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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 17 July 2007, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. HANNESSON (Iceland)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Ms. Čekuolis (Lithuania), Mr. Hannesson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE
(continued) (A/61/699-E/2007/8, A/61/699/Add.1-E/2007/8/Add.1, A/62/72-E/2007/73,
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Ms. GÓMEZ OLIVER (Mexico) welcomed the progress made towards reform of the multilateral humanitarian assistance system, in particular the strengthening of the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Her delegation would continue to support the Fund as part of its commitment to a more transparent and effective humanitarian system focused on real needs on the ground, including for low-profile emergencies. More remained to be done however to ensure improved coordination between agencies and other actors, including civil society, with a view to providing more effective support to affected States. Her delegation therefore supported the cluster approach adopted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Council currently bore increased responsibility for the challenges encountered in operational activities. Although it had strengthened humanitarian efforts in areas such as drinking water and housing, many other areas required attention, in particular preventing epidemics and the spread of preventable diseases, and training United Nations personnel to deal with violence against women and children in both conflict and natural disaster situations. She therefore welcomed the inclusion in draft resolution E/2007/L.15 of a request that the Secretary-General submit a report on the integration of a gender perspective into humanitarian assistance, which would facilitate early action by the Council to ensure that humanitarian assistance took into account the needs of men and women and to provide humanitarian workers with tools to provide an appropriate response to crimes such as sexual abuse and trafficking.

Mexico had often suffered the effects of natural disasters, and attached the greatest importance to international efforts to provide assistance to affected countries. The Council must take action to reduce the number of people affected every year by such phenomena. To that end, humanitarian agencies must develop a clear strategy for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, while bearing in mind the need to adapt their efforts to the relevant programmes of national governments and development agencies.

It was essential to protect the safety of humanitarian workers and guarantee their access to affected populations, especially in cases where States were unable to provide such guarantees. The issue of access was a cornerstone of General Assembly resolution 46/182 and a prerequisite for effective humanitarian action throughout the world. She therefore regretted the increasing politicization of that issue as a form of intervention, recalled that free access to humanitarian assistance was a fundamental human right of victims and an obligation for all parties to an armed conflict, and stressed the need to eradicate the problems at the field level that had increased suspicion on the part of some States. The Council could make an important contribution to resolving that problem with a view to reducing the suffering of the affected populations and promoting sound and sustainable recovery in the States concerned.

Ms. OSMAN (Sudan) said that the number of natural disasters and the number of victims of such disasters continued to grow and she therefore welcomed efforts by the international community to strengthen the humanitarian assistance system. She noted that Sudan was subject to natural disasters, such as the recent floods, which were exacerbated by climate change, and thanked the international community for assistance provided during natural disaster emergencies. Recalling that humanitarian efforts in Sudan in the 1980s had been considered exemplary, she said that in that same spirit her Government, in March 2007, had entered into an agreement with the United Nations and observers from donor groups to create a high-level committee and a working group to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Monthly missions were undertaken to the Darfur region and her Government had implemented a fast-track system, in particular in the area of customs formalities and health, to accelerate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Thanks to the positive attitude of her Government, mortality rates had dropped and improvements had been made in the nutrition levels and health of the target populations. The international community should take due account of the positive measures adopted by her Government. Numerous challenges remained however and the deteriorating security situation was affecting the delivery of assistance. She called on the international community to prevail on all parties to the conflict to sign the March agreement and also work to prevent the introduction of arms into the region.

She stressed the importance of observance of the principles of humanitarian assistance: neutrality, independence, transparency and respect for territorial sovereignty and integrity. She welcomed regional efforts to reinforce assistance efforts but said that such efforts must respect the leadership role of the national Government, including with regard to needs assessment. Humanitarian assistance should not be politicized and priority should be given to national capacity-building; currently out of US\$ 2 billion in assistance, less than US\$ 3 million was allocated for improving national capacity. She also pointed out that food aid could in fact have a negative effect on national agriculture, thereby increasing the local dimension of the crisis. She said that the emphasis should be shifted from humanitarian assistance to long-term development. She also welcomed the opportunity to adopt the best practices and lessons learned elsewhere although always adapting them to local conditions.

Mr. SHALEV-SCHLOSSER (Observer for Israel) underlined the importance of increasing the effectiveness of the international response to emergencies and commended OCHA for its efforts to strengthen coordination, including the adoption of the cluster approach framework and for its attention to donor concerns relating to transparency and accountability. Both natural disasters and those of human origin required a rapid and targeted response; the first few days were especially critical for saving lives. Israel had developed expertise in disaster management and response, which it was happy to share with the international community, and had deployed teams to many areas of the world. It was a proud member of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), United Nations Disaster Assistance and Coordination (UNDAC) and other United Nations rapid response organizations.

With a view to improving the technical capacity of developing countries to deal with emergencies, Israel's international development cooperation programme (MASHAV) offered assessment and professional training for emergency medicine and preparedness. It also had valuable experience in the development of arid areas and combating desertification and would continue to share its expertise in those areas with a view to minimizing the impact of such environmental factors on human lives.

Recent experience had shown that military assets could provide a valuable complement to civilian efforts during emergencies and were a resource that should not be overlooked in the quest to improve international response to humanitarian crises. That response must however be multifaceted and involve United Nations agencies as well as NGOs; Israeli NGOs for example played increasingly significant roles in preparedness and response and were active throughout Africa and Asia.

He underscored the need for all parties to a conflict and the international community to guarantee the safety of humanitarian workers and their access to affected populations. His delegation was conscious of the occasionally delicate balance required between allowing humanitarian access to populations in need and a State's obligation to ensure the security of its own population in a climate of imminent threat. In its own region Israel sought constructive solutions to allow for the timely delivery of humanitarian supplies while preventing their misuse by terrorists.

He welcomed the progress made by the Central Emergency Fund (CERF) in meeting its objectives. As a CERF donor country Israel was pleased to note that as at mid-2007 the Fund had received pledges for well over 50 per cent of its targeted funding and he looked forward to continued collaboration with OCHA.

Mr. LARÍOS LÓPEZ (El Salvador) welcomed efforts to strengthen the coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance and reaffirmed his delegation's commitment to the principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence in the provision of such assistance. The increasing frequency of natural disasters and their devastating effects in the developing countries in particular underscored the need to strengthen national capacity to combat poverty and discrimination and promote an inclusive society through strategies such as access to education and health care, development and the strengthening of basic infrastructure. In order to reduce the vulnerability of societies, a comprehensive approach adaptable to multiple types of risks must be adopted and disaster mitigation strategies should be included in sustainable long-term development programmes, bearing in mind the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

As a country that had experienced natural disasters and in keeping with its international commitments, El Salvador was implementing a natural disaster risk mitigation strategy. Following the earthquake of 2001, the National Service for Territorial Studies (SNET) had been established as the technical and scientific body responsible for studying natural phenomena and early warning mechanisms in the five regions of the country had been strengthened. As a result, for example, the population living near waterways could be alerted to rises in water levels during the rainy season, and warnings about landslides and volcanic activity could be issued. At the regional level, in the context of the Central American Integration System, his Government had adopted the Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Vulnerability and Natural Disasters in Central America. Efforts were also under way to identify national and regional priorities.

The United Nations must continue to develop innovative mechanisms to provide assistance in disaster situations, for example the use of insurance as an effective method of obtaining special funding in natural disasters and other emergencies. Bilateral and multilateral mechanisms must also be reinforced in order to mobilize sufficient resources for humanitarian assistance and ensure more equitable distribution of assistance among emergencies and sectors.

His delegation welcomed initiatives and best practices such as the World Food Programme (WFP) pilot project in Ethiopia in 2006. The Emergency Relief Coordinator should strengthen coordination with United Nations agencies in the field in order to develop special funding mechanisms for special cases and reduce dependency on CERF during emergencies. Finally, he reiterated his Government's commitment to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action as a valuable tool for promoting sustainable development in El Salvador.

Mr. LUMBANGA (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), associating himself with the statement made by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that he looked forward to further strengthening of the humanitarian assistance system. He expressed concern however at the stress put on limited humanitarian resources by the increase in armed conflict and at the suffering of civilians, especially women and children.

Fortunately there had been progress in some long-standing emergencies: the peace process in the Great Lakes region had had a direct impact on Tanzania and, as a result of the peace process in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the voluntary repatriation of refugees had begun. Repatriation would only succeed however if the returnees found suitable conditions for permanent settlement. The international community had an obligation to ensure effective reintegration of returnees and promote a sustainable peace, and he called on the international community to provide assistance to the Great Lakes Conference Secretariat and the Special Reconstruction and Development Fund for the Great Lakes Region and to support the implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region.

Tanzania had had to face both natural disasters and those of human origin and had integrated a disaster risk management policy into its socio-economic planning. Furthermore, the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUKUTA) for the mainland and the Zanzibar Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUZA) both underscored the importance of disaster management for poverty reduction. However, implementation of those strategies was being hampered by lack of resources, and he appealed for international support to augment his Government's efforts.

He recognized the usefulness of military assets in emergency situations but underscored that the use of military assets must be demand-driven, cost effective, at the request of the receiving Government and in accordance with the guidelines for their use. His delegation commended the efforts of OCHA and other humanitarian organizations to mitigate the suffering of millions of people around the world and expressed concern that in many instances humanitarian personnel worked in insecure and difficult conditions. His Government provided military police in all refugee camps for the security of humanitarian personnel as well as camp residents; furthermore, humanitarian personnel could request to be escorted. He called for safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and supplies and welcomed the United Nations readiness to assist countries in that regard. Humanitarian personnel must likewise adhere to the principles of humanitarian assistance in carrying out their duties.

He welcomed the adoption of the cluster approach for humanitarian assistance but emphasized that the lead agencies must work to facilitate that strategy. OCHA should continue to keep Member States informed of lessons learned in its implementation and he looked forward to the results of the external evaluation currently under way. He recalled that while national governments had the primary responsibility for responding to emergency situations, they required international assistance. His Government would continue to work with all stakeholders to deliver humanitarian assistance effectively and called for a concerted effort by all stakeholders to that end.

Mr. BETANCOURT (Observer for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), aligning himself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that his country attached particular importance to the issue of international humanitarian disaster relief, and in that context, he reiterated Venezuela's support for the guiding principles contained in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

There was a need to work for global mobilization and greater awareness of the real scale of the threats confronting humanity and for all actors - not only Governments, at the international, regional and subregional levels to play their part in disaster risk reduction. The international community could count on Venezuela as a natural ally in those efforts.

A Venezuelan organization for civil protection and disaster management, composed of government representatives, business, NGOs and community groups, had been established in 2000, with a mandate to strengthen disaster prevention measures and develop risk management activities. In 2005, the multi-disciplinary Simón Bolívar Humanitarian Task Force had been established to strengthen disaster prevention and response operations, focusing on risk minimization. That task force was present in five regions of Venezuela, and had participated in international humanitarian operations in various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the rest of the world. Specifically, Venezuela had provided support to displaced Lebanese citizens evacuated during the 2006 conflict and had assisted Bolivia in implementing preventive measures in the aftermath of the 2006 and 2007 floods, which had helped to reduce the damage caused by the most recent floods. A fund had also been created to provide financial support for prevention and response activities at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

The organization for civil protection and disaster management was also involved in identifying, evaluating and monitoring disaster risks and strengthening early warning systems of the national centre for disaster prevention and response. Major efforts were being undertaken in the field of education, notably the provision of training for local communities in the areas of self-protection and development of local risk and disaster management strategies.

Venezuela was actively participating in the activities of regional and subregional bodies in that field, including the preparatory work for the high-level conference on risk reduction organized by the Association of Caribbean States, to be held in Haiti in November 2007.

Venezuela urged the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to maintain its independence, and to base its activities on requests for assistance received from affected countries. Venezuela was prepared to collaborate with OCHA, through the Simón Bolívar Humanitarian Task Force, in providing humanitarian assistance to any country that requested it. He reiterated the request to the Secretary-General for a detailed report on how OCHA had spent funds allocated to support humanitarian activities and the impact of such activities in affected countries.

Mr. CONDORI CHALLCO (Bolivia), aligning himself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that his country supported and applied the principles of neutrality, impartiality, transparency and accountability in its management of humanitarian assistance. In the past two years, the Bolivian Government had been paying particular attention to the responsible management of the donations and contributions received from donors.

Bolivia had adopted a comprehensive risk management approach to minimize its vulnerabilities and manage natural risks, and also applied the approach outlined in the Hyogo Framework for Action. It was also necessary to reduce social and institutional vulnerabilities, which required the improvement of coordination mechanisms for the different disaster phases. Bolivia was learning the process of transparent and solidarity-based

humanitarian assistance through the experiences shared in forums such as the Council and would therefore pay special attention to accelerating the organization of coordination channels for the appropriate application of humanitarian assistance. Relations between Bolivia and the United Nations agencies, the European Commission and other bodies had improved significantly, not only in order to gain access to greater assistance, but to ensure transparency and appropriate resource management. It was necessary to allow Bolivia to access the additional financial assistance mechanisms, particularly for rehabilitation and post-disaster activities. Bolivia was currently on the verge of social conflict due to the inability to articulate a response to post-disaster activities, and therefore requested OCHA, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system and the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) to make an exception in its case, as a process of reorganizing the disaster management and response mechanisms was under way in the country. Although Bolivia was currently one of the principal recipients of humanitarian aid, it was hoped that its profile would change with the support of the international organizations.

In Bolivia, the deterioration in people's living conditions and migration from rural to urban areas had reduced production capacity and was affecting the levels of investment in development to which many donors contributed. Therefore, it was necessary to intensify efforts to ensure coordination between international bodies and national and local authorities in the area of humanitarian affairs.

Together with the other four Andean countries, Bolivia was implementing the Andean strategy for disaster prevention and response, which focussed on strengthening institutionality and capacity at the subregional, national and local levels; information, research and development mechanisms; identification, evaluation and monitoring of risks and early warning; and mutual assistance in the event of a disaster.

Mr. YUN Hyun-Soo (Observer for the Republic of Korea) expressed condolences to the people of Japan following the recent earthquake and typhoon in that country. He expressed the hope that OCHA would pursue the process of reform for system-wide coherence and that it would result in better service delivery to member States in need.

The OCHA Donor Support Group Partnership Meeting held the previous month in Seoul had been a good opportunity for Asia-Pacific countries to pool their knowledge and explore ways of enhancing cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance. Participants had noted that significant trends in the international humanitarian assistance system included increased urbanization, increasingly severe natural disasters, climate change and the growing threat of pandemics. They had taken note of the progress made in key reform initiatives on the cluster approach, CERF and the humanitarian coordinator system, as well as current challenges to the system, such as providing access to humanitarian assistance at the onset of crises, ensuring the security of civilians and humanitarian workers, and improving civil-military coordination.

He said that it was crucial to distribute funding and assistance based on needs, subject to practical limitations, and needs assessments was therefore essential. Needs assessments could help to ensure that assistance was effectively tailored for specific regions or States. For example, the fact that the Asia-Pacific region had accounted for 73 per cent of worldwide deaths due to natural disasters since 2000 must be taken into account when making decisions about assistance allocation. Noting that there was a tendency to pay attention to those crises covered by the mass media, he stressed that greater efforts were required to secure funding for lower-profile emergencies, which were often chronically underfunded.

He stressed that gender mainstreaming must be promoted at each stage of the humanitarian assistance process and in inter-agency coordination, as women were more vulnerable than men in emergency situations, and accounted for the majority of victims.

Korea had enacted an international emergency relief act in March of that year, which aimed to coordinate emergency relief activities nationally and internationally and to enhance preparedness for intervention, including the delivery of emergency relief supplies, dispatch of relief workers and disaster recovery and rehabilitation activities.

He said that the internationally agreed development goals and a human rights approach should be the guiding principles of work in the area of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. BENFREHA (Algeria), aligning himself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the increasing humanitarian assistance challenges that arose from armed conflicts and natural disasters required greater coordination of United Nations efforts in the field. He noted with interest the emphasis placed on capacity development at the national and regional levels as a response to those challenges.

He underlined that General Assembly resolution 46/182 should continue to guide assistance activities in countries affected by humanitarian emergency situations. However, he noted that the principles underpinning humanitarian activities continued to be put to the test during humanitarian assistance operations. The principles of national sovereignty, integrity and unity must be applied by respecting the precedence of decisions made by national authorities in the identification, coordination and execution of humanitarian assistance.

Strengthening of State institutions contributed to humanitarian assistance by consolidating capacity-building and providing a sound base for development. Humanitarian assistance must moreover form part of a long-term process in terms of better management and coordination of the transition from humanitarian assistance to rehabilitation and development operations. It would be necessary to ensure that donors focused on strengthening the capacity of recipient countries in the rehabilitation phase by means of an evolving process of humanitarian assistance.

The competent bodies of the United Nations and humanitarian NGOs should step up coordination with national authorities and organizations as well as regional organizations with a view to giving greater impetus to humanitarian assistance activities. The humanitarian activities of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee would gain credibility and efficiency by strengthening the role of NGOs based in developing countries.

It was important to continue to develop inter-institutional synergies and cooperation and to improve needs assessment so as to better identify priorities in the field of humanitarian assistance. A joint effort by all bodies of the United Nations system was necessary to take account of the close interconnection between humanitarian assistance and human rights.

It was important to have in place a mechanism to prepare for humanitarian emergencies. The Hyogo Framework for Action emphasized the importance of capacity-building. In that context, Algeria continued to advocate the extension to the Mediterranean region of early warning systems and mechanisms to reduce the effects of tsunamis in the Indian Ocean.

Welcoming the important role being played by CERF in the field of humanitarian assistance, he noted that the realization of its objectives was dependent on rapid, coordinated, regular and equitable financing for humanitarian emergencies.

It would be useful to consider the possibility of establishing an intergovernmental body to collaborate with OCHA in defining modes of intervention, as well as monitoring the mobilization of funds and evaluating results obtained. Such interaction between member States and OCHA should occur before the submission of periodic reports on humanitarian activities to the Council.

Ms. FORERO UCROS (Observer for Colombia), aligning herself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, stressed the importance of ensuring that inter-agency coordination in the field of humanitarian assistance was guided by the principles contained in resolution 46/182. She also recalled that humanitarian assistance must be provided with the consent of the country concerned, in coordination with the national authorities, particularly the institutions involved in protecting the affected population. It was important that inter-agency coordination in the humanitarian field should take advantage of national capacities and that collaboration between the competent bodies at the central and local levels should be strengthened, taking into account the priorities established in national development plans and civil protection programmes.

The Colombian Government had defined three priority areas as the framework for coordinated work with the United Nations system in the field: achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; combating the global drug problem and protecting the environment; and reconciliation and strengthening of governance, which covered humanitarian assistance. The

provision of assistance to the displaced population was an area of particular importance for United Nations agencies with offices in Colombia. Colombia valued the commitment of the competent bodies of the United Nations system with regard to internally displaced persons as well as the feedback the system provided to State bodies through its various agencies. In that context, the National Plan of Comprehensive Care for the Displaced Population laid down the guidelines for the activities carried out by the relevant national bodies in association with the agencies of the United Nations system. The policy for the displaced population was based on prevention and protection, humanitarian assistance and economic stabilization phases; for the final phase, cooperation was essential to ensure sustainable solutions in the medium and long term. As regards cooperation, it was of vital importance to the Colombian Government to shift the focus from development assistance to productive projects.

Ms. de HOZ (Observer for Argentina) said that her country supported and valued the work being carried out by the United Nations system in the humanitarian field. In that regard, Argentina advocated full access by humanitarian personnel to populations in need, guided by the principles of emergency humanitarian assistance contained in resolution 46/182. The increase in natural disasters and their impact on affected populations required coordinated management. It was necessary to strengthen the leadership of the United Nations in terms of preparation and minimization of risk. The first Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Geneva in June of that year, had provided the opportunity to strengthen preparation for disasters, share experiences and identify activities to accelerate national implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

As the increasing incidence and severity of natural disasters was often due to climate change, and it was the most vulnerable groups of the population that were most often the victims, it was necessary to coordinate agencies in the area of risk minimization and climate change. She expressed concern at the possibility of duplication of activities liable to make assistance incoherent, and emphasized the need to maintain sound coordination structures through OCHA and to undertake a process of global planning in which all actors could participate. She expressed regret at the tragic death of many humanitarian workers, which illustrated the precarious security situation they often faced in the field.

Argentina's White Helmets initiative worked together with the specialized agencies of the United Nations to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The initiative was a governmental humanitarian assistance tool with complementary aims: the eradication of hunger and poverty reduction and collaboration in disaster situations to mitigate their effects and prevent their reoccurrence. That model of solidarity-based action based on voluntary participation had proved to be particularly suited to disaster prevention.

Mr. HART (Barbados) said that as a small island developing State in a region particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, Barbados attached great importance to the topic of discussion. According to recent scientific research, the Caribbean region would experience stronger and more destructive hurricanes and other extreme weather conditions over coming decades, which would have a significant negative impact on the region's economic and social development. Ensuring more predictable, coordinated and timely responses by the international community to natural disasters was therefore a regional priority.

Barbados supported efforts to improve the timeliness of distribution of resources from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and believed that CERF access should be granted to bodies outside the United Nations system including regional intergovernmental mechanisms, such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). CDERA was organizing a regional forum on humanitarian reform awareness in the Caribbean, to take place in December 2007. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) recognized the importance of military assets in disaster response. CDERA had been the first intergovernmental response system to clearly articulate the role of the military and had influenced the development of the United Nations Civil-Military Coordination Training and Learning Programme. Since different services were required from the military in natural disaster situations and complex emergencies, caution should be exercised in the wholesale transfer of experience. Barbados called for the wider dissemination and promotion of the Oslo Guidelines, and supported fully the Secretary-General's recommendation for their integration into national preparedness plans.

Ms. NG'OMA (Malawi), aligning itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that disasters were a major source of shock to economies and vulnerable people. Climate change was affecting Malawi in ways that were yet to be understood, as manifested in a marked increase in disaster occurrences over the past decade, including drought, flooding, outbreaks of disease and crop pests.

Much progress had been made since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and many lessons had been learned from that experience: the benefits of stronger partnerships between Governments, donors and civil society, the critical importance of accountability processes, and the fact that humanitarian programmes were particularly successful when they were led and owned by Governments.

Her delegation commended the work of CERF; the future sustainability of the Fund being particularly important, more innovative measures were therefore needed to broaden its donor base. She hoped that the forthcoming high-level conference for CERF donors would result in much needed new pledges and political support for the Fund. In view of the workload and the need for timeliness of response, the strengthening of the CERF secretariat must be a priority. The lack of NGO access to CERF should be reviewed, since NGOs played a crucial role in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Efforts should be made to raise States Members' awareness of the policies and procedures of CERF, including the standard guidelines for submission of requests to the Fund.

Disaster risk reduction was high on Malawi's development agenda and was included in the national growth and development strategy. The Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs was responsible for coordinating disaster risk management programmes, and since 2006 it had shifted its focus from response to risk reduction. A national workshop on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction would be held as a starting point to ensure that it was factored into all development policies, programmes, strategies and plans. Other activities for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction included the orientation of district officials on disaster risk reduction, the development of district disaster risk management plans, the sensitization of people living in flood prone areas, and the orientation of civil protection committees.

The United Nations had a valuable role to play by bringing prevention, mitigation and preparedness to the forefront of the development agenda through advocacy, policy dialogue, technical advice and capacity-building initiatives. The 2008-2011 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) would provide technical support to the Government in assessing disaster risks, anticipating hazards, assessing vulnerabilities and coping capacities and compiling and maintaining information on disaster losses. Disaster risk could only be minimized, not eliminated entirely. The international community should therefore continue to increase the capacity of the United Nations system and regional, national and local authorities to improve emergency management and response systems.

Mr. GOSPODINOV (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that humanitarian needs, particularly those associated with natural disasters, were growing owing to increased vulnerability to disasters and the effects of climate change. The Red Cross/Red Crescent Centre on Climate Change was central to IFRC's analysis of the humanitarian consequences of environmental hazards, and the Netherlands Red Cross Society was conducting groundbreaking work in assessing those consequences. The IFRC had noted an increase in small-scale, localized and recurrent disasters, as well as a link between hydro-meteorological disasters and threats to public health. Effective needs-based humanitarian assistance should therefore adopt an increasingly holistic approach, giving equal attention to disaster risk reduction and disaster response and recovery. It must also focus on targeting its efforts at the national and community levels in order to ensure the maximum benefit for the population. The surge of localized disasters that did not attract the attention of the international community would increasingly require vulnerable people to respond to their own needs.

In order to provide needs-based assistance, IFRC must be able to measure the impact of its own work. The Federation had initiated a partnership with WHO and UNDP in the countries affected by the 2004 tsunami, to measure and monitor the impact of recovery work. The results of relief efforts had only recently begun to be felt by the affected population, for whom the tsunami was still far from over. The agencies were instituting a Tsunami Recovery Impact

Assessment and Monitoring System (TRIAMS) for the identification of potential gaps and overlaps at the lowest administrative level, and the consequent adjustment of recovery programmes. TRIAMS would include disaster reduction indicators and provide information on the extent to which recovery strengthened the resilience of the affected populations. He called on partners, Governments and agencies to continue to support TRIAMS.

Although much had been achieved in respect of humanitarian reform and the use of the cluster approach, emphasis should be placed on improving and linking local capacities, rather than on improving international response, with greater support to local, national and regional actors based on a long-term view of national and local needs. In October 2007, IFRC would launch a global partnership for Africa with the support of other agencies, national societies, Governments and other institutional partners. IFRC had recently issued an appeal for US\$ 250 million to carry out work at the community level to help address the humanitarian needs caused by HIV/AIDS.

Following the completion of a series of regional meetings, national societies, United Nations agencies, NGOs and academic experts, the IFRC International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles Programme was able to make important recommendations for consideration at the forthcoming thirtieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The recommendations would be supported by the presentation of draft guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international relief and initial recovery assistance, which would contribute to national preparedness.

IFRC had developed the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund for the provision of emergency financing. The fund was currently being expanded, in keeping with the increased number and urgency of emergencies, and the needs, roles and responsibilities identified at the local level. In 2006 alone, IFRC national societies had responded to 429 disasters and issued 23 international emergency appeals. It had made 101 allocations from the Fund in response to local immediate needs, of which 80 per cent were for amounts less than 75,000 Swiss francs.

Ms. PICTET-ALTHANN (Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that assistance to the poor and suffering was at the heart of the Order of Malta's humanitarian and spiritual mission. The Order was aware of the multiple factors to be addressed with a view to eradicating

extreme poverty and hunger, and recognized the challenges implicit in achieving the MDGs. The Order was present in 120 countries, conducting activities in respect of health care, including programmes to improve maternal health, reduce child mortality, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, provide education and promote the empowerment of women.

United Nations agencies, Governments and NGOs were regular partners of the Order of Malta in the field. The Order was currently cooperating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO to ensure health care for over 115,000 people in Darfur, while providing medical supplies to more than 30,000 in Northern Sudan, and had recently concluded agreements with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS). The effectiveness of needs-based humanitarian assistance could be enhanced by mobilizing local people and building on existing capacities. The Order of Malta's worldwide relief service, Malteser International, traditionally worked through local partners, and sought to place them at the centre of its relief effort through cooperation at a strategic level or on a day-to-day basis, while training local staff and providing development-oriented rehabilitation aid.

In that spirit, the Order of Malta continued its programme of humanitarian aid across the countries worst affected by the 2004 tsunami. Emergency relief had been followed by rehabilitation programmes, including psychosocial counselling for traumatized families, the establishment of basic health-care facilities, the provision of safe drinking water supplies and the reconstruction of homes, schools and hospitals. Activities were under way to create sustainable incomes for those who could not support themselves, and the Order was implementing water and sanitation programmes in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand. Malteser International had recently established a standing working group to draft guidelines on best practices for water, sanitation and hygiene projects.

Her delegation supported the Secretary-General's appeal to facilitate the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to populations whose survival was at risk. Lack of security and access endangered the lives of those in distress by preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid. Turning to gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies, he said that the Order of Malta was running several medical-care programmes in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo, to assist victims of social aggression. In 2005, local medical staff, trained by Malteser International, provided medical and psychological aid to over 10,000 mistreated girls and women in the regions of Ituri and South Kivu. Her delegation noted that the granting of CERF access to non-United Nations organizations was being considered, which would strengthen the humanitarian response system. The Order of Malta's organizations were responding to disasters throughout the world, whatever their cause, consistent with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. The Order was committed to high-quality standards, through the provision of efficient and effective humanitarian aid for the benefit of populations in need.

Ms. DIDIGU (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that ECOWAS felt that there was a need to strengthen national mechanisms for humanitarian relief and their cooperation with international bodies. With the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ECOWAS had established an emergency response team strategy, which formed part of the civilian component of the ECOWAS standby force for peace support operations in the West African subregion. The standby force would also be used as a tool in the overall disaster management mechanism that ECOWAS was developing. It was convinced that the United Nations strategies that were in place, including the cluster approach and needs-based humanitarian assistance assessment, would contribute significantly to strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance. ECOWAS was committed to implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action and in January 2007 had adopted a policy on disaster reduction at the subregional level, an implementation programme for which was currently being developed.

Mr. ENDRES (Division of Operational Services, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that since 2005 key policies and guidelines had been developed to support the implementation of the cluster approach. UNHCR had actively contributed to the work of OCHA on strengthening country teams and the humanitarian coordinator system. He agreed that the cluster approach should be evaluated, and that its formal activation should continue to be based on requests from country-based actors, who were best placed to identify gaps in the humanitarian response, and to assess which clusters might be most appropriate to fill such gaps. They would also be in the best position to determine whether sufficient resources could be brought to bear, or whether the operational environment was conducive to effective implementation.

In tailoring its part in emergency response under the new system, UNHCR had carried out training activities in the three clusters dealing with camp coordination and camp management, emergency shelter, and protection. It had also revised its Handbook for Emergencies, and had adapted training activities for emergencies and sectoral intervention.

Under the 2007-2008 Global Cluster Appeal, UNHCR's total funding requirements for the three clusters it leads and its activities in logistics, early recovery and nutrition amounted to 13.7 million dollars. UNHCR had also agreed to channel the 5.1 million dollar amount required by cluster partners through a pooled funding mechanism. Granting support to country and global cluster activities would better enable UNHCR and its partners to fully strengthen their emergency response capacity.

With reference to the use of military assets in disaster relief, he agreed with the terms under which military and civil defence support should be granted, as stated in paragraph 52 of the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance (A/62/87-E/2007/70). Moreover, providers of military and civil defence assets must ensure that costly military interventions actually provided additional support and were not charged against humanitarian budgets that were already stretched. Military and civil defence actors should always maintain respect for humanitarian principles in order to avoid jeopardizing the neutrality and impartiality of their operations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees highly valued the CERF, from which it had received some 50 million dollars. Of particular importance to UNHCR were emergencies with protracted caseloads, where even basic needs were often unmet.

He supported more active engagement of NGOs in each phase of the Fund process as a means of enhancing partnership. In that regard, UNHCR welcomed the establishment of a joint task force aimed at the development of common standard operating procedures for all stakeholders, including NGOs. While UNHCR appreciated the capacity-building efforts of the secretariat managing the CERF, it agreed that additional guidance and training were needed, and supported the improvement and refinement of policies and procedures that clarified access to the Fund. A clearer definition of "life-saving" activities was also needed.

With the introduction of the participatory assessment methodology, UNHCR and its partners had made significant progress in identifying needs, and targeting the most vulnerable population groups. Despite such progress, factors such as limited access, security restrictions and low levels of resources remained a challenge. The delivery of an effective collective response depended on the ability of the humanitarian community to overcome those challenges.

Mr. TOOLE (Director, Office of Emergency, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) welcomed the emphasis placed on humanitarian access and needs-based humanitarian financing in the Secretary-General's report (A/62/87-E/2007/70), and expressed his appreciation of the very significant funding that UNICEF had received in 2006 and early 2007 for humanitarian response, through appeals and support to its regular resources since 2006.

UNICEF remained committed to the concept of more effective and strengthened leadership and response in all humanitarian sectors; the United Nations and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) partners had been working to ensure greater accountability, enhanced coordination and better results. That effort should further bolster the capacity-building programmes of national authorities and local organizations, thereby strengthening their ability to provide humanitarian assistance in times of crisis. He believed that the demonstration of results for beneficiaries should remain the cornerstone of UNICEF's efforts, and that an evaluation of the cluster approach would establish benchmarks for measuring the impact of response on affected populations.

He stressed that when resident coordinators were appointed, consideration should be given to the specific skills and experience required for humanitarian work and/or their aptitude in fulfilling humanitarian coordination functions.

UNICEF was committed to the implementation of the basic principles outlined by the global humanitarian platform principles of partnership, and believed that current funding mechanisms had improved the predictability and timeliness of response procedures, particularly in the case of sudden-onset emergencies. Sustained efforts were nevertheless needed to ensure greater equity of funding available to all countries.

He lauded the contribution made by the Central Emergency Response Fund in speeding up responses in underfunded crises, and said that the Fund should complement internal reserves earmarked for response. In that context, he thanked member States of the UNICEF Executive Board for tripling its internal emergency reserves in 2006.

UNICEF shared the views expressed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/62/87-E/2007/70) with regard to the use of military assets in natural disaster relief. It was important that such assets should be leveraged in a needs-based and coordinated manner, on the basis of clear guidelines. UNICEF also supported the Secretary-General's appeal for greater dissemination, promotion and observance of the Oslo Guidelines. He noted with appreciation the update on joint United Nations and NGO efforts to improve humanitarian response, and said that UNICEF endorsed all approaches that led to more reliable, predictable and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the protection of women and children.

Ms. STRAUSS (International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance was a topic of great relevance to the work of the IOM, particularly as it related to population displacements and sudden population movements.

The year 2006 had seen the implementation of the humanitarian reform programme, and IOM had played its part by assuming responsibility for cluster performance, working with the Central Emergency Response Fund, and ensuring that relevant expertise was mobilized for use by the humanitarian coordination system in the field. Inter-agency collaboration in the implementation of the cluster approach within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee had already shown the potential for improved coordination and coherence. To that end, all partners should consistently adhere to the cluster approach. In order to increase effectiveness and exploit synergies, IOM had agreed with UNHCR on a unified cluster approach at the global level for both natural disasters and for dealing with internally displaced persons due to armed conflict. That approach was expected to avoid duplication, while recognizing the primary responsibility of each agency in their respective areas of competence.

The joint efforts of IOM and UNHCR, functioning as a virtual secretariat that supported the shared objectives of the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster, represented one of the tangible results achieved since the adoption of the cluster approach. In addition, networks of actors with experience and interest in disaster response had been expanded, and workshops and training sessions had been held to create a pool of qualified staff that were readily deployable in sudden-onset emergencies. Furthermore, greater NGO participation, a crucial requirement for strengthened operational capacities, had been achieved. While still in its early stages, the cluster approach had provided an improved, collaborative inter-agency framework, and represented a more responsive, timely and effective mechanism at the global and country levels. One of the remaining challenges, of particular relevance to organizations with limited core resources such as IOM, was the sustainability of the cluster approach.

With growing public expectations for rapid response to emergencies, the Central Emergency Response Fund had proved useful in stimulating early action and response at the field level, and had helped organizations, such as IOM, to shorten funding gaps during grave humanitarian crises. The Fund had been instrumental in IOM's relief response in 12 countries, while the underfunded emergency window had supported important humanitarian projects in 5 countries to the tune of approximately 15 million dollars.

Despite positive developments, the ability of humanitarian actors to meet expectations and deliver aid remained a significant challenge since access was often hindered. Moreover, innocent civilians and other vulnerable groups were sometimes deprived of access to humanitarian aid because of criminal activity, violence and conflict conditions. It was therefore crucial for Governments to guarantee access, and for all parties involved in conflicts to respect international humanitarian law in that regard.

Draft resolution on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (E/2007/L.15)

The PRESIDENT noted that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

Ms. FELLER (Mexico), as facilitator for the draft resolution, drew the attention of the Council to two minor editorial changes to the draft: in operative paragraph 8 the word “those” should be replaced by “these”; and in operative paragraph 11, the word “by” should be inserted before the word “contributing” and before “facilitating”.

Draft resolution E/2007/L.15, as orally amended, was adopted.

Mr. HOLMES (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said the international community should remember that the agencies and organizations operating on the frontlines of humanitarian response had to cope with an increasingly difficult, complex and unsafe environment and that the success of their life-saving efforts depended on the hard work and sacrifices of those in the field.

Draft resolution E/2007/L.14 reflected the progress made in improving humanitarian methods and operations, and its adoption was an acknowledgment of efforts to boost humanitarian response capacity, accelerate the pace at which relief was provided, and improve reliability and accountability through strong leadership and better understanding of needs. However, the success of the international community’s efforts could be measured only in terms of lives and livelihoods saved on the ground.

The cluster approach had been designed to clarify responsibilities and lines of accountability, and provide better mechanisms for coordination and communication with Governments and relevant line ministries. Where clusters had been implemented, Governments had appreciated the clarity and coherence they had brought to the support they received. Nevertheless, he recognized the need to provide more regular information on the cluster approach and on progress made in its implementation. In that regard, an independent evaluation of the implementation of the cluster approach was under way and would be available in 2008. There had been some progress in reducing disaster risk worldwide - as the informal discussions the previous day on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action had shown - but it remained rather uneven.

Many countries still had inadequate institutions and processes, and lacked the expertise, technology and funds to develop them. He therefore encouraged countries that were in a position

to do so to share their wealth of experience and best practices, and to donate expertise and funds to countries in need of such support. Regional and subregional organizations and arrangements would be of increasing relevance in that regard.

The secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) should be supported in its task of fostering widespread engagement and partnerships; and greater resource mobilization was needed to supplement the excellent global facility established by the World Bank. Recent disasters in Japan and Pakistan were clear examples of the importance of risk reduction.

With reference to the discussion on the use of military assets in disaster relief, he noted that all panellists had spoken in favour of such military involvement, at the request of the host Government and when the scale and requirements of emergencies exceeded civilian capacities. There had also been an appeal for greater clarity on how best to apply such specialist capabilities in operations that were, and should remain, a civilian endeavour. He recalled that the panellists from Mexico and Mozambique had described national models that might be expanded or replicated, and he informed the Council that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) had commissioned an independent study on the lessons learned by member States.

As regards the discussions on funding, he noted the recent upward trend in the volume of funds mobilized for humanitarian assistance, the broadening of the donor base, and greater diversity in the agencies and organizations that received humanitarian funds. He also noted increased pressure on the international community to use available funds more efficiently, and to ensure that they were applied more impartially. The pace at which funds were raised had quickened, and they were being used in an increasingly targeted fashion, through a number of approaches. The deputy humanitarian coordinator in Sudan had reported an increasing recognition of the ability of common humanitarian funds or pooled funds to support coordinated and strategic funding of humanitarian activities.

However, there was an awareness of the parallel improvements that such measures required, including more rigorous data-collection methods and needs and impact assessments;

improved sectoral leadership, decision-making and accountability frameworks; more robust management systems at headquarters and in the field, and reduced administrative costs.

He said the development of a humanitarian financing system that adequately and effectively supported humanitarian operations was one of his top priorities. Although the amount of funding registered in mid-2007 was an improvement over previous years, it was still not adequate, and there were rather large disparities in levels of funding available for particular crises and sectors. The need for a more predictable and equitable humanitarian financing system was evident.

Another priority was the task of improving access to populations in specific and practical terms, and he was encouraged by the expressions of support by members of the Council for the principle of access, without which the strengthening of coordination of humanitarian assistance would be in vain. He was also pleased by the continued support for General Assembly resolution 46/182, which constituted the framework that guided the work of the international community in providing emergency assistance.

Welcoming the proposals on enhancing the responsiveness of the Council by convening ad hoc meetings to discuss specific humanitarian emergencies when they arose, he suggested that the Council might proceed along the lines of General Assembly resolution 61/16 in order to raise awareness and promote the engagement of all stakeholders in support of relief efforts.

Coordination segment

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN PROMOTING FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL (continued) (E/2007/L.15)

Draft resolution E/2007/L.15

The PRESIDENT informed the Council that the draft resolution contained no programme budget implications. He said that if he heard no objections, he would take it that the Council wished to adopt draft resolution E/2007/L.15.

Draft resolution E/2007/L.15 was adopted.

The meeting rose at 5.23 p.m.