activity, and destitute women received free obstetric care in a Freetown hospital. Some 60 per cent of all IDPs were currently recipients of ICRC assistance and 80 per cent of the recipients of its medical care were women and children, as were 70 per cent of the IDPs in Liberia.

Over the previous year, the focus had been on the coordination of humanitarian assistance for refugees, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was setting up an office in Conakry. ICRC was recognized as the de facto lead IDP agency and had signed a food pipeline agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP). Overall coordination mechanisms were already in place in Sierra Leone. Although the United Nations was setting up similar mechanisms in Liberia, the situation there was rather delicate, since the Organization was promoting both coordination and sanctions, for which reason ICRC, although anxious to cooperate, might feel a need to keep its distance.

Mr. SACKETT (United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan) said that, with the change in the focus of the war to Afghans fighting Afghans, the conflict had become more bitter and bloody with civilians bearing the brunt of the fighting. Regrettably, scorched earth tactics, indiscriminate bombing of civilians and widespread human rights abuses, including massacres and arbitrary executions, abounded, with war and drought exacerbating the effects of poverty and violating the rights of Afghans, especially women and girls.

Traditional coping mechanisms had reached breaking point, with soaring levels of vulnerability. Most Afghans subsisted on pitifully low incomes, some 3 million of them surviving on assistance from the international community, while disease or starvation that stemmed from the deadly combination of drought and conflict killed many others, for lack of adequate assistance or humanitarian access. The ban on poppy cultivation, while a welcome development, had had a negative impact on rural labourers and small farmers, many of whom were heavily indebted to the drug traders. Afghan refugees also faced increasingly hostile environments in neighbouring countries.

Humanitarian triage, the daily lot of aid personnel, involved broad categorizations, including a new coinage, “internally stuck persons”, those with scant access, if any, to basic requirements while lacking the means to seek assistance elsewhere. Most Afghans who were not part of the military or remnants of the State apparatus required help for day-to-day survival.

While assistance, currently estimated at US\$ 800,000 per day, was not negligible, gaps remained, some of which could be made good by more food and non-food items in IDP camps and more help in areas of origin to stabilize populations. Other deficiencies, however, were more intractable, but education and agricultural services could be key factors of investment in longer-term rehabilitation.

There was no panacea for so bleak a situation. A sine qua non was to seize any opportunity for engagement with the communities and with the less hard-line players among the Taliban authorities. The donor community must endeavour to sustain the Taliban’s ban on poppy cultivation and provide longer-term development assistance as part of a more creative carrot-and-stick package if the current impasse was to be surmounted.

Mr. TANDAR (Observer for Afghanistan) thanked all the humanitarian actors who participated in the panel, without whose help the Afghan people’s plight would be even bleaker. ICRC currently formed part of the Afghan landscape and United Nations organs,

especially UNICEF, had stepped up their presence in the country since 1992. That having been said, he did not agree that contact with both sets of authorities was the ideal approach. The Taliban must not be allowed to use humanitarian aid to further its military and political ends. He had been astonished to hear that difficulties existed on both sides, and asked precisely what problems had been encountered in State-controlled territory, with details of the place and time.

Welcoming the new United Nations Coordinator for Afghanistan, he reaffirmed his Government's support, despite past shortcomings, particularly with regard to humanitarian aid for IDPs in the State-controlled part of Afghanistan. Roads and bridges were being rebuilt and schools reopened with an eye to the people's future. He wished to remind the Executive Director of UNICEF that his appeal to the Fund to work more directly with girls' primary schools was still unanswered. The Council should not be deceived by the Taliban poppy-cultivation ban; huge amounts had been stockpiled and, once they were cleared, cultivation would resume.

It had been pathetic to hear that ICRC currently employed 35 women when, in pre-Taliban times, thousands of girls had been enrolled in schools and half of all civil servants had been women. In response to the call by UNICEF for a six-month ceasefire so that humanitarian assistance could reach the Afghan people, especially IDPs, the Afghan State, recognizing that the war was the cause of its people's suffering, had declared its readiness to declare an immediate and permanent ceasefire, a proposal firmly rejected by the Taliban. As for the proliferation of areas of conflict in Afghanistan, the people's defence was legitimate and recognized under international law. They had had enough of the Taliban's medieval control, a truly black stain on their national history.

Mr. MUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq), having expressed his delegation's appreciation to the members of the panel, said that political catastrophes and crises were sometimes more destructive than natural disasters. A case in point was that of the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq, which, according to the 1997 UNICEF report, were killing vast numbers of children. Other humanitarian agencies and NGOs had issued like warnings, as had the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, which had declared the sanctions to be tantamount to genocide. How could the United Nations stand idly by and watch that crime against humanity being committed in blatant violation of its own Charter?

According to the UNHCR report, over 1 million people had left Iraq, more than 85 per cent of them for economic reasons. What was the Economic and Social Council - two members of which actually supported the sanctions - doing in that regard? How could the

Executive Director of UNICEF view the massacre of children with equanimity? It had been pronounced from that very rostrum in 1999 that over 2 million children had died as a result of military conflicts worldwide. But Iraq, with its 24 million inhabitants, had lost half a million children from economic sanctions alone. The disaster of the Iraqi people could not be resolved solely by humanitarian assistance. A new crisis had erupted in the form of the sequel to Gulf War radiation, and bombing raids continued while the lofty United Nations looked on as the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, suspending food aid to Iraq, were determined to perpetrate the genocide of the Iraqi people.

Commercial contracts accounted for only half of Iraq's real needs, despite the fact that US\$ 11 billion were available in the Banque Nationale de Paris for spending on contracts for Iraqi's humanitarian needs. He called on the international community to live up to its responsibility and condemn such protracted genocide.

Mr. HASTINGS (United States) said he had found the presentations on the humanitarian needs of Afghanistan and West Africa highly enlightening. He congratulated Mr. Lubbers on realizing, early in his tenure, the importance of visiting West Africa, thereby sparking a larger humanitarian response. The situation was improving but the international organizations must keep the spotlight on West Africa's needs and ensure donor countries' timely and effective response to complement the work of the staff on the ground.

The efforts of OCHA in Sierra Leone were commendable and typical of the sort of mission expected of it. He welcomed the establishment of its Conakry office, which would be of use to the entire subregion. However, as conditions settled in Sierra Leone, they became inflamed on the Liberian border. He heartily endorsed the Secretary-General's view that the time for repatriation from Guinea to Sierra Leone had not yet come. It was first necessary to ensure that the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme was in full swing countrywide, that the legitimate Government was extending its authority to all the territory being relinquished by the RUF and that IDPs were able to return home in safety and dignity.

His delegation's parameters were somewhat wider with regard to the truly massive crisis in Afghanistan. In planning, coordination and resource mobilization, attention should also be paid to the 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, countries which for two decades had generously served as first-asylum hosts. Ongoing strife, drought and the growing lack of cooperation by the Afghan authorities created a veritable crisis of survival for vast numbers of Afghans, a fact documented by the panel. His delegation urged all donors to respond

generously to the appeal for major new resources and the first-asylum countries to continue their generosity and restraint. In Afghanistan, too, the time was not ripe to embark upon a massive repatriation of refugees. Rather, the international community should seek, through the United Nations, to stabilize the crisis and consider at a later stage when an eventual repatriation of refugees could be organized.

Mr. VERBEEK (Netherlands) said that the basic question was how to make the move from a humanitarian crisis to a sustainable situation. The concept of an integrated approach, which involved looking at the causes of crises as well as how they were to be addressed and also at the crucial notion of ownership, was a step in the right direction. He asked the High Commissioner for Refugees and the representative of ICRC whether they looked for local partners, especially women, from the community. He wondered whether they were also seeking to develop a more regional approach. That would be particularly appropriate in West Africa where the Economic Community Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) had already set an example. Were efforts being made, through contact with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), to ensure that whatever was done by the international community had the support of African leaders? An underlying question was how long the international community could continue to shoulder the burden of so many humanitarian crises all at once.

Mr. PAYOT (Observer for Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the Union was particularly concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, especially in terms of the needs of women in the areas controlled by the Taliban. The humanitarian assistance extended by the Union was directed chiefly to women and children. He would like to know more about women's living conditions in Afghanistan, since all work had been forbidden to them, whether they were receiving adequate health care and what was being done with regard to the education of girls.

In West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone, the situation of children was catastrophic. Thousands were conscripted into the armed forces and directly involved in conflict. The European Commission, in cooperation with UNICEF, was considering the establishment of a database for improving information on child soldiers. He would like to know the latest developments in that regard. He was also concerned about the sexual exploitation of children in the region and asked what was being done to deal with it. Refugees and IDPs in Afghanistan and West Africa, of whom there were about 1 million, most of them women and children, all had special needs.

Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that his Office indeed had local partners, especially civil society groups. In many difficult situations, the solution to the problem lay not in political negotiations but in the presence and priorities of civil society groups. UNHCR enjoyed regular contacts with regional political leaders, in West Africa especially. It had specific ties to the OAU and he had personally consulted a number of African leaders. Such contacts, not only at the diplomatic level but also with NGOs and other civil society groups, were very much a part of the institutional framework.

Mr. TAUXE (Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)), replying to the question asked by the observer for Afghanistan said that there had been problems with local commanders in terms of security and he thanked the Government for its offer to intervene. His organization had already been in contact with the authorities of the region of Faisabad. It had also contacted the Taliban authorities. The situation regarding representatives in the field was indeed complicated. He agreed that the number of persons that could be sent was very small but was glad to report that they included specialists in women's health and orthopaedics. There were very great problems in regard to the employment of women. Clearly, in Afghanistan, the ICRC had talked to all the parties involved, both Government and Taliban authorities. The ICRC method of work obliged it to obtain guarantees from all the parties in power in order to operate in the field.

In reply to the question by the representative of the Netherlands about local partners, he said that the ICRC was fortunate in being able to draw upon local Red Cross societies in nearly every part of the world. It had tried to involve the Red Crescent in Afghanistan on a national basis and a good network was developing. In West Africa, the national Red Cross Society was its primary partner. It also cooperated closely with regional political organizations. It had been teaching international humanitarian law to ECOMOG peacekeeping troops since the 1990s. As for the international response to the ever-growing number of humanitarian crises, the international community, particularly its most prosperous segment, needed to realize that an additional effort had to be made. His answer to the question put by the representative of the Netherlands was that the world should continue to invest - and he used that word advisedly - in the humanitarian field in order to avoid still greater difficulties in the future.

Mr. SACKETT (United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan) said that he ought to have stressed the extent to which local Afghan communities were already involved in the humanitarian effort. In drought-stricken areas of rural Afghanistan,

for example, he had seen for himself how the better-off members in the community cared for those who were left with nothing. He fully agreed that it was important to draw on local strength. As to what it was still possible to do for women and girls, he regretted that it was currently less than 18 months earlier. Regarding the progress that could be made in the areas controlled by the Taliban in respect of the education of girls and income-generating activities for women, there were three activities run by United Nations agencies still in operation: the WFP subsidized bread-sale programme for destitute widows; some women-oriented community development and income-generating programmes in urban centres, run by HABITAT; and continued courageous efforts by UNICEF to operate girls' schools in some of the IDP camps. Some of those in authority were still trying to help and resisting attempts to impose more restrictions. The United Nations system needed to take advantage of opportunities that did exist and move forward wherever possible.

Ms. McASKEY (Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)) said, in reply to the question by the representative of the United States, that OCHA could play a valuable coordinating role by helping to develop a common information base for the three countries involved in the regional conflict. Decisions based on incomplete information had caused havoc in some of the humanitarian activities being carried out. There was also a role for OCHA in coordinating the humanitarian point of view into the political and peacekeeping work of the United Nations in West Africa. An Office for West Africa was to be established and a special representative of the Secretary-General appointed. OCHA should intervene only where it could play a useful and practical role in support of humanitarian operations.

Mr. McGILL (Canada) said that the increase in the targeting of civilians had led to a proliferation of groups with special needs. Regarding the difference that the international community could make in responding to those special needs, he asked whether any consideration had been given to the policy of mainstreaming the gender perspective in terms of the lessons learned from humanitarian operations. On the question of local partnerships, he asked how far the agencies represented on the panel sought to include women and children as participants in the design and delivery of humanitarian programmes and projects. Making children part of the process would be a step forward in the search for longer-term solutions. Lastly, he would like to

know how all the agencies represented on the panel were equipping their people in the field to deal with the special needs of victims of sexual violence, an especially deplorable element of the conflict in West Africa.

Mr. HUSSAIN (Pakistan) said that one impression that had emerged from the presentations was that no one was really responsible for deciding how the IDP issue was to be handled. There seemed to be no central regulatory process to determine which IDPs were to be helped and which were to be left unhelped. There was clearly a need to set the rules and establish some kind of uniform policy. His Government was particularly concerned about the problem since it was faced with a situation in a neighbouring country whereby groups started out as IDPs and then became refugees. He also noted that some of the panellists' statements had a high political content. He wondered whether they were, perhaps, going beyond their mandates in their comments on certain issues. The emphasis on human rights seemed to vary from situation to situation. In some cases the emphasis was excessive and he wondered whether the humanitarian agencies might not be giving in to pressures from certain donor countries which were not ready to intervene themselves but were trying to use the human rights situation as an excuse.

He was grateful to the representative of the United States for bringing out the regional dimension of the situation in Afghanistan. He would note, however, that the correct figure for refugees from Afghanistan in neighbouring countries was almost 4 million. He was glad to hear praise for the contribution of those neighbouring countries but, if they were to continue to shoulder that responsibility, they must be given help. The authorities inside Afghanistan should be persuaded to create conditions that would encourage the refugees to return so that an end might be seen to the crisis. The question of how long humanitarian efforts could continue was particularly pertinent in the host countries. Those humanitarian agencies which focused on down-to-earth operational issues were the most successful. No country faced with a humanitarian crisis could really afford to oppose the arrival of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. KELLY (United Kingdom) said that the panellists had clearly outlined the scope of the challenges facing the international system in providing assistance to vulnerable groups. One of the most important of the broad issues discussed was the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. It was generally agreed that security was a key priority and funding for it must be based on a more secure and predictable footing. He understood that the various United Nations agencies and the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator

(UNSECOORD) were revising the current arrangements and he would like to know what point had been reached and when the Council could expect to hear the conclusions. His Government had recently completed its own analysis of security arrangements so as to understand where the gaps lay and what could best be done to fill them. That study had been made with the full cooperation of the United Nations Secretariat. The United Kingdom had recently lost a number of its nationals working on various United Nations humanitarian missions and was thus strongly committed to an urgent improvement of security.

His delegation agreed with those previous speakers who had stressed the importance of a regional approach to many of the issues. The point had been made in the report of the Inter-Agency Task Force for West Africa recently discussed in New York, which called for a United Nations Regional Office for West Africa. Serious consideration should be given to the proposal. It was important, however, to bear in mind the need for clarity of roles and responsibilities between any new Office and existing United Nations country offices and special representatives of the Secretary-General already present in the region. It was also essential to enhance the capacity of the regional organizations to participate, with the full involvement of the financial institutions, in the design and implementation of DDR programmes.

Lastly, he stressed the importance of integrating mine-action programmes into the wider framework of humanitarian priorities. Such integration was particularly important in the context of vulnerable groups, for example, the return of IDPs to contaminated areas. Events in the temporary security zone between Ethiopia and Eritrea were an example of the clear need for better coordination between OCHA and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

Ms. FAHLEN (Observer for Sweden) said that the need to adopt a regional approach applied to donors as well as to the humanitarian agencies. Needs changed over time and donors must be aware of them in order to meet them with appropriate funding. To reinforce coordination at both the national and regional level, it was important for OCHA to have adequate resources, of both manpower and finance. One aspect of coordination was a better understanding of the context and the needs of the vulnerable populations. The collective effort for better understanding through joint lessons learned and improved monitoring, mentioned by the representative of the ICRC, was described in the Secretary-General's report.

The question of access was closely linked to the issue raised by the representative of the United Kingdom, namely, the security of humanitarian workers. She would like to hear more from the panellists on their experience in negotiating safe access.

Her delegation fully supported the emphasis by UNICEF on making education a part of the humanitarian response to crisis situations involving children. There was to be a special session of the General Assembly on children in September 2001, but it would be useful if the Council also reflected on ways of reinforcing an understanding of the situation in regard to children through child impact assessments of programmes. Precise figures were needed and more analysis to show trends in the way children were affected by violent conflict. She noted that the figure of 300,000 given for child soldiers in June 2001 was the same as that published many years before in the Graça Machel report, though they must surely be different children.

Lastly, with regard to DDR programmes, she emphasized that the programme in Sierra Leone must be closely linked to the reconciliation effort. She would like to hear more from the panellists about ways of ensuring such a link.

Mr. CAMBIASO (Italy) said that the logistics of day-to-day survival in refugee camps inevitably diverted attention from the importance of securing longer-term solutions. Honesty and courage were required to ascertain the true economic and political causes of crises.

Ms. McASKIE (Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)), replying to a question asked by the representative of Pakistan, said that all the agencies were involved with IDPs, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator serving as a focal point.

She referred the representative of Canada to the Mid-Term Review of the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Countries of the Great Lakes Region and Central Africa which contained references to gender-related activities carried out by the various agencies. The follow-up to the Policy Statement for the integration of a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance, adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, could be discussed more concretely at a later stage.

Mr. SACKETT (United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan) said that some agencies had a stronger regional approach than others to complex emergencies: an approach which had many advantages.

Although humanitarian access continued to be denied the United Nations team in many parts of Afghanistan, lessons could be drawn from its experience in successfully negotiating certain safe passages. A professional security apparatus, an agreed security protocol with those in charge, and the active involvement of local security focal points had all proved vital.

Mr. TAUXE (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)), said that, although he had never actually heard the term “internally stuck persons” used, it was generally recognized that the most victimized persons were those incapable of exercising their right to flee during armed conflict. In the Afghan province of Ghor, ICRC was currently trying to prevent the displacement of some half a million persons.

Although specialists in sexual violence were beginning to be sent to the field, ICRC teams were still not fully equipped to deal with the psychological and physical trauma involved.

With regard to negotiating safe access for humanitarian assistance in increasingly complex emergencies (typically in the absence of any international peacekeepers), it was vital to engage in dialogue with all the parties involved - even, however regrettably, with terrorist or criminal elements.

Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that he fully agreed with the comments made by the observer for Sweden regarding the reintegration of demobilized child soldiers.

Turning to an issue raised by the representative of the United Kingdom, he said that a common approach to security costs was in place, but that there continued to be disagreement as to whether the funding should come from the regular budget. He hoped that donors would be more forthcoming.

He concurred with the representative of Pakistan that there was indeed a need for a common approach to IDPs and hoped that the Council would, in its agreed conclusions, express support for “pro-active” IDP programmes. (Such programmes would clearly require the approval of the Governments concerned in order to avoid thorny issues of sovereignty.)

There could be no real division between humanitarian assistance and politics. In view of all the appeals for preventive action, it was impossible to remain silent about the causes of refugee flows.

The importance of addressing sexual violence was not in question. In the context of a 15 per cent downsizing of UNHCR, all that was in doubt was the funding. There continued to be a worrying discrepancy between statements calling for action and the political will to provide the necessary funds.

Mr. ALFELD (South Africa), having paid tribute to the excellent work being done by humanitarian personnel in difficult and often highly dangerous conditions, said that his delegation supported all efforts to enhance staff security and negotiate safe corridors in crisis

situations - a particularly burning issue in West Africa. It was also his delegation's view that humanitarian actors should be involved in negotiating political solutions. Further information would be appreciated on the need to engage with non-State actors in complex emergencies.

Academic categorizations of people ("IDPs", "internally stuck persons", "refugees" or "asylum-seekers") were not always helpful and could even hamper the elaboration of durable solutions. Once persons ceased to be IDPs, their reintegration still needed to be assured. More flexible approaches towards persons in vulnerable situations were thus in order.

Mr. CAMARA (Observer for Guinea) said that, for over a decade, Guineans had welcomed into their homes persons fleeing the armed conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, with whom they had shared their food and other resources. There were currently up to a million such refugees in Guinea and the country was also suffering rebel attacks on its villages, and related environmental damage. UNHCR had helped establish refugee camps, but the scale of the problem was such that the country urgently required international assistance, including for voluntary repatriation purposes.

Mr. HIRATA (Japan) said that his delegation would like some further details of the planned strengthening of OCHA. He would also like to know whether peacekeeping operations were mandated to protect humanitarian personnel and whether the latter were ever involved in security negotiations with warring factions.

Mr. OUEDRAOGO (Burkina Faso) said that his delegation appreciated the international attempts to resolve the crises in West Africa. It was concerned, however, at the delays in the channelling humanitarian assistance, in particular to local communities in Burkina Faso. He wondered how UNHCR proposed to continue to make a real impact in the region in future, given the projected closure of some of its field offices. The panellists should also explain their positions on massive and forced returns of refugees, which had a particular impact on women and children.

Dr. LEUS (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that, although his organization's main concern was health, other agencies could use health as a vehicle by building on humanitarian access negotiated exclusively for health personnel. All too often, excessive deaths occurred not as a direct result of the complex emergencies themselves, but from easily preventable diseases and causes. Many deaths also occurred in pregnancy and childbirth. In cooperation with UNICEF and Rotary International, WHO had successfully expanded polio immunization in the midst of armed conflict, even in West Africa. In

Afghanistan, it had achieved particularly high immunization coverage and could provide gender-disaggregated data. It was thus not true that nothing could be done, or that nothing had been done by the agencies on the ground.

Ms. BELLAMY (Executive Director, United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that UNICEF was committed to immunization and education-for-girls initiatives, particularly those currently being implemented with great difficulty in Afghanistan. It would be desirable for more humanitarian partners to be present in the country; in that connection, she wished to thank the Government of the United Kingdom for changing its position on the involvement of its nationals.

Given the importance of securing funding of humanitarian assistance for West Africa, it was to be regretted that many of the countries concerned were not on the donor "hit list".

At the regional level, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had been doing some important work in connection with the demobilization of child soldiers.

She agreed with the representative of Belgium that it was vital to combat sexual violence against women and girls in crisis situations. That involved preventing such violations in refugee camps (and wherever else they might occur) and by providing economic alternatives for sex workers. There must also be capacity-building and standard setting to address the issue of HIV/AIDS in humanitarian crises.

Concerning security, a cost-sharing formula had just been agreed with the United Nations Controller, but funding still needed to be raised. Although the Department of Peace-keeping Operations (DPKO) was not mandated to protect humanitarian personnel, such protection was sometimes provided in crisis situations.

She assured the observer for Sweden that there was indeed a commitment to improve the quality of the data available to humanitarian workers.

Responding to the representative of Japan, she said that the report of the Secretary-General did not refer to any planned strengthening of OCHA.

It was necessary for logistical purposes to engage with non-State actors to ensure delivery of vaccinations, water and other supplies to populations in need.

Speaking as Moderator of the panel, she thanked all the participants for a particularly fruitful discussion.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.