

PROVISIONAL

E/2006/SR.30

31 July 2006

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 2006

Humanitarian affairs segment

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 18 July 2006, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Mr. KARIYAWASAM (Sri Lanka)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE
(continued)

Panel discussion on chronically underfunded emergencies

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

GE.06-62891 (E) 240706 310706

In the absence of Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE
(continued) (A/61/78-E/2006/61, A/61/79-E/2006/67, A/61/85-E/2006/81 and
A/61/87-E/2006/77)

Panel discussion on chronically underfunded emergencies

Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said that notwithstanding improvements in the humanitarian system, the provision of adequate assistance in underfunded emergencies remained a serious challenge. The international community's response to emergencies worked quite well when humanitarian activities were fully resourced, but repeatedly failed when there was a lack of sufficient resources. He hoped the discussion would help identify some practical solutions to that problem.

Mr. CAVACO (Director-General, Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO)) said that in 2005 his department had provided about €87 million of aid to "forgotten crises", for example to assist people in Myanmar and the areas bordering it in Thailand, and to support Saharan refugees who had been living in Algeria for some 30 years. In 2006, it had also provided humanitarian assistance in Chechnya, Nepal and Kashmir.

In allocating aid, a high-quality field assessment was imperative. For that reason, the European Commission had developed an approach designed to produce a global, consistent and impartial analysis of needs and undertook a global needs assessment of developing countries, using a series of statistical indicators. That assessment was complemented by a second, known as the "forgotten crises assessment". The latter, based on desk analysis and measures of media coverage and per capita development aid, sought to identify the most serious humanitarian crises, where little or no aid was received. That approach was now being refined, as it had been recognized that reliance on statistical indicators involved limitations. For instance, data was subject to time lags, and it was usually collected at the national level, while crises were often confined to certain areas or minorities within a given country.

The Commission also made use of qualitative assessments from its own experts in the field and of reports received from the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations. As a major donor, it channelled its funding not only through the United Nations, but also directly to such agencies. It was important to support a multiplicity of implementing partners, as United Nations bodies were not always in the best position to provide assistance. The collective aim must be to deliver vital humanitarian aid as efficiently as possible.

ECHO's assessment approach, while not perfect, provided a certain amount of objectivity and consistency that had sometimes been lacking in the United Nations consolidated appeal process. United Nations appeals should be based on solid needs assessments and should take into account local coping capacities. In addition, the priorities in the appeals could be set out more clearly, in particular by humanitarian coordinators. Donors had asked the United Nations to ensure that flash appeals were published rapidly, focusing in a first phase on immediate short-term life-saving measures, followed by a second appeal covering long-term needs. They had also asked for the consolidated appeals to be presented in the context of overall humanitarian needs per country, which would strengthen prioritization and facilitate the advocacy of "forgotten conflicts" at the global level.

For rapid response to sudden emergencies, ECHO was able to allocate up to €3 million within 72 hours on the basis of a "primary emergency decision", and within days it could provide further aid. It had done so for example in response to the earthquake that had struck Indonesia in May 2006, the Asian tsunami of 2004 and the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. He welcomed the fact that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) too was now able, through the Central Emergency Response Fund, to make resources rapidly available in case of need. However, since it was crucial that money should not be drawn away from partners who required funding outside the framework of the fund, the European Commission had decided that it should not redirect its limited resources to the fund but should instead maintain its own flexible and rapid emergency financing instruments.

ECHO wholeheartedly supported the reform of the humanitarian system, within which OCHA had a unique role to play in providing leadership and coordination.

Mr. RAGHE (Chief Executive Director, Africa Rescue Committee) said that after years of conflict and disorder, Somalia was inching toward the restoration of a central administration. The new parliament had met in February 2006, but fighting had later surged in and around Mogadishu, with Islamists eventually prevailing over a secular warlord. The transitional Government and the Islamists were reassuring Somalis that they would now work to achieve peace and democracy and that they disavowed terrorism, but there were signs that they might still resort to military solutions rather than dialogue.

The already bad humanitarian situation had worsened, as the most severe drought in a decade had decimated livestock, produced poor harvests and displaced still more people. The number of Somalis facing an acute food or livelihood crisis had more than doubled to 710,000, and the number requiring humanitarian assistance had grown from 1 million to 2.1 million, including 400,000 displaced people. Yet since 2000, on average, only half of the consolidated appeal for Somalia had been funded, and since most of that assistance had been donated as food aid, critical sectors such as protection, security, shelter and water and sanitation had received under 20 per cent of the funding required, while health and agriculture respectively had received a mere 12 per cent and 8 per cent of the funding considered necessary.

Some additional assistance was provided outside the United Nations system, in particular through non-governmental organizations or Arab States that supported local communities, and remittances were estimated at \$800 million to \$1 billion a year, nearly as much as international assistance. Yet combined, those amounts did not match the level of need. Many humanitarian activities simply could not take place. Still, those that had been carried out had effectively averted the worst of two droughts, reconstructed communities on the coast following the tsunami and brought a host of services to many Somalis. Many Somali non-governmental organizations had ensured faultless provision of services at the grass-roots level where United Nations and international staff could not venture, but limited access to resources had reduced the impact of their work.

The lack of resources meant that urgent needs were not being met and that, as a result, people were suffering and dying. One in four Somali children did not live to the age of 5. For

100,000 live births, 1,600 mothers died. Many war wounded did not receive proper health care. Common and easily preventable diseases were prevalent, and the lack of food, despite massive food aid, had led to malnutrition rates that would normally trigger an emergency response. Current nutritional interventions reached only 16 per cent of some 58,000 malnourished children in drought-afflicted areas.

Less visibly, the livelihoods of the Somali people were jeopardized. Over 70 per cent of the livestock in the south had died in the recent drought, and in 2002 and 2004, some 80 per cent of the livestock in the north had perished. Despite the existence of early warning systems, long-term livelihood interventions were very limited in Somalia, in part because donors and aid-providers tended to focus on short-term activities. But even when informed livelihood interventions had been planned, they had very rarely been fully funded. The crisis response had focused overwhelmingly on the provision of food in response to appeals that had been issued long after livestock had started dying in massive numbers.

Somali society had survived for years thanks to its social support structures, but they were being stretched to breaking point. Because of a lack of re-stocking initiatives, there were too few camels left to share. Remittances were an important source of revenue in the relatively affluent areas of northern and central Somalia, but few people in the hardest hit, rural communities in the south had relatives abroad. The informal credit system was stretched beyond its capacity, and widespread indebtedness was leading to bankruptcies, which would undermine long-term development. Families were forced to split, with men and boys seeking pasture for animals while women and children migrated to urban centres, where they would often face destitution; there was increasing competition over water sources and grazing grounds. In drought-affected areas, 80 per cent of schools had closed. The environment too was being pillaged as a survival strategy.

The resilience of the Somali people had seen them through overwhelming odds, and had averted a famine such as the one that had struck in 1974. But it was weaker than ever. There was an urgent need not only for life-saving measures, but also to restore people's capacity to withstand future adversity and to break the vicious cycle of emergencies.

Mr. McNAMARA (Special Adviser to the Emergency Relief Coordinator on Internal Displacement) said that over the past two years humanitarian operations in the field had focused increasingly on persons displaced as a result of conflict and that underfunding of emergency relief most affected vulnerable populations, in particular those who had been uprooted. Many countries where emergency assistance was underfunded were experiencing situations of lingering conflict. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, a silent emergency was quickly becoming a forgotten emergency; there were 700,000 displaced civilians and although a target of US\$ 44 million had been set under the consolidated appeal process, only 30 per cent of that amount had been funded. Official development assistance had likewise fallen from \$1 billion in 2002 to only \$200 million in 2006, half of which was being used to service the country's international debt. Of the 40,000 children suffering from HIV/AIDS, only 3 per cent had access to antiretroviral medications. The serious humanitarian situation in Côte d'Ivoire posed a real threat to the peace process.

Underfunding of humanitarian emergencies was more than just a matter of statistics. The principles of humanitarian donorship, international responsibility and the protection of the most vulnerable, especially in conflict situations, also needed to be taken into consideration. It was necessary to provide adequate post-conflict support with a view to promoting population stability, which was essential to a lasting peace. Unfortunately, even in countries where peace processes had been successful, such as Liberia, Burundi or southern Sudan, displaced people rapidly and voluntarily returned home only to find that there had been little investment to help them meet their basic needs. In Burundi and Liberia for example, only 25 per cent of the funding necessary to support basic services and provide people with livelihoods had been disbursed, which meant that civilians continued to be vulnerable and face security risks. Inadequate support could lead to lawlessness and renewed violence, secondary displacements and population instability, locking countries into a cycle of displacement, migration, violence and poverty. Adequate funding for basic human necessities must be provided in order to break that cycle and provide the foundation for the return and reintegration of the population, peacebuilding and development.

It was in the interest of the international community to provide support for the post-conflict recovery process, since failure to do so could have serious consequences. In Somalia, for example, renewed conflict had added to the number of displaced persons and

refugees and currently some 2 million individuals required humanitarian assistance. And yet the consolidated appeal for that country, excluding food, was only 25 per cent funded, and some crucial components such as agriculture and health had no funding whatsoever. As a result, there was often no international civilian presence in the field to provide basic assistance and protection, even when security was not a concern.

Whenever a population was desperate and unstable there were political and security consequences. The international community ignored such situations at its own peril and must be ready to provide protection and assistance to the most needy in order to contribute to stability, which was a prerequisite for lasting peace and development.

Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said the widely varying levels of support for humanitarian assistance in different countries was unconscionable. Better advocacy and ensuring that every penny was wisely spent could help produce a more balanced response from the international community. The new strong economies in the South must likewise be encouraged to contribute, especially given their stated concerns about underfunded emergencies. Ways must be found to increase the effectiveness of the Central Emergency Response Fund and ensure it was fully funded. The approach of other mechanisms, such as the European Commission's humanitarian aid department, could also be emulated; he expressed concern, however, that even the most effective mechanisms were experiencing difficulty in increasing their funding to meet expanding needs.

Mr. CABRAL (Guinea-Bissau) said the underfunding of humanitarian emergencies was symptomatic of a deeper political and moral crisis in the international community, which appeared to be neglecting its collective duty to care, protect and contribute. It was not fair that some regions, such as Africa, were less favoured by international donors. He noted the lack of funding for assistance in Somalia, despite the persistent drought in that country, and the fact that every day in the Horn of Africa 3,000 children a day died. In contrast, there had been a tremendous outpouring of aid following the Asian tsunami. Such disproportionality in the allocation of assistance funding was worrying. The international community must find innovative ways of funding humanitarian assistance so that all countries able to do so

contributed. Assistance should be provided wherever it was needed and basic needs, such as those for food and security, must be addressed before trying to promote more lofty goals such as the strengthening of democracy.

Ms. FINSKAS (Observer for Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said sufficient funding for emergency assistance seemed to be available whenever there was the political will to provide that funding, in particular in situations involving large numbers of refugees and those which had been in the media spotlight. However, some emergencies, including ongoing complex emergencies, remained underfunded because of lack of funds, political will or media attention. Most such forgotten crises were in Africa and Asia and included situations where the local population was unable to flee.

The needs of persons affected by such forgotten crises should be addressed with timely, predictable and sufficient funding and effective action by humanitarian organizations. Lack of funding had forced many humanitarian organizations to cut back operations and, as a result, the situation of victims in underfunded crises had deteriorated quickly. The European Union was deeply concerned about that problem and stressed that funding must be allocated solely on the basis of need, in a neutral and impartial manner. It also encouraged donors not to earmark funding to United Nations funds and agencies, so that resources could be allocated and distributed on the basis of needs assessment, in accordance with the principles of good humanitarian donorship. Funding for new crises should not adversely affect the funding for ongoing crises and international responses to humanitarian crises, including donor performance, should be evaluated regularly.

Accurate and timely needs assessments should be undertaken to identify funding gaps. The United Nations humanitarian agencies should develop common mechanisms for reporting and sharing information on beneficiaries and should identify clear priorities in order to assist donors in making funding decisions. The Central Emergency Response Fund made a significant contribution to the financing of chronically underfunded emergencies and could help rectify the existing imbalance in global aid distribution. She welcomed the allocation of the first funding under the Central Emergency Response Fund to life-saving activities in underfunded crises but stressed that the fund was meant to serve as a tool of last resort, to complement, not replace, existing funding mechanisms.

Efforts to track donor contributions, monitor the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and bring underfunded emergencies to the attention of donors. Donors should report their allocations to the OCHA Financial Tracking Service with a view to sharing information on the funding of each crisis. The funding tables of organizations likewise constituted a valuable source of information on which crises were underfunded.

Mr. DIALLO (Guinea), recalling that Guinea was situated in a region where there was ongoing conflict and hosted growing numbers of refugees from the subregion, said that the international community must show the political will to address the problem of underfunding of certain emergency situations, put an end to double standards in allocation of funding, and ensure that need, and not political considerations, provided the basis for funding. Unfortunately, even when aid was provided, it often arrived late or was inadequate.

He noted that Mr. Cavaco had said that the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission could, within 72 hours, allocate up to €3 million in funding for emergency situations. That was very laudable, but he stressed the need to ensure that such funding was distributed equitably. He would welcome more information on how such emergency funding was used and on the experience of the Humanitarian Aid Department in mobilizing emergency funds.

Mr. JURY (World Food Programme (WFP)) drew attention to the chronic underfunding of the food needs of long-term refugee populations. It was wholly unacceptable that one of the most effective ways of focusing attention on the problem of forgotten groups was to threaten to reduce the food rations allocated to them. On the positive side, initiatives by donors such as the European Union had shown that it was possible to devise mechanisms that identified underfunded needs. Underfunded groups also benefited significantly from unearmarked contributions. Innovative funding mechanisms developed by WFP, involving risk management and internal borrowing, made it possible to use resources more efficiently by spending money when it was needed rather than when it was received.

Mr. MALY (United States of America) said he preferred the expression “underfunded countries” to “forgotten countries” since analysis showed his Government to be providing humanitarian assistance to 9 out of 10 of the emergencies traditionally characterized as

forgotten. The question of underfunding had to be viewed holistically since there were many reasons why humanitarian emergencies were poorly resourced. Decisions on the allocation of humanitarian resources had to take into account their impact on saving lives and reducing suffering. Key factors influencing such decisions included the capacity of United Nations and other actors to undertake sound analysis to guide resource allocation, the ability to deliver humanitarian assistance effectively, access by humanitarian workers and the critical question of security. The presentation on Somalia had clearly illustrated the impediments to humanitarian assistance inherent in situations of chronic insecurity. Lack of resources was thus only one aspect of the challenge. To be analytically useful, the concept of underfunding needed to be based on a comprehensive picture of ongoing assistance and resource commitments. He therefore welcomed the improvements in the Financial Tracking Service, which should be further developed so as to reflect the full range of humanitarian contributions, including private donations and the specific activities funded through unearmarked contributions. His comments, which should not be seen as downplaying the scale of humanitarian needs, reflected the belief that rigorous and comprehensive analysis would enhance the international community's collective humanitarian assistance efforts.

Mr. AMIN MANSOUR (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the United Nations should increase awareness-raising, mobilize more resources and strengthen the relevant bodies and actors to address the problem of underfunded emergencies. International non-governmental organizations and the mass media had a major role to play in contributing to operations in the field and drawing attention to forgotten crises. At the national level, respect for human life and concern for human suffering should be placed above political and economic considerations in the context of humanitarian emergencies. He would be interested to know how far the European Union, which he thanked for its generous contributions to humanitarian emergencies, had fulfilled the commitments it had made at pledging conferences.

Mr. MOSSELMANS (United Kingdom), after endorsing the statement made by the observer for Finland on behalf of the European Union, said that the key issue for his country, as conveners with Denmark of the Good Humanitarian Donorship process, was how donors could better allocate their resources in accordance with need. Having commissioned a study on the question, the partners in that process intended to convene a workshop on severity indices; to invest in initiatives to improve the evidence base, including the evolving humanitarian tracking

service of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART) initiative; to work with agencies to strengthen the needs assessment process; to give priority to donor coordination in the funding of crises; to explore with agencies ways of giving more visibility and maximizing incentives to donors making core contributions; and to monitor the performance of flexible finance mechanisms with a view to improving them. He would be interested to know what the panel thought was the single most important step that donors could take to improve the allocation of resources according to needs.

Mr. LOPEZ ACUÑA (WHO) highlighted the low percentage of health components funded under the consolidated appeal process - amounting to less than 10 per cent of total allocations in 2006. Predictable funding for sustained action in critical areas such as health was essential. From the WHO perspective, there was a continuing need for a dedicated mechanism for funding post-conflict transitional recovery processes. More consideration should be given to the role of international financial institutions in chronic emergency situations, where it was necessary to bridge the gap between humanitarian and developmental action and to build up national capacities in the sectors concerned. WHO was planning to convene later in the year a global consultation on the health aspects of chronic emergencies, transitions and relief operations.

Mr. NIEUWENHUIS (Observer for the Netherlands), after endorsing the statement made by the observer for Finland on behalf of the European Union, said that funding for humanitarian assistance should rise in step with general funding as countries moved to fulfil their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance. The reform efforts mentioned by Mr. Egeland, including better needs assessments, were welcome since they were as important as increased funding. While it was difficult to conceive of an alternative to the consolidated appeal process for development assistance, which involved a diversity of donors and addressed limitless and long-term needs, a better mechanism for transition funding was required. In that connection, he awaited with interest the recommendations of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence, which could also benefit humanitarian assistance. He hoped that the current

discussion would encourage donor Governments, the United Nations system and neighbouring countries to assume their responsibility for assisting and protecting vulnerable populations in emergency situations.

Mr. SALEWICZ (Canada) said that, in response to the collective challenge of injecting equity into the system of humanitarian assistance, his Government was investing more resources into mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund and was putting more money into non-earmarked funding at the regional and global level. At the same time, it expected the United Nations to channel resources to the areas of greatest need and to work with its agencies to develop common needs assessments. As far as long-term refugee populations were concerned, it supported WFP programmes to respond to breaks in the food-aid pipeline and encouraged other donors to do likewise. Recognizing that humanitarian emergencies were often symptoms of political failure, his country was looking at inclusive approaches to protracted emergencies, bringing to bear diplomatic, developmental and humanitarian instruments in the search for constructive solutions.

Mr. ABBAS (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)) said that shelter was the most chronically underfunded sector in humanitarian operations. Emergency-shelter response was generally seen in terms of providing tents and non-food items. However, as the recent Pakistani and Asian tsunami relief and recovery operations had shown, it could also involve helping families to prepare an emergency shelter with the support of a shelter kit. A fundamental challenge to ensure that crises were not forgotten or did not become underfunded was to improve the transition from relief to recovery efforts. UN-Habitat believed that a 12-month transitional phase funded with predictable resources would prove cost-effective, since it would help to end relief operations early by supporting institutional capacity-building and to promote the beneficiary participation and ownership essential to sustainable recovery.

Mr. CAVACO (Director-General, Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission) said his department was careful not to favour more newsworthy crises over other more sustained ones. Accordingly, more than 50 per cent of its 2006 budget had already been devoted to crises in Africa, and in 2005, despite the magnitude of emergency assistance for

tsunami recovery and the earthquake-hit region of Pakistan, over 40 per cent had gone to Africa. Replying to the question on how the primary emergency decision funds were used, he said that they were reserved for very exceptional situations and had been used once in 2005, for relief during the outbreak of Marburg haemorrhagic fever in Angola, and twice in 2006, to provide emergency relief for the flood-stricken refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, and for relief work after the Jogjakarta earthquake. Such funds were only available on condition that work was carried out within three months.

Replying to a question from the observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said that the annual budget of some €500 million was always fully pledged and usually exhausted each year. Some 80 per cent of the resources for 2006 from its normal budget had already been pledged. In 2005, recourse had been had to the emergency reserve mechanism, disbursable only upon authorization by the Council of Ministers of the European Union and the European Parliament. It had been used in 2005 for certain unpredictable situations, such as the crises in Darfur and Palestine. The health sector did not receive direct funding, but resources went to other stakeholders in the health sector, such as non-governmental organizations. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, health and shelter were covered under the European Development Fund in addition to emergency assistance.

Mr. RAGHE (Chief Executive Director, Africa Rescue Committee) said that Somalia, in addition to its long-standing problems, might well be facing another emergency if the uncertain political situation led to further armed conflict between Islamists and the transitional federal Government. There appeared to be no contingency plan to cover that possibility. Such a conflict could last another 15 years, with the resultant deaths, internal displacements and the like.

Mr. McNAMARA (Special Adviser to the Emergency Relief Coordinator on Internal Displacement), responding to a remark by the representative of the United Kingdom on the need to allocate resources in accordance with need, suggested holding a dedicated inter-agency, inter-donor dialogue on some of the most underfunded crises, to enable priority needs and resource potential, as well as obstacles, to be identified.

Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said that progress had clearly been made, insofar as more organizations - including non-governmental organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and United Nations partners - were doing more predictable work than ever to address both chronic and systemic humanitarian problems, but progress was not fast enough.

When the needs assessment framework was fully in place, needs assessments would be systematically better across the board. Although appeals still included doubtful projects, he was determined to remedy that situation. Appeals were already much more inclusive, involving many more non-United Nations than United Nations actors. The objective was, through clustering and humanitarian reform, to produce a full picture of needs and funding possibilities.

The fact that children were still dying of hunger showed that the pace of progress was too slow. The challenge for humanitarian agencies was to be as good in Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and parts of Chad - where the system had not lived up to the moral imperative to provide predictable assistance for everyone - as they had been in the humanitarian response in Darfur, Kosovo and northern Iraq.

Responding to the question from the representative of the United Kingdom, he said the single most important step that could be taken by donors - traditional donors, as well as a handful of emerging donors who could not afford to commit predictable amounts of funding to every emergency - would be to undertake to fund a particular percentage of appeals in order to provide a critical mass of secure funding.

Draft resolution E/2006/L.13: Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

The PRESIDENT invited the Secretary to read out oral revisions to the draft resolution.

Mr. KHANE (Secretary) said that the third preambular paragraph should read: “Welcoming also the fact that the Economic and Social Council held panels on ‘Gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies’ and ‘Chronically underfunded emergencies’.”

Draft resolution E/2006/L.13, as orally revised, was adopted.

Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that the panel discussions during the humanitarian affairs segment had enhanced the Council's understanding of a number of complex issues and given it a clearer perspective of intergovernmental work. The panel on gender-based violence had focused on the potential of countries to act, from the highest level of government to the grass roots, to combat that shocking form of violence. He had been heartened by stories of States grappling with that issue at home and hoped that it would be possible at the forthcoming General Assembly to reach common agreement on what constituted gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies so as to increase efforts to prevent, investigate and punish it.

The panel discussion on chronically underfunded emergencies had highlighted the impact of underfunding on beneficiaries, the threat of escalation and regionalization of crises and the irreversible costs to people as they mortgaged their future for mere survival. As had been pointed out by the representative of the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission, chronic underfunding could be overcome if needs and priorities were well defined and the principles of good donorship were observed. He would be reporting significant shortfalls in several key appeals when he launched the mid-year review of the 2006 consolidated humanitarian appeal. The humanitarian problem was being seriously underestimated and the time had come to re-examine investment priorities and use the momentum of the panel discussion to bring about improvements in needs assessments, appeals and funding.

The informal event on post-disaster transitions had highlighted the specific challenges to be faced when there was a shift in the operational environment. There had been consensus on the need during the transitional period for a comprehensive joint strategic framework involving Governments, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to promote synergy and accountability to beneficiaries. Those discussions should now be formalized in the Council.

Success in the humanitarian field depended on actions that were based on joint initiatives and common resolve. The value of resolutions such as resolution E/2006/L.13, which the Council had just adopted, was the broad ownership they engendered in support of humanitarian work. That resolution addressed many issues in operational terms and recognized the need for an enabling environment for the effective participation of civil society organizations in

emergency planning and coordination. It called on the United Nations system to improve its reporting and needs assessments in the interest of better prioritizing and programming and would encourage coordination of the discussions on humanitarian issues in the Council and the General Assembly.

He particularly valued the general support for the cluster approach, which, because it matched improved service delivery with increased accountability, was a reform from which humanitarian coordination had much to gain. Given the diversity of the humanitarian sector, collaborative action in that sector was particularly difficult. The next phase of the reform would therefore focus on broad-based partnership both in the field and among decision makers. A newly established “global humanitarian platform” to discuss common issues of humanitarian engagement would hold its first meeting in one year’s time. With the promise to remain ambitious in vision, cautious in implementation and transparent in communication as the current reforms of the United Nations system were consolidated, he sought the continued support of Member States in upholding the principles of humanitarian work. The ongoing attacks on civilian targets in the Middle East underlined the urgency and importance of providing life-saving humanitarian relief to the civilians who paid the ultimate price of conflict.

The PRESIDENT commended delegations on the adoption by consensus of the action-oriented resolution E/2006/L.13, with its practical recommendations for more rationalized and coherent intergovernmental discussions on humanitarian work, and declared the humanitarian affairs segment of the 2006 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council closed.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.