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SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN
AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

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Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to
respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in resolution 36/225 of 17 December 1981, entitled "Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations", requested the Secretary-General to submit a preliminary progress report on the implementation of that resolution to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session, through the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1982, and a comprehensive report to the Assembly at its thirty-eighth session, through the Council at its second regular session of 1983.
2. The report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (A/37/235 and Corr.1) and the statement made by the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator before the Second Committee of the General Assembly on 2 November 1982 (see A/C.2/36/SR.29, paras. 33-40) provided the preliminary progress report requested in resolution 36/225.
3. On 17 December 1982, the General Assembly adopted resolution 37/144 in which it, inter alia, took note with appreciation of the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General and statement by the Co-ordinator and reiterated its request to the Secretary-General "to submit a comprehensive report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 36/225, including a report on the implementation of the present resolution, to the Assembly at its thirty-eighth session, through the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1983".
4. The present report has been prepared in response to the requests by the General Assembly in resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 for a comprehensive report on the implementation of those resolutions. Detailed information on the operations of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator during the past year is provided in the annual report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Officer which is to be submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session, and every effort has been made to avoid duplication. Further, in the present report, an attempt is made to add to and not repeat information previously provided to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, for example in documents A/36/73/Add.1 and E/1981/16 and Corr.1.
5. The Secretary-General would like to express his appreciation to Mr. Gordon Goundry, former Assistant Secretary-General in the Office for Special Political Questions and Joint Co-ordinator of Special Economic Assistance Programmes, who served as a consultant in the preparation of this report.
6. In the course of preparing the report, visits were paid to and consultations held with the relevant officials in the principal United Nations organizations and agencies involved in disaster relief and emergency assistance. Meetings were held with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO).

7. Discussions were also held with some voluntary organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies. In addition, informal discussions were held with representatives of a number of Governments which have contributed to the UNDRO Trust Fund or which have channelled resources through UNDRO to meet emergency needs.

8. The Secretary-General wishes to draw particular attention to the observations contained in section VIII below. The suggestions contained therein draw heavily on the consultations held within the United Nations system and attempt to meet some of the concerns expressed by government representatives. The Secretary-General believes that these suggestions constitute practical measures, within existing arrangements, which would further strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system as a whole to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations and that they are worthy of further consideration.

II. BACKGROUND

9. During the 1960s, the international community was faced with the growing problem of providing international assistance to countries confronting natural disasters and other disaster situations and as a consequence, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2816 (XXVI) of 14 December 1971, entitled "Assistance in case of natural disaster and other disaster situations".

10. In adopting the resolution, the General Assembly was aware of the varying needs of nations experiencing such disorders and was concerned about the ability of the international community to come to the aid of countries that were experiencing a disaster situation. General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXVI), in which the Assembly authorized the creation of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and established its mandate, was addressed to various parties. Firstly, the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to appoint the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and to organize his office. Secondly, it invited potential recipient Governments to carry out a programme to improve their capacity to deal with disaster situations. Further, potential donor Governments were invited to strengthen their programmes of emergency assistance in disaster situations and to keep the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator informed in advance about the facilities and services they might be in a position to provide. In addition, the General Assembly recognized the vital role in international relief played by the International Red Cross and other voluntary societies and invited all organizations involved in disaster relief to co-operate with the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator. In authorizing the creation of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and establishing its mandate (subsequently reaffirmed by the General Assembly in resolution 36/225), the General Assembly noted the competence of the United Nations and its related agencies to render assistance in cases of natural disaster and other disaster situations.

11. During the 1970s, the international community experienced a growing number of disaster situations of increasingly greater intensity and complexity at a time when

many disaster-affected countries, particularly developing countries, confronted such serious economic problems that they were dependent to an increasing extent on assistance from the international community. This concern was reflected in Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/43 of 23 July 1980 and in the inclusion of a specific paragraph (para. 161) on disaster relief in the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade. 1/

12. At the same time that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly were considering methods of improving the response of the United Nations system in disaster situations, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination addressed the problem of how to organize the United Nations system to deal with complex disasters and emergencies of exceptional magnitude, and adopted decision 1981/2 on this subject. 2/

13. At its thirty-sixth session, the General Assembly, which had before it a number of reports on this matter, adopted resolution 36/225 of 17 December 1981, entitled "Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations". The General Assembly incorporated in resolution 36/225 its conclusions arising from its consideration of the various reports before it and, like the earlier resolution authorizing the appointment of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, the resolution was addressed to the international community as a whole.

14. In resolution 36/225, the General Assembly invited the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, within the framework of decision 1981/2, to examine urgently the role of the lead entity and the participating organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in complex disaster situations. Subsequently, in resolution 37/144 of 17 December 1982, the General Assembly took note of decision 1982/1 of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination relating to the role and functions of the lead entity in complex disasters and emergencies of exceptional magnitude.

15. It would appear, therefore, that the General Assembly, in its resolutions 2816 (XXVI), 36/225 and 37/144 envisaged three types of emergency situations with which the United Nations could be involved.

16. Firstly, there were disaster situations which fell clearly within the competence of one of the United Nations organizations or specialized agencies and for which that organization was primarily responsible. For example, FAO, WFP, UNHCR, WHO, UNICEF and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have clearly defined emergency programmes for which they alone are responsible. However, it should be noted that the distinguishing feature is that the emergency is the primary responsibility of an organization or agency, and not that a number of organizations and agencies are involved. For example, in programmes for refugees who are his mandated responsibility, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has standing working agreements with WFP covering food, with WHO on health matters, and with UNICEF on programmes relating to mothers and children. Depending on the nature of the programmes the High Commissioner enters frequently into ad hoc arrangements

with UNESCO, FAO, ILO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) or the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Similarly, UNICEF has working arrangements with WFP and WHO regarding its emergency programmes for children and women. These relief actions are clearly identifiable as being the primary responsibility of a particular agency or organization and, although involving a number of organizations, would not appear to fall within the general co-ordination functions of UNDRO. In most cases, the responsible co-ordinating agency is clear from the nature of the situation. The same applies to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in accordance with its special statute and the 1949 Geneva Convention and the 1977 additional protocols.

17. Secondly, there were natural disasters and other disaster situations in which aspects fell outside the specific mandate of a particular organization or specialized agency, involved more than one organization and necessitated the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator playing a co-ordinating role for the United Nations system as a whole.

18. Thirdly, the General Assembly recognized that, in exceptional circumstances, there might be disasters and emergencies of such magnitude or complexity that special arrangements would be needed to co-ordinate, mobilize and deliver emergency relief.

19. It should be noted further that, in resolution 36/225, as in previous resolutions, the General Assembly envisaged the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator playing a central role not only for the United Nations system but also with respect to the total international response to certain disasters. The Co-ordinator was thus requested to establish and maintain the closest co-operation with all organizations concerned and to make all feasible advance arrangements with them for the purpose of ensuring the most effective assistance. This central role was further emphasized in the designation of the Co-ordinator as the focal point in the system for disaster relief.

20. The present report is structured around the steps that have been taken to strengthen and improve the capacity and effectiveness of UNDRO, actions that have been taken by the relevant United Nations organizations and specialized agencies to allow them to play their full role in disaster situations, programmes that have been initiated or expanded to improve the flow of information in the field of disaster prevention and preparedness, and the progress that has been made in developing concerted relief programmes and actions that have been taken to co-ordinate relief efforts. With respect to each of these broad areas, general information is provided on the way in which various United Nations organizations and specialized agencies have addressed the requests made to them by the General Assembly. More detailed information will be made available to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in the relevant reports of the various organizations. In section VIII below, some suggestions are offered in order to improve the capacity of the system.

21. It was not possible in the time available to obtain information on the response of Governments to those aspects of the resolutions which were addressed to them.

III. STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVING THE CAPACITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR

22. The General Assembly, in resolution 36/225, called for the strengthening and improvement of the capacity and effectiveness of UNDRO (para. 3), requested the Secretary-General to continue to take the necessary steps to strengthen its management operations (para. 5), and stressed the need further to strengthen and improve the capability of UNDRO in information collection and dissemination (para. 6). In resolution 37/144, the General Assembly took note of the progress made by the Secretary-General in initiating improvements in the management operation of UNDRO (para. 2); requested the Secretary-General to facilitate, when necessary, rapid appointment of temporary staff and procurement of supplies by UNDRO (para. 4); reiterated its desire further to strengthen and improve the capability of UNDRO in the area of information provided by existing early warning systems (para. 10); and requested the Secretary-General to assign a higher priority to strengthening, preferably within the means at his disposal, the financial and manpower resources of UNDRO (para. 13). For 1983, in support of the information programmes of UNDRO, the General Assembly approved the creation, on a temporary basis, of one additional Professional post at the P-3 level and one additional General Service post.

IV. STEPS TAKEN BY RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS AND SPECIALIZED AGENCIES TO STRENGTHEN AND IMPROVE THEIR CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO EMERGENCIES

23. In paragraph 18 of resolution 36/225, the General Assembly called upon organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to establish emergency units or focal points if they were not already in existence.

24. Formal emergency units have been established in FAO, WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR. WHO has designated an officer to be responsible for emergency relief operations, and emergency units or disaster focal points have been or are being established in each regional office. UNDP, which can provide up to \$30,000 for immediate relief and up to \$1 million from special programmes resources for technical assistance activities in support of rehabilitation and reconstruction has established a focal point for all emergency contacts, although the regional bureaux remain the substantive offices. UNESCO has a unit which specializes in response to disasters and which acts as the focal point in these matters. ILO whose activities are largely supportive in disaster situations is in the process of designating a focal point through which the various branches can be contacted with respect to emergency programmes.

25. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 36/225, significant advances have been made in strengthening the emergency components of these agencies and organizations principally involved in disaster relief and there have been major improvements in the capacity of these organizations to co-operate in joint efforts by the United Nations system to provide assistance to disaster-stricken States. FAO has taken action to strengthen its Office for Special Relief Operations and has

established a Technical Co-operation Programme which includes emergency assistance. The Office, funded mainly by voluntary contributions made for special emergency and rehabilitation activities, has increased its operational and administrative capacity to deal with the number of emergency requests and assistance to be provided. FAO mobilizes for special relief operations some \$9-10 million per year on a voluntary basis. This average excludes large-scale emergency operations, such as that for Kampuchea for which, under concerted United Nations efforts, much more has been mobilized. The FAO Technical Co-operation Programme is funded from the Organization's regular budget and is able to respond also, within the financial constraints, to emergency requests received from member countries for the procurement of agricultural input, materials for plant and animal protection and equipment urgently needed for agricultural production. A further increase in the resources available for the Programme has been proposed in the forthcoming biennium.

26. Approximately, \$200 million per year is available for emergency food supplies, made up of an emergency allocation from WFP resources and the International Emergency Food Reserve. Requests for emergency food provided by WFP are approved by the Director-General of FAO. The WFP Emergency Service, which has been designated the focal point for disasters, has been upgraded and expanded and is now staffed by eight professionals (an increase of one third in the past three years). In 1982, some 12 million people in thirty-seven countries were provided with approximately 537,000 tonnes of food under emergency programmes. In recent years, however, from two thirds to three quarters of WFP emergency food supplies have been made available for refugee programmes.

27. The Disaster Unit in UNESCO was strengthened during the past two years with the addition of a senior professional officer; an expanded programme relating to the scientific aspects of disasters was also approved. The office responsible for emergency relief operations at WHO has mobilized millions of dollars of extrabudgetary resources for emergency health needs during the past three years and the emergency units in a number of regional offices have been strengthened.

28. UNICEF established an Emergency Unit as early as 1971. Despite the financial constraints, the Emergency Reserve Fund of UNICEF will be maintained at \$3 million annually for the period 1983/1985 and UNICEF field representatives have access to a discretionary reserve fund under which \$25,000 annually can be allocated for specific emergency action in a country, without prior clearance by UNICEF headquarters. However, to respond to the evolving situation and to strengthen its capacity to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations a new Emergency Operations Unit has been established in 1983. This Unit provides the focal point for all actions related to the participation of UNICEF in emergencies. For small emergencies, the Unit co-ordinates with the programme and geographical field sectors at UNICEF headquarters and, for large-scale emergencies, initiates the setting up of internal task forces. The Emergency Operations Unit is also responsible for ensuring the co-ordination of the Fund's emergency response with organizations in Europe. In support of its European co-ordination, UNICEF has had an emergency programme officer posted at Geneva, who has been charged with the responsibility of strengthening the Fund's daily working contacts with Geneva-based organizations and voluntary organizations.

29. The Emergency Unit of UNHCR was established in 1980 and is primarily responsible for emergency preparedness measures; responsibility for the management of emergency operations rests with the geographical bureaux and substantive offices. The Emergency Unit has an annual \$200,000 project for emergency preparedness measures, including the stocking of emergency refugee health kits. In 1981 the High Commissioner's Emergency Fund was increased to \$10 million and the maximum amount available for any single emergency was raised to \$4 million.

30. It should be noted that these emergency units or focal points normally play a dual role in the provision of emergency assistance. They are generally responsible for providing or co-ordinating emergency assistance programmes which fall clearly within the mandate of the organization concerned. In addition, they provide the mechanism for system-wide co-ordination through their relations with UNDRO. Indeed, in most cases, the major part of their work involves responses to the emergencies for which their organizations are principally responsible.

31. For example, the Office for Special Relief Operations of FAO normally deals with 20-25 emergencies each year which fall clearly within the mandate of FAO and do not involve co-ordination with UNDRO. The new Unit in UNICEF has been charged with the primary task of assisting and strengthening the capacity of UNICEF to prepare and more effectively respond to disaster situations by providing support to UNICEF, field offices, country suboffices and liaison offices operating in developing countries. The units in WFP and WHO are similarly responsible for co-ordinating and carrying out emergency activities that are specific to those organizations. The capacity of the United Nations system as a whole to respond to emergencies depends both on aspects of the work of these emergency units and on the human material and financial resources made available to them.

32. In discussions, it was made clear by the relevant agencies that they rarely had sufficient resources available to meet all the emergency requests made to them. In resolution 36/225, the General Assembly recognized that a major constraint in the United Nations system's effective response to natural disasters and other disaster situations had been a shortage of resources, and in paragraph 14 of the resolution, the Assembly stressed the need to strengthen the operational capacity and human material and financial resources available to individual agencies and organizations in order to enable them to play their respective roles more promptly, efficiently and effectively. To date, the necessary additional resources have not been provided, although some strengthening has been possible.

V. INFORMATION

33. The General Assembly has consistently recognized that comprehensive, up-to-date information is essential to assist the international community to respond to disasters and has stressed the importance of information to disaster relief co-ordination. Thus, in paragraph 1 (h) of resolution 2816 (XXVI), the General Assembly authorized the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, on behalf of the Secretary-General, "to acquire and disseminate information relevant to planning and co-ordinating disaster relief, including the improvement and establishment of stockpiles in disaster-prone areas ...". Further, the Assembly recommended that

the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator should maintain contact with Governments concerning the available aid in emergency situations, such as food supplies, medicines, personnel, transportation and communications, as well as advice to countries in pre-disaster planning and preparedness (para. 7), and invited potential donor countries to inform the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in advance about the facilities and services they might be in a position to provide immediately (para. 9 (c)).

34. The importance of information has been reaffirmed in various resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly since 1971. For example, in paragraph 6 of resolution 36/225, the General Assembly stressed the need to take full advantage of information provided by existing early-warning monitoring systems and to co-ordinate, as far as feasible and useful, all the relevant early-warning systems, and stressed that, to this effect the capability of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in information collection and dissemination should be further strengthened and improved. In paragraph 15, the General Assembly requested all States to ensure a full flow of information to UNDRO. Subsequently, in paragraph 10 of resolution 37/144, the General Assembly reiterated its desire further to strengthen and improve the capability of UNDRO to take full advantage of information provided by existing early-warning systems and, in paragraph 11, urged all Governments and relevant organs and organizations to improve their flow of information on relief assistance, action and plans. In the Secretary-General's view, UNDRO should be at the centre of a comprehensive network of information at various levels (national, regional and international) and from various sources, including Governments, voluntary bodies and United Nations organizations (A/36/73/Add.1, para. 27).

A. Early-warning systems

35. The possibility of early notification and early warning of disasters of particular significance in view of the need for a timely, international response, is one important component of the UNDRO information programme. During the past decade, a number of organizations in the United Nations system have developed early-warning and monitoring systems relating to impending emergencies in their areas of competence. Each of these is being further defined and elaborated to improve its effectiveness. All systems involve specialized techniques and, in many cases, depend on information which is provided on a confidential basis. All publicize their forecasts with caution, recognizing the dangers of false alarms. In these circumstances, each organization in developing its own system, has to decide on the efforts that should be made, the methods that should be tried and the resources that should be applied. Each system, however, generates information which could be and is made available for a wider use.

36. In resolution 36/225, the General Assembly stressed the need to co-ordinate, as far as feasible and useful, all the relevant early-warning systems and saw a significant role for UNDRO in co-ordinating the information provided by such systems. The wording of resolution 37/144, however, might be interpreted as calling upon UNDRO to co-ordinate the systems themselves. It is difficult to see how UNDRO could be expected to co-ordinate the highly specialized work being

carried out and financed by a number of separate organizations. However, it is reasonable to expect UNDRO to develop the capacity to co-ordinate and assess the information being provided by the various systems.

37. The Secretary-General envisaged UNDRO at the centre of a comprehensive network of information at various levels and from various sources, and UNDRO has taken steps to develop this focal position. UNDRO at present receives information from the FAO/WFP Global Information and Early-Warning System, from the WMO World-Wide Weather Watch and tropical hurricane monitoring systems and from the WHO Emergency Relief Operations Centre. Arrangements have been worked out for information exchanges with UNICEF, the International Red Cross and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies on developing emergency situations. Another source of advance information is the wide network of UNDP resident representatives who serve as representatives of UNDRO and are in a unique position to receive and assess information from a variety of local sources. Some Governments also provide UNDRO with advance information on likely emergencies.

38. UNDRO has itself introduced a limited type of early warning through its "alert" reports. To date, these "alerts" have been used to give advance warning of a possible appeal when a disaster has occurred. Sometimes, however, they have given warning before the occurrence has been confirmed. The Disaster Relief Co-ordinator has used these "alerts" sparingly, however, being fully cognizant of the dangers of false alarms.

39. There is scope to develop further the "alert" system as a co-ordinated early-warning system utilizing all the information sources available to UNDRO. However, there are two considerations which need to be constantly borne in mind before undertaking such a programme.

40. The new meaning to be given to the "alert" would need to be generally recognized and its implications fully explored. Receiving and exchanging information within a wide network, assessing and evaluating the information and determining whether an "alert" should be issued is a time-consuming task. By its nature it cannot be delayed and must be done quickly. Further, the information must be kept up-to-date and be readily available or the central system will fall into disuse as irrelevant to real needs.

B. Information related to relief programmes

41. There are two other related aspects of the UNDRO information programme which are essential not only to facilitate relief programmes but also to enable these programmes to be co-ordinated. UNDRO should have immediately available, in the event of a disaster, certain essential information about the disaster-stricken country. Such information, which could be linked to an "alert" is an essential part of preparing a response when a disaster strikes. In addition, after a disaster strikes, UNDRO must maintain current information on the extent of the disaster, the way the situation is developing, the needs of the affected people, the progress being made towards meeting those needs and the additional assistance required to cope with the situation. Further, it would be extremely valuable for UNDRO to have information on people who could be called upon to assist in dealing

with the emergency, as well as on the availability of needed relief supplies. These needs are being met through the development of the UNDR0 disaster information data base system which became operational on 29 September 1982. The system is an interactive multi-data base system which allows instant retrieval of the recorded information, backed by detailed files which are identified. The system can also identify information and files maintained by other information systems and in certain cases, can draw directly on other data banks. The system is capable of further expansion and was designed in consultation with the Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems and the International Computing Centre to which it is linked.

42. At this stage, seven data bases are planned, of which two (the country profile data base and the consultant data base) have been implemented, and a third (the supplier/stockpile data base) has been designed and is in the process of implementation.

43. Since UNDR0 is not a significant funding agency, its role in promoting, facilitating and co-ordinating relief efforts depends on its becoming the source to which all those involved in providing relief turn for information. The disaster information data base system could be such a source. Its design and implementation has now progressed to the stage at which a wider group of potential users - operating agencies, voluntary organizations and potential donor Governments - might be brought into the process. Meetings and consultations with a wider group of the potential users of the information would have a number of advantages: they would more fully inform potential users of the use and capacity of the system; they would allow the potential users to make suggestions for subjects and classifications that would be useful to them; they could assist in eliminating duplication and waste; and they would ensure that all are aware of the need to ensure an early and continuous flow of relevant information to UNDR0.

44. The UNDR0 information programme, by means of situation reports, covers estimated needs, the progress made towards meeting those needs and the additional assistance required. In recent years, these reports have been much improved. There is still, and will always be, room for further improvement. The Disaster Relief Co-ordinator has selected two priority areas for improvement and enhancement: the assessment of needs and the identification of unmet needs.

45. The Secretary-General has noted that the full co-operation and support of both donor and recipient Governments is a necessary condition for international action for disaster relief in almost every aspect. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the provision of up-to-date information.

C. Public information

46. Because the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator is primarily concerned with the promotion, facilitation and co-ordination of the emergency relief provided by others, he has need for only a limited public information programme concerning UNDR0 operations. There is, however, one area in which he can carry out his mandate only if he is successful in mobilizing public support not only in disaster-prone countries but also in potential donor countries: this is the area of disaster-preparedness.

47. It has already been pointed out that activities in the area of disaster preparedness do not appear to enjoy the priority they merit, either in the programmes of disaster-prone countries, or in the financial programmes of donors, a state of affairs that can only be corrected by a public information programme. This is an area in which UNDRO, in co-operation with the Department of Public Information, and in consultation with UNESCO and other concerned organizations could play a vital role.

VI. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND PREVENTION

48. When it adopted resolution 2816 (XXVI), the General Assembly recognized the need for action directed towards disaster preparedness and prevention. Thus, it invited potential recipient Governments to undertake a number of preparedness programmes, and included in the mandate of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator the promotion of the study, prevention, control and prediction of natural disasters and the provision of advice to Governments on pre-disaster planning. Concern with these matters has continued to be expressed in the resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly since 1971. For example, in resolution 36/225, the General Assembly again urged Governments in disaster-prone countries to explore further the possibility of improving storage, communications and transportation facilities, as well as measures to ensure disaster preparedness and prevention, and also urged the international community to assist disaster-prone countries, upon their request, with the establishment of effective national early-warning systems, the development of contingency plans for disasters and the strengthening of assessment capacity for relief requirements and for distribution and monitoring of relief supplies.

49. In the period after 1971, a number of steps were taken in disaster-prone countries to develop preparedness plans and emergency organizations (see E/1981/16 and Corr.1, para. 32). However, in recent years, many developing countries have been faced with increasing economic difficulties and have not been able to divert scarce resources to those kinds of activities.

50. International organizations have, however, continued and expanded their work with respect to disaster preparedness and prevention. The annual reports of the Secretary-General on the work of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator provide information on specific action taken by UNDRO in the fields of disaster preparedness and prevention. In addition to the work of UNDRO, significant efforts have been made by a number of other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies. With respect to these various efforts, the initiating organization has, in each case, taken steps to ensure that the resulting reports and documents have been circulated to the appropriate audience.

51. Among these efforts, the following should be noted:

(a) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has prepared a detailed handbook for emergencies, which, although primarily designed to facilitate the delivery of relief goods to help meet the needs of people outside their own country, will be of considerable value to any organization providing humanitarian relief within a country. In addition, the High Commissioner intends to continue to provide \$200,000 annually for emergency preparedness measures;

(b) WHO and UNHCR, in co-operation with UNICEF, UNDRO and the League of Red Cross Societies, have prepared a list of standard drugs and clinical equipment for 10,000 people for three months. Pre-packaged WHO emergency health kits of these items have been assembled for immediate delivery when local supplies are unobtainable. Further, WHO participated in producing a book, Refugee Community Health Care (published by the Oxford University Press), and in co-operation with UNHCR, has collaborated with the University of London to develop an annual course on refugee health. WHO and UNDRO have jointly published a study, Disaster Prevention and Mitigation: Sanitation Aspects, and WHO has developed, in association with the School of Public Health at the University of Louvain, a course on health aspects and relief management in the event of natural disasters. In 1982, a workshop was held for the deans of medical schools on the educational aspects of health in disasters; the workshop was organized in co-operation with the Council of Europe at Strasbourg. WHO and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have developed a joint programme on the health aspects of accidents in civilian nuclear plants, including the preparation of a manual and a handbook of accident exercise scenarios to test emergency plans and preparedness in nuclear facilities;

(c) UNESCO, within its programme on natural hazards, has carried out activities relating to a better assessment of natural disasters and their prediction and to the mitigation of natural disasters. Expert seminars and meetings have been organized on earthquake prediction and on diminishing damage from earthquakes; the extension of existing seismic networks and the establishment of new networks; the setting up of experimental sites in which modern methods of earthquake prediction will be applied and prediction techniques improved; volcanic hazards and the prevention and mitigation of damage from such occurrences; and on landslides and the erosion of steep slopes, including ways of reducing the resulting damage. These activities have been undertaken in association with the relevant national and international scientific associations. Although the safety and care of people must be considered the first priority in any disaster situation, there is a need to take steps to protect the national heritage of a disaster-stricken country. UNESCO is developing an approach to this matter, including the possibility of a formal recommendation for consideration by its forthcoming General Conference;

(d) Under its Tropical Cyclone Programme, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has provided assistance to member States to strengthen their capacity to detect, track and forecast tropical cyclones, to improve tropical cyclone warning systems and to ensure that timely and effective measures for disaster preparedness are implemented. WMO has also undertaken work on flood forecasting and flood risk evaluation;

(e) In almost every emergency situation, food is an indispensable element and in most emergency assistance programmes it constitutes the largest single component. The delivery and distribution of large tonnages of food frequently cause serious problems. The development of a disaster-prone country's capability reliably to meet its own food needs must therefore be viewed as an essential factor in disaster preparedness and prevention. Although the emergency component of WFP resources and the International Emergency Food Reserve constitutes a major advance

in ensuring that food is available for emergencies, the problem of its prompt availability continues to be a problem. National and regional food stocks remain the first source on which it is necessary to draw, particularly for food grains. In these circumstances, national and regional food security is an essential element in disaster preparedness and, in recent years, FAO and WFP have undertaken major exercises concerning food security and the working of emergency food schemes.

52. Among the most relevant reports for these purposes is the report entitled "Study of WFP emergency operations and improvement of all aspects related to such matters", submitted by WFP to the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes at its twelfth session, and the three reports submitted by the Director-General of FAO to the Committee on World Food Security at its eighth session: "A review of the implementation of the Plan of Action on World Food Security", "Increasing the flow of resources for food security programmes" and the "Director-General's report on world food security". Together, these reports indicate ways in which the provision of food in emergencies can be improved and the need for emergency food supplies minimized. The reports provide information on a number of developments in this regard.

53. Within FAO programmes, the following positive developments should be noted: the establishment of the Regional Commission on Food Security for Asia and the Pacific; the creation of the Regional Cereals Unit for the Sahel Countries; the steps taken towards the establishment of a regional early-warning system and a food reserve for the countries of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference; and the decision to create an Action Committee within the Latin American Economic System to develop greater food security in the region. In addition, the Food Security Assistance Scheme, established by FAO in 1976 and designed to reduce vulnerability to food supply instability, continues in operation (it obtained pledges amounting to \$8.5 million for the period January-November 1982).

54. WFP has recently conducted an in-depth study of past emergency food programmes and has established a Steering Committee on Emergency Operations in order to improve the implementation of such operations and ensure their co-ordination. This Committee will also regularly review and reassess the volume and nature of the resources available for emergency operations.

55. The Governments of Sweden, Switzerland and the Federal Republic of Germany have established mobile disaster units which have the capacity to undertake relief activities outside their own countries. At a meeting of heads of these units with the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, guidelines were worked out for their operation in co-operation with the United Nations system in emergency situations.

56. The above outline of the various efforts that are being made in the field of disaster preparedness and prevention, although not exhaustive, illustrates the work being done by United Nations organizations and specialized agencies and the ways in which the system is developing a number of approaches over a broad front to deal with this matter in accordance with the wishes expressed by the General Assembly.

57. The Secretary-General has noted that disaster-preparedness projects appear to attract fewer resources than those more directly linked to development and do not appear to have the same degree of national priority. He pointed out that there was little support available for preparedness projects except through the relevant subaccount of the UNDRO Trust Fund (A/36/73/Add.1, para. 38). There has been little change in this respect since the Secretary-General made his comments. Indeed, in 1983, the sharp increase in the number of disaster relief cases dealt with by UNDRO took up most of the available time of staff and most of its resources. In the event, the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator was not able to give preparedness and prevention measures the emphasis he felt that they deserved.

VII. THE CO-ORDINATION OF RELIEF EFFORTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCERTED RELIEF PROGRAMMES

58. The General Assembly has recognized and reaffirmed the primary role of the Government of each State in caring for the victims of disasters occurring in its territory, and the responsibility of those authorities for relief operations in the event of an emergency and for the administration and co-ordination of international programmes of assistance. General Assembly resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 are directed towards ensuring that the United Nations system assists the Government of the disaster-stricken State, at their request, in carrying out these responsibilities.

A. Co-ordination at the field level

59. In paragraph 8 of resolution 36/225, the General Assembly dealt with the question of co-ordinating the relief efforts of the United Nations system and decided that "in response to a request for disaster relief from a disaster-stricken State and, as necessary, in particular in disaster-prone countries, the United Nations resident co-ordinator shall, with the full concurrence, consent and participation of the Government, convene meetings of the concerned organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to plan, monitor and take immediate action to provide assistance and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and appropriate voluntary organizations may be invited to participate in such meetings with the approval of the host country".

60. The role given to the resident co-ordinator in association with representatives of the relevant organizations of the United Nations system requires some disaster-preparedness measures. Further, in the event of a request for assistance, it requires the development of the first stage of a coherent relief programme, taking into account the needs of the situation, and the extent to which the Government of the affected country is in a position to meet those needs. The resident co-ordinator and the representatives of the concerned United Nations organizations are also expected in an emergency situation to take whatever immediate action they can to provide assistance, in accordance with their authorities, and are expected to monitor the situation and the international assistance being provided. It is implied that all organizations, including voluntary agencies, will act in accordance with their own mandates and authorities and will commence providing assistance during this first phase.

61. With respect to the United Nations system, new instructions have been issued by the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation and the Administrator of UNDP, incorporating the responsibilities of the resident co-ordinator/resident representative as set out in paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 36/225. Similarly, the Administrator of UNDP, in co-operation with the Executive Director of WFP and the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, has issued revised letters of instruction to the UNDP resident representative as the representative of WFP and UNDRO respectively.

62. UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR and WFP have made or are making necessary amendments to their field operations manuals to accord with paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 36/225, and the specialized agencies concerned - FAO, WHO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) - have taken steps to ensure that their representatives co-operate with the resident co-ordinator, as envisaged in that resolution.

63. During 1982, the specific procedures laid down by the General Assembly in paragraph 8 of resolution 36/225 were followed by the resident co-ordinator/resident representative in 19 disaster or emergency situations. In addition, in 20 instances, the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator made arrangements, at the request of the resident co-ordinator/resident representative, for the prompt dispatch to affected areas of relief co-ordination officers to assist in carrying out responsibilities related to disasters.

B. Co-ordination at headquarters level

64. In 1982, the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator was requested to launch international appeals in 32 disaster cases. Although in every case he consulted relevant United Nations organizations and specialized agencies and voluntary organizations providing emergency relief, he did not convene meetings in all cases in which he was requested to provide disaster relief, as envisaged in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 36/225. To have done so would have placed an intolerable burden not only on UNDRO but also on the emergency units or focal points of various United Nations organizations or agencies. In some cases ad hoc meetings were held with a limited number of organizations.

65. It would appear sensible for the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to continue to exercise his best judgement on whether or not it is necessary to convene system-wide meetings while remaining willing to call such meetings in any specific case on request.

66. The arrangements set out in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 36/225 were, however, carried out for some countries for which the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator considered meetings to be essential. The meetings were designed to ensure a co-operative approach in which each organization would play its part in a co-ordinated programme. The following cases illustrate the concerted approach to disasters, the role of the focal point and the participation of United Nations organizations and voluntary agencies:

(a) Chad. Consultations were held with UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, WFP, WHO, WMO and FAO. In addition, a meeting was held with a number of voluntary organizations: Aviation sans frontières, Médecin sans frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and Hôpitaux sans frontières. In April 1982, a Pledging Conference was organized at Geneva, in which representatives of 37 countries, 9 United Nations organizations and 15 voluntary organizations participated, to obtain international support for the concerted relief programme presented at the Conference;

(b) Lebanon. Consultations were held to plan the emergency response with the Office of the Co-ordinator of United Nations Assistance for the Reconstruction and Development of Lebanon (UNARDOL), UNICEF, UNDP, UNRWA and WHO. Consultations with these and other organizations were frequent throughout the period in which the emergency programme was being executed. One meeting was held on 11 October 1982 to discuss the execution of a concerted relief programme with the participation of UNRWA, UNICEF, WHO and UNHCR, and a second was arranged with voluntary organizations, including ICRC, the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the International Council for Voluntary Agencies. A special information session was held on 26 October 1982 (which covered both Lebanon and Chad) with the participation of representatives of 33 Governments, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, UNRWA, ILO and a number of voluntary organizations, including ICRC, LRCS and the Intergovernmental Committee on Migration (ICM). In this connection, it should be noted that the concerted relief programme for Lebanon did not include food needs as these had already been separately covered; this explains the absence from the meeting of FAO and WFP;

(c) Ghana. On 3 February 1983, UNDR0 arranged a meeting with UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO to discuss the emergency needs relating to returnees (FAO was unable to attend as a result of transport problems but met with UNDR0 the following day). A second meeting was organized with LRCS, WCC, ICM, the Catholic Relief Services, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), ICRC, Food for the Hungry International, and Caritas Internationalis. Ad hoc consultations preceded and followed these meetings throughout the organization and implementation of the emergency programme for Ghana;

(d) Ethiopia. A co-ordination meeting was called by UNDR0 on 28 February 1983, in which UNHCR, UNICEF, FAO, LRCS and LWF participated, to deal with the critical problems arising from the drought.

C. Complex disasters and emergencies of exceptional magnitude

67. The General Assembly recognized the need for extraordinary measures to be taken in the event of complex disasters and emergencies of exceptional magnitude, and took note of the progress made by the Secretary-General and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) in working out arrangements for such cases (resolution 37/144, para. 2). Paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 of General Assembly resolution 36/225 imply that, prior to and during the process of determining whether a particular emergency is complex or of exceptional magnitude, relief programmes would go forward in the normal way.

68. Since the adoption of decision 1981/2 by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination and resolution 36/225 by the General Assembly the Secretary-General has not made a determination of a complex disaster or an emergency of exceptional magnitude. Therefore, there have been no lead entities designated at the international level, nor designated entities at the country level, although the United Nations system is presently concerned with three situations which might well be considered complex or of exceptional magnitude, that is, the situations in Chad, Lebanon and Kampuchea.

69. It does not appear that the failure to use the process set out in General Assembly resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 and in ACC decisions 1981/2 and 1982/1 indicates any difficulties in proceeding in the manner outlined in those resolutions and decisions.

70. In the case of Chad, as soon as the Secretary-General received the request for assistance, he began the process set out in ACC decision 1981/2 and contacted all members of ACC, informing them that it appeared to him that the situation in Chad was of the kind envisaged in that decision. The concerned agencies replied to his message immediately and their responses indicated their general agreement that Chad might well require extraordinary arrangements. In the event, however, the General Assembly, in resolution 36/210 of 17 December 1981, in which it, inter alia, requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Chairman of OAU, to organize a pledging conference for Chad and requested him "to contact the Government of Chad with a view to the urgent appointment of a resident co-ordinator who will also be his special representative for reconstruction, rehabilitation, development and emergency relief operations in Chad", set in train a process different from that envisaged in ACC decision 1981/2.

71. In the case of Lebanon, special arrangements had already been made in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 33/146 of 20 December 1978, 34/135 of 14 December 1979, 35/85 of 5 December 1980 and 36/205 of 17 December 1981. Similarly, in the case of Kampuchea, the General Assembly, in resolution 37/6 of 28 October 1982, appealed to the United Nations system to continue existing arrangements to assist Kampuchean people in need, that is, the arrangements that had been worked out in the framework of General Assembly resolutions 34/22 of 14 November 1979, 35/6 of 22 October 1980 and 36/5 of 21 October 1981. In all of these cases, therefore, United Nations organizations and agencies continued to carry out their programmes subject to the provisions of those resolutions and no action was taken in accordance with ACC decision 1982/1.

72. In summary, there has as yet been no occasion on which General Assembly resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 have been implemented with respect to complex disasters and emergencies of exceptional magnitude, and it is not possible to report on how these arrangements have worked in practice.

VIII. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

73. The steps that have been taken to implement General Assembly resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 have resulted in the strengthening and improvement of capacity and effectiveness of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies and have improved the effectiveness of the role of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator as the focal point for emergency relief in the United Nations system. However, insufficient time has passed since the adoption of those resolutions to draw definite conclusions about the new arrangements. The experience to date with their implementation, consultations with the relevant United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, and discussions with representatives of Governments and voluntary organizations suggest that while the new arrangements mark a significant improvement, there are areas in which a clarification of procedures would be desirable and in which further action to improve the arrangements could be taken.

A. Observations

74. The following suggestions do not involve anything that is particularly new. To a large extent, they attempt to build on and strengthen steps that are already being taken. Throughout, they are directed towards ensuring that a co-operative international effort is made to meet the needs of people affected by disasters through a concerted and co-ordinated programme in which each organization plays its allotted role.

1. Concerted relief programmes

75. The United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator attempts to draw up a concerted relief programme for each disaster or emergency for which he is requested to issue an international appeal. It is becoming clear that drawing up a concerted relief programme for a major disaster involves three essential steps. Firstly, there is a need for an on-the-spot assessment within the framework envisaged in paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 36/225. In that paragraph, the General Assembly gave the responsibility to the resident co-ordinator, at the request of the authorities in the disaster-affected country, to take the first step in developing a relief programme through the convening of meetings of all organizations concerned in disaster relief. In the formulation of this stage of the response to the disaster, each of the concerned organizations is expected to provide its assessment of the situation and of the needs. Further, to the extent possible and practical, organizations are expected to begin delivering emergency relief. The field manuals and operating instructions of each of the organizations clearly spell out the action that each representative in the field is expected to take and the responsibilities of each in the event of a disaster. Experience has shown clearly the value of utilizing the expertise available in the disaster-stricken country to make the original assessment of damage and of the need for assistance, and the necessity of assuring that action taken to ensure co-ordination does not detract from the functions of operating agencies. Even at this first stage, the capacity and experience of the operating organizations and the substantive support of the professionals in their operational and administrative units are required.

76. The second step envisaged in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 36/225 requires the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to convene a meeting of the concerned organizations of the United Nations system further to develop and elaborate a concerted relief programme and, in consultation with the specialized agencies concerned with disaster relief questions, to begin developing an operational plan to ensure the speedy and efficient delivery of goods and services to the disaster-stricken area. It is at this stage that multi-agency assessment missions have a particular value.

77. The assessment of the appropriate assistance to provide in a disaster situation is not a simple task. The full magnitude of any disaster and an accurate assessment of needs only emerge as the relief programme begins to be implemented. At almost every stage of the assessment of needs and of the determination of the most appropriate response, technical questions arise which necessitate expert professional advice, as well as operational and administrative experience and capacity. In some cases, the precise nature of the needs can only be identified in the process of providing the relief. It is, therefore, clear that the operating organizations and specialized agencies need to be continuously involved at all stages in the assessment of needs and the identification of relief requirements. In many cases this would seem to necessitate as a third step, the relevant organization or agency carrying out its own specialized exercise to deal with the problems in a particular sector following the first co-operative attempt to draw up a concerted relief programme. In the case of large-scale disasters that affect particularly the food and agricultural sectors, it may prove indispensable for the specialized agency to carry out a detailed follow-up assessment concerning the overall food production and supply situation in the country, the logistical constraints on the bulk shipment of large quantities of relief goods and the rehabilitation needs in order to ensure quick recovery in the affected areas.

78. It must, therefore, be recognized that any concerted relief programme drawn up in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36/225 will need to be revised and amended on the basis of improved information. This consideration emphasizes the provisional nature of the first assessment of needs and the first appeal for international assistance and the importance of the international community recognizing the extent to which amendments and adjustments will be necessary after technical work has been done in the field. There is always a balance to be struck between the speed of delivery of relief goods and the time required to make a proper assessment not only of needs but also of the most appropriate method of meeting those needs. In many cases, the relief effort would have been more effective had more time been spent on assessment, even at the expense of rapid delivery of relief supplies. It would be useful if regular inter-secretariat meetings of the various disaster units and focal points were convened further to clarify the detailed procedures to be followed in drawing up and publicizing concerted relief programmes.

79. In this connection, it should be noted that the convening of meetings is costly and time consuming. In its report on communications in the United Nations system (A/37/372), the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) felt that there was a significant potential in the United Nations system to use modern methods of telecommunication as an alternative to travel (paras. 57 to 65). An efficient

system of teleconferencing, including video display devices, would reduce the burden on the relevant United Nations organizations and specialized agencies of attending meetings to develop concerted relief programmes in disaster situations. The Inspectors recommended that experimental teleconferencing be tried in lieu of routine consultations or short missions. It would be useful if the efforts made by UNDR0 to develop concerted relief programmes, in consultation with concerned organizations, were included in any such experiments, particularly since the operations centre at UNDR0 has equipment to facilitate teleconferencing.

2. Appeals

80. In paragraph 9 of resolution 37/144, the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General, who would normally be represented by the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, to consult with the concerned agencies of the United Nations system in order to develop concerted relief programmes as a basis for united appeals for funds to be launched by the Co-ordinator on behalf of the Secretary-General. It is clear from the preambular paragraphs of resolutions 36/225 and 37/144 that the concern of the General Assembly was to ensure that additional resources were made available by the international community to assist the affected people in disaster-stricken States. Paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 37/144 should therefore be interpreted and implemented with this intention clearly in mind.

81. The General Assembly recognized that the affected country shouldered the major part of the burden in dealing with disasters. In addition to the contribution of the disaster-stricken country, bilateral programmes and voluntary organizations mobilize and direct substantial amounts of resources to assist the affected people. Indeed, only a part of the total needs are provided through the United Nations system. Relief programmes carried out in various disaster situations demonstrate the necessity for each organization involved in disaster relief to make rapid decisions on the need to mobilize additional resources and on how this should be carried out.

82. Under these circumstances, it is important that in interpreting paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 37/144, no obstacle be placed in the way of organizations mobilizing resources through their usual channels and that the appeal procedure suggested by the General Assembly be adopted in such a way as to ensure an increase, rather than a decrease, in the resources available. It would seem that the intent of the resolution would be carried out if the united appeal for funds were to cover the total needs of the concerted relief programme, while indicating which organizations would be responsible for particular parts of the programme and making it clear that each donor would be free to channel its response to various organizations in accordance with its own wishes. In view of the large volume of resources mobilized by voluntary organizations and by United Nations organizations and specialized agencies using their own appeal procedures, additional resources are more likely to result if, following the united appeal and co-ordinated with it, each of the concerted organizations continued to direct its efforts towards obtaining the funds needed for relief. The united appeal might well be used to identify and support the various individual appeals rather than used to substitute for them.

83. The wishes of the General Assembly would appear to be met if the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator were kept informed about such mobilization efforts and their results. Indeed, only if this is done can the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator issue revised estimates of needs, identify remaining gaps and take steps to obtain resources to cover unmet needs. Further, such information is essential if UNDR0 is to be the information focal point for the system.

84. It would not appear that the General Assembly intended to apply the concept of a united appeal to an emergency that was clearly the responsibility of a particular organization which would use its own appeal procedures as necessary. Even in those cases, however, the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator might have a role to play. The Co-ordinator should be willing, at the request of the responsible agency or organization, to support its appeal using the channels and methods of UNDR0. Further, the Co-ordinator should be informed of the emergency so that a complete disaster record data base can be maintained by his Office.

3. Delivery of relief supplies

85. The rapid delivery of relief supplies to the affected population remains one of the areas in which further improvements are necessary in order to minimize human suffering from disasters. In this connection, there are two distinct areas of concern. One concerns the availability of needed supplies and the speed with which they can be delivered to the affected country. The second involves the distribution of such supplies to the affected areas and people.

86. The methods of ensuring that relief supplies are available were discussed in a previous report submitted by the Secretary-General (E/1981/16 and Corr.1) which stressed the value of pre-positioning stocks of supplies and equipment in convenient locations so that they can be drawn on quickly and of ensuring the immediate availability of any funds needed to mobilize these relief needs. Although some steps have been taken with respect to ensuring the availability of relief supplies on a global basis, there have been few new developments in the past two years to improve either the availability of supplies or the speed of response.

87. The difficulties involved can be illustrated in the provision of food which is frequently a major relief concern. Through advance pledging, WFP currently has available over 500,000 tonnes of food to meet emergency needs through the emergency component of its own programme and the International Emergency Food Reserve. However, in practice, the pledges are called forward from the donor after an emergency occurs; this can result in unacceptable delays before the food reaches the affected people.

88. A detailed examination of a large number of emergency operations carried out in the past two years by WFP has shown that, on average, there is a four-month delay between the request for emergency food assistance and the delivery of the food to the affected country. Of this total, on average, some 107 days are required by the donor country to mobilize and ship the food. On average, only 30 days are required for shipping: some 77 days are required to carry out procedures in the donor country and to mobilize food for shipment.

89. As a result of these long delays, immediate needs have had to be filled by other sources or by ad hoc arrangements which involve drawing on national stocks in the country or in neighbouring countries with a promise of replenishment, borrowing stocks from development projects or diverting shipments at sea. None of these methods has proved completely adequate. Programmes have been worked out by FAO to create national and regional food reserves which could fulfil an important function in meeting immediate food needs, but developments have been slow in creating such reserves. In addition, a proposal has been made by WFP to have under its own control a small stock of strategically located essential supplies, from which the first drawings could be made. The stock would be managed and turned over in the course of calling forward pledges from donors of emergency food and food for development. This proposal has not yet been accepted, although it could go some way towards reducing the long delays that presently occur. A further, and in many ways a more effective way of dealing with the delay problem, would be to provide WFP with more cash pledges so that it could use the most appropriate method of meeting emergency food needs, often by commercial purchases in the affected country or in neighbouring countries.

90. The discussion of delays has been in terms of food which tends to be a major and frequently the largest single component in emergency programmes. Similar considerations, however, apply with respect to all relief supplies (fertilizers, clothes, medicines, construction materials etc.). The few stocks and depots maintained by the United Nations and voluntary organizations can meet only a fraction of the immediate emergency needs. A small amount of money that could be used in a flexible manner to facilitate the delivery of emergency supplies would significantly improve the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to disasters.

91. Although the ready availability of relief supplies and the reduction of delays in delivery to disaster-stricken States are major concerns, the distribution of relief supplies within the country often poses more serious problems. In a number of cases, internal distribution and monitoring have faced serious operational constraints, particularly in those emergencies in which the disaster-affected country has been unable to discharge its primary responsibility of internal distribution.

92. The need to ensure that relief supplies can be received, transported and distributed is of the highest priority; ideally, arrangements should be in place by the time the first relief supplies become available. The problem of the receipt and internal distribution of relief supplies involves organization and management on the one hand and funding on the other. Because the authorities in a disaster-stricken State have the primary responsibility for meeting the needs of its citizens, many bilateral and multilateral relief programmes are organized only to meet the external requirements - that is, the organization and management of relief supplies and their shipment from the source to the affected country. 3/ In many disasters, these arrangements are adequate. However, in some situations, particularly in the least developed countries, it may not be possible for the local authorities to meet the demands of the internal situation when a disaster strikes. The causes of the disaster may result in major internal disruptions which reduce the ability or the capacity of the local authorities, or serious economic

difficulties may make it impossible for the authorities to deal effectively with the costs of relief distribution. In these circumstances, international organizations, including those of the United Nations system, play a valuable role; however, improved arrangements would allow the United Nations system to play this role more effectively.

93. Where the authorities in the disaster-stricken State require only advisory assistance in order to deal with internal distribution problems, the United Nations system faces no organizational difficulty in responding. Each United Nations organization has the expertise to assist the Government by providing advisers on the transport, distribution and monitoring of the specific relief supplies which are the concern of the organization. In some recent cases, organizations have not had the funds to provide such advisory services but, in general, if funds were available the United Nations system could, with existing structures, provide all the necessary advice.

94. A special difficulty emerges, however, when the local authorities require more than technical advice and request the United Nations system to undertake general operational responsibility for the transporting and distribution of relief supplies. No single United Nations organization or agency has been given this specific responsibility as part of its mandate.

95. Adequate support for operations which provide, deliver and distribute emergency relief calls for operational and administrative experience supported by a wide range of specialists and professionals. For this reason, operational responsibilities in the field should be assumed by an agency or organization which can draw, as necessary, on the capacities of its headquarters or regional units. A priori, there does not appear to be any one agency or organization in the United Nations system which should, as a general rule, be given the responsibility for overall internal transport of relief supplies, including the establishment of necessary communications systems, in those cases in which the national authorities are unable to carry out these functions and request assistance. In recent years, WFP, because of the large amount of the food required in many relief programmes, has undertaken these functions. In other cases, FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, ILO and UNHCR have done so. Sometimes voluntary organizations have undertaken these operational responsibilities. The most reasonable approach to assisting disaster-stricken States in these circumstances would be to determine the most appropriate organization on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the nature of the operation and the particular conditions existing in the country.

96. A number of organizations and specialized agencies have the ability to manage such operations and, within the system, there are staff with the required expertise. However, no organized mechanism exists to identify and mobilize these people nor to meet the costs that cannot be properly assumed by any organization in accordance with the purposes for which funds were made available to it. There is thus a need to provide the system with the capacity to meet any costs which fall outside the mandate and programmes of the particular organization which is given responsibility for operations in the disaster-stricken State. This is an area in which the UNDRR roster of experts, combined with some general purpose funding, could make a significant contribution in strengthening the overall capacity of the system to respond to disasters.

97. A number of disaster-prone countries have adopted emergency plans designed to ensure effective relief efforts in the event of a disaster. Steps have been taken to reduce delays caused by regulations and to expedite the movement of people and humanitarian assistance, and arrangements have been worked out with air carriers and communications systems to give priority to relief activities. However, much more needs to be done in these areas.

98. The success of emergency arrangements within a country depends, in the end, on local personnel being trained to deal with the special problems that arise in such circumstances. Although a number of organizations, particularly the International Red Cross, have undertaken training programmes for people dealing with disasters, only limited progress has been made within the United Nations system to provide related training for emergency management (see, in this connection, A/36/73/Add.1, para. 24). Staff with relevant expertise in such areas as documentation, materials management, emergency repair and maintenance of equipment, emergency transport and communications management, and the setting up of crash training programmes for reconstruction and rehabilitation can be found throughout the United Nations system, many in organizations which are not normally involved in relief activities, such as ILO, UNIDO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations field services.

99. There is a need for additional training programmes for officials in disaster-prone countries, utilizing skills available in the United Nations system, in voluntary agencies and in the services of Member States. This is an area in which the UNDRO roster of experts, combined with additional funds, could also play an important role in filling a demonstrated gap. The Disaster Relief Co-ordinator met with the executive secretaries of the regional commissions and approaches were identified in the field of training at the regional level. Two seminars have been organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), with the co-operation of UNDRO.

4. Roster of experts

100. In his report to the Economic and Social Council at its fifty-first session (E/4994) the Secretary-General had proposed a plan for a roster of volunteers to be drawn from experienced staff members of the United Nations system and interested non-governmental organizations, who could be made available at very short notice in the event of a disaster. This plan was endorsed by the General Assembly in paragraph 6 of resolution 2816 (XXVI), and steps were taken by the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to draw up such a roster.

101. At the present time, the UNDRO disaster information data base system includes a computerized roster of disaster-management specialists of potential use as consultants for relief operations, assessment missions or technical assistance. An UNDRO internal working party, in consultation with the League of Red Cross Societies and UNDP, have identified nearly 300 people whose records are being examined. So far, 50 people have had their records processed and the relevant data entered in the roster.

102. An up-to-date roster of people who have a variety of skills and who are available for emergency service would be of value to all organizations involved in

disaster relief by providing an immediately available source of information on who could be available to carry out specialized assignments. To be of maximum value, the roster should include information on the kinds of people likely to be needed by all organizations involved in disaster relief to complement their own internal sources of information. This type of information would be particularly important when an agency or organization is requested to carry out activities in disasters of the kinds illustrated in section 3 above. Now that the basic design work has been done, it would be useful if UNDR0 convened additional working groups with other potential users in order further to develop its roster.

5. General-purpose funding

103. The Secretary-General indicated that with respect to the financing available to UNDR0 through the Trust Fund, he considered that the main emphasis should be placed on the availability of a general purpose fund for unearmarked emergency relief (A/36/73/Add.1, para. 40). He stressed that such a fund would have a special value in disasters: "It can play an important gap-filling role vis-à-vis the different agency programmes; and enables the United Nations to provide funds, over and above the very limited funds available from the regular budget, to launch operations expeditiously, pending the receipt of additional resources, and to ensure that relief operations are not interrupted at critical times."

104. It is now possible to identify more precisely some of the gap-filling roles for which such a fund could be used. The discussion of expediting relief supplies indicated that in certain types of situations there was a need for funds to cover that portion of the internal transport costs of relief supplies not provided for in the programmes of organizations providing the goods; to meet those operating costs of any organizations given responsibility for internal transport and distribution which could not properly be met by that organization; to provide needed communications equipment; and to assist in meeting the costs of personnel from various organizations who were released to assist in dealing with disasters. Experience with a number of major emergencies has shown that co-ordination is much easier when the Co-ordinator has funds available to fill these gaps and that the existence of such a capacity by the Co-ordinator significantly increases the value to all co-operating organizations of his co-ordinating role.

105. The most appropriate channel for such general-purpose funding would appear to be the UNDR0 Trust Fund.

106. The Disaster Relief Co-ordinator is primarily concerned on behalf of the Secretary-General with the promotion, facilitation and co-ordination of international relief efforts, and not to carry out such activities himself. Operational responsibility for relief is the function of other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies and of voluntary organizations. For this reason, the precise funding role for UNDR0 would need to be spelled out clearly if general purpose funding were to be made available through the Trust Fund to meet the needs identified by the Secretary-General. In this connection, the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator has prepared and circulated an information note on the development and purposes of the UNDR0 Trust Fund. That note covers fully matters raised by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 34 to 38 of document A/36/73/Add.1.

6. Evaluation

107. The Secretary-General recognized the importance of introducing within UNDRO systematic evaluation procedures in order to assess, after each disaster, the policies, procedures and practices followed and identify issues which, in the light of experience, might require attention in the future (A/36/73/Add.1, para. 29). The programmes of UNDRO would reflect and be adapted to the outcome of these evaluation exercises. The Secretary-General informed the General Assembly of his intention to enable UNDRO to draw on the expertise and facilities available to the Secretariat in the field of evaluation to develop its capabilities in this sphere. In accordance with this undertaking, some assistance was provided and UNDRO has taken action to ensure that the officers dealing with each disaster and each programme evaluate actions taken as part of their regular work programmes. It might be useful to enlarge on the question of evaluation in the case of UNDRO.

108. The approach envisaged by the Secretary-General involves two distinct types of evaluation, both of which are essential management tools and should be incorporated into the ongoing work of UNDRO. Firstly, there is a need for the type of process presently being carried out by each officer responsible for a disaster or a programme. Of necessity, the evaluation is done at a basic level but has value in almost all parts of UNDRO operations. The second type of evaluation implied in the Secretary-General's approach would be an in-depth examination on a sample basis in order to identify issues that may require attention and to indicate ways in which UNDRO activities should be adapted in the light of experience.

109. This type of in-depth evaluation of selected programmes is being carried out in a number of United Nations organizations. Normally, it is best done by people with the necessary expertise who are not themselves directly involved in the activities, and therefore complements the first type of evaluation. Many larger organizations have special units, normally part of general management or attached to the head of the organization, to carry out these in-depth evaluations. Such activities are time consuming and are ordinarily carried out after an activity has been completed. It is much too expensive to carry them out for every programme or every disaster. UNDRO would not appear to be large enough to have this kind of evaluation unit itself; however, its needs could be met if it were able to draw on expertise in other United Nations agencies or outside the system. It may be necessary for UNDRO to be provided with the required resources and, in this context, attention is invited to paragraph 111 below.

110. The types of evaluation so far discussed are essential management tools of the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, and would permit a regular examination of the way in which his functions are being carried out. However, there is a need for another type of evaluation exercise designed to assess the way in which the international community as a whole has dealt with the mobilization and provision of disaster relief in specific cases. Such an evaluation would identify any necessary changes to the way in which the international community responds to emergencies and would provide a basis for putting any needed new arrangements in place. There does not appear to be a procedure for carrying out this type of system-wide exercise.

7. Rehabilitation and reconstruction

111. There are special needs for rehabilitation and reconstruction after a disaster. The Secretary-General reported that "so far as the 'rehabilitation and reconstruction phase' is concerned, the assistance required of the system is not qualitatively different from development co-operation, except that it cannot be programmed in advance; and should therefore be left to the competent development agencies of the system. For this purpose they need sufficient flexibility to respond to unprogrammed needs and sufficient resources to do so" (A/36/73/Add.1, para. 30).

112. The role of the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in the reconstruction phase is, therefore, limited. Indeed, he is expected to "phase out relief operations under his aegis as the stricken country moves into the stage of rehabilitation and reconstruction ..." (General Assembly resolution 2816 (XXVI), para. 1 (i)). There is, however one way in which the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator could assist in filling the hiatus which frequently exists between "relief" and "reconstruction and rehabilitation".

113. Urgent projects for reconstruction and rehabilitation may have to be worked out during the emergency phase. Indeed, ideally, some should be commenced while emergency relief is being provided. In many cases, development organizations of the United Nations system and voluntary agencies formulate such projects during the emergency. Unfortunately, there are few resources available to these organizations to implement such projects - the only significant available source within the United Nations system is the possibility of drawing on the UNDP Programme Reserve for up to \$1 million for each disaster for post-disaster technical co-operation for rehabilitation purposes; the development organizations, however, require extrabudgetary funds.

114. It might be helpful to these development agencies in their efforts to mobilize resources for rehabilitation if, as the immediate relief needs are being met, UNDRO, in consultation with the Government and the United Nations agencies concerned, were to include in its reports to potential donor countries some reference to the known priority needs for rehabilitation and reconstruction. All that would seem to be required is to identify the organization and the rehabilitation project. Potential donors would then know that the necessary preparatory work has been carried out and that the development organization requires extrabudgetary resources to carry out the project. It would be for potential donors and the development organization to pursue matters bilaterally; UNDRO would have no further role to play.

B. Conclusions

115. A generally satisfactory and workable structure to promote, facilitate and co-ordinate relief activities by the United Nations system, in co-operation with Governments and voluntary organizations, is set out in General Assembly resolutions 2816 (XXVI), 36/225 and 37/144. Together with the approaches outlined by the Secretary-General in document A/36/73/Add.1 and in ACC decisions 1981/2 and 1982/1,

and interpreted in a pragmatic fashion, they provide the necessary legislative authority and a set of modalities to create a framework for continuing collaboration that is consistent with the need for flexibility and builds upon the capacities of the various organizations. The role of the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator is being more clearly defined and the value of his co-ordinating function is becoming more generally appreciated.

116. There will continue to be a need for further improvements to be made to the way in which the international community responds to the tragic suffering of those affected by disasters and caught up in emergencies. What would now seem to be needed is to develop a carefully formulated approach to implementing any suggestion made in the present report that finds favour. For each suggestion, there is still a need to examine its implications, including additional resources, so that decisions can be made. At present, it would not seem possible for UNDRO to undertake any of the additional activities suggested in the present report, given the current level of resources.

Notes

- 1/ General Assembly resolution 35/46, annex.
- 2/ See ACC/1981/DEC/1-10.
- 3/ The World Food Programme can, however, finance up to one half of the reasonable estimated internal costs of transporting emergency food supplies in the least-developed countries.
