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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 16 July 2007, at 3 p.m.

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

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

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 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/62/87-E/2007/70,
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Panel discussion on the use of military assets for natural disaster relief

The PRESIDENT said that large-scale disasters, such as the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami, the South Asian earthquake and the floods in Mozambique, had received a high level of support from foreign military assets in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. At a time when the incidence and severity of natural disasters was increasing, military assets continued to be requested, offered and provided by governments in support of humanitarian relief operations. Yet such support had not gone unchallenged. By holding the panel, the Council had recognized the need to take stock of the role played by military assets in response to disasters and to discuss the corresponding challenges. It was hoped that the panel would identify the guidelines and operational practices for the effective delivery and coordination of relief efforts in response to disasters.

Ms. WAHLSTROM (Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator), acting as moderator, noted that the topic had been discussed by the Council in 2005 and that the Oslo Guidelines on the use of military and civilian defence assets in disaster relief had recently been updated.

Mr. DEL ROSAL (Ministry of National Defence, Mexico) said that the tendency for conflicts between States to become less frequent had called into question in the public mind the need to continue investing in military equipment, training, and even in maintaining large armies. However, the emergence of new and alarming challenges had forced States to rethink their concepts of security. They had come to see those challenges, not least from the environmental standpoint, as phenomena so powerful and wide-ranging in scope that they potentially threatened the security and development of all nations.

He said that the role of the Mexican armed forces in the care of disasters was to maintain order, assist victims, protect property and help in the reconstruction of affected areas - functions that forged important links between military personnel, the civilian authorities and society at large. The limitations of civilian institutions in preventing or coping with emergencies made it inevitable for governments to resort to its armed forces in order to respond rapidly to a disaster.

Because of its geographical location and climate, Mexico faced various hazards on the daily life of its nationals, such as earthquakes, fires, severe droughts and volcanic activity, that endangered lives and property and increased the security needs of the civilian population. The involvement of the Ministry of National Defence in the civil protection system in Mexico was regulated by various legislative provisions, which made the Ministry legally responsible for ensuring that the armed forces responded rapidly to emergencies or natural disasters, in close cooperation with the local authorities. The use of the armed forces in civilian relief operations as a rapid response measure, and not simply as a means of last resort, had helped to reduce loss of life and material damage in the context of disasters.

Since disasters did not respect borders and caused incalculable damage, particularly in countries that lacked well-defined civil protection structures, Mexico had long been sending humanitarian assistance to various countries, primarily in the Americas, such assistance being a guiding principle of its foreign policy.

Humanitarian assistance covered a wide range of activities involving help to victims of armed conflicts and natural disasters - the latter in many cases outnumbering the former. Humanitarian assistance, which was provided without charge, targeted the most vulnerable or most seriously affected, irrespective of religion, gender, age, nationality or political persuasion. It was assuming increasing importance in a world in which natural hazards were a matter of growing concern to governments everywhere.

In order to prevent and mitigate the effects of natural disasters, and assist affected countries, the Mexican Government had set up a unit under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the participation of the Ministry of National Defence. Emergency assistance included the

dispatch of medical, food and building supplies, search-and-rescue operations, and the provision of advice and training to civilian and military authorities responsible for emergencies, in strict observance of the wishes and sovereignty of the receiving State.

Aid was dispatched abroad in Mexican armed forces aircrafts and accompanied by unarmed military specialists. Relief supplies were usually received by Heads of State and invariably channelled through the armies of the receiving States. Humanitarian aid was either offered spontaneously by the President of the Republic of Mexico in a gesture of solidarity to an ally that had experienced a natural disaster, or was requested directly by the Head of State of the affected country. Such requests were submitted by affected States when local capacity, availability or resources had been overwhelmed by the scale of the emergency. As soon as the decision to deploy aid was made, the President of the Republic convened the members of the national civil protection system to identify what type of aid was needed and available. The Mexican armed forces then initiated the national civilian protection plan, and government officials were sometimes sent to the affected country to carry out a first-hand assessment of the situation. The procedures and techniques used by military personnel on humanitarian assistance missions abroad were the same as those applied nationally, but emergency relief personnel acted strictly in accordance with the operational mandate of the recipient country.

The tasks carried out by the humanitarian assistance team included preliminary damage assessment; search, rescue, salvage and evacuation of the population from the disaster area; and the provision of medical and dental care. Military personnel participating in humanitarian assistance teams were aware that their activities in foreign countries must be based on the principles of self-determination of peoples, non-intervention and prohibition of the use of force and be guided by respect for human rights, maintaining the positive image of the Mexican army and avoiding irresponsible action that might in any way thwart the purpose of their humanitarian mission.

The use of military assets in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to countries affected by natural disasters was a guarantee of timely, efficient and coordinated action, reflecting the organizational skills and discipline of the armed forces. Before receiving humanitarian assistance

teams that included military personnel, recipient countries should make it clear that such support was interpreted as a gesture of friendship from an ally that wished to ensure that relief was provided in the most professional manner possible.

Mr. GRAISSE (Senior Deputy Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)) said that there was no doubt about the value of military assets in responding to the logistics challenges presented by natural disasters. The World Food Programme (WFP) had repeatedly benefited from such cooperation, most recently in response to the 2007 Mozambique flood crisis, and earlier in the aftermath of the earthquake in South Asia and the Indian Ocean tsunami event.

Military services were trained and equipped to respond to crises at short notice. The United Nations was also equipped to respond to emergencies, but was faced with more crises than it had reserves, and often lacked the manpower and equipment to deal with large-scale emergencies. While the logistical capacity of the United Nations system was considerable, it was not always sufficient to respond immediately to major emergencies. No single humanitarian agency or conglomeration of agencies had the logistical response capacity of a sophisticated army.

One question that should be addressed was whether the international community was adhering to the “last resort” concept for the use of military assets, as advocated in the Oslo Guidelines on the use of military and civilian defence assets for natural disaster relief, or whether it had recognized that natural disasters required greater pragmatism. The non-binding Oslo Guidelines clearly stated that foreign military and civil defence assets should be requested only in the absence of a comparable civilian alternative and only when those assets could meet a critical humanitarian need; and that the use of military or civil defence assets must therefore offer a unique capability and availability. It could be argued that, while the use of military assets such as a heavy airlift could legitimately be seen as a last resort in certain natural disaster situations, it was strictly speaking a case of unique availability rather than unique capability. Whereas in a complex emergency situation, particularly a combat zone, the military was often uniquely capable of providing the necessary equipment and expertise, such technical capability was not a necessity in natural disasters, where the commercial sector was capable of meeting that

particular need. However, the humanitarian community had to be pragmatic and to recognize that the scale of a disaster might call for assets that exceeded those found on the open market. In the case of a 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, for example, the international humanitarian response would not have been sufficient without the enormous help of the Pakistani army with the additional support of military air contingents and other contributions from the developed world.

Another issue was that of who paid for the use of military assets, and how it affected humanitarian budgets. States that provided military assistance at the request of humanitarian agencies did not typically use the budget of the Defence Ministry for non-combat or relief operations, but passed on the cost to other ministries. Uncertainty as to which department should bear the cost often delayed the deployment of available assets. Moreover, humanitarian agencies, which did not know the true cost of military contributions until long after the event, could find that the military cost had to be absorbed within the overall aid budget, with the result that it might have been preferable for them to pursue more economical commercial options.

He believed that ministries with responsibility for foreign affairs and development agencies should hold discussions with their defence ministries on the funding of their deployments in such a way that their level of multilateral contributions to humanitarian organizations were not affected. At the same time, the international community should conduct a comparative analysis on the cost and efficacy of the use of military assets as opposed to commercially contracted support so that donors and humanitarian agencies could make informed decisions on the timing of offers and requests for assistance.

Two recent crises, the South East Asia earthquake and the conflict in Lebanon, had highlighted the value of being able to call on a joint national military-civilian response coordinating body. As a result, Lebanon and Pakistan had further improved their potential response capacity by establishing national disaster management authorities with the aim of including military and civilian assets in national preparedness plans. A question to be addressed was when and how such national capacities should request and coordinate foreign military assistance as part of their disaster reduction initiatives. A further need was to develop the foreign militaries' understanding of the "cluster" or field coordination approach to the management of disaster relief operations and, more generally, to promote joint preparedness activities among all actors as part of a proactive, rather than a reactive, response to disasters.

He believed that the targeted use of military assets in natural disasters, developed in a manner fully consistent with humanitarian principles and the Oslo Guidelines, constituted a very important factor in the efficient and timely provision of humanitarian relief.

Ms. JOHNSON (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the issue of the use of military assets in natural disaster relief and of cooperation with the military at the national level was an important one for her Federation, which was involved in hundreds of emergency situations every year. Governments had a responsibility to develop response plans that defined the roles and responsibilities of ministries and other national actors, including civil society organizations such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent national society, as well as the military. The military often had tremendous resources that, when used to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance and in urgent life-saving actions, could help ensure effective disaster response. The contribution of the Pakistani and foreign militaries following the earthquake in 2005 in Pakistan was an example of a situation where military assets had made a real difference.

The main roles of the military should however be limited to short-term life-saving actions, logistical support, such as transport, and engineering, for example road repair. Front-line interaction with affected communities should be left to experienced neutral and independent humanitarian actors known to and respected by the communities concerned, such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent. Effective humanitarian action required experience and the ability to dialogue with the affected populations and tailor the humanitarian response to their needs. That was especially important in humanitarian operations in areas afflicted by conflict or civil strife and tension, where the attitude of the community to the presence of the military, national or foreign, must likewise be taken into account. As the response operation extended through recovery there was less justification for the use of military assets, and long-term development efforts were best left to humanitarian actors and government ministries.

In recent years the Federation had been preparing a project on International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles, which also addressed the issue of the increased use of military assets. Since May 2006, consultations had been held with more than 100 Governments, 100 national societies and 40 international humanitarian organizations, and an international conference on the subject would be held in Geneva in November 2007. The purpose of the

project was to promote preparedness by providing Governments with legal and regulatory guidance for international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance. Its article 11 stated that military assets should be deployed only at the request and with the consent of the receiving State, should be time-limited, should be a last resort and should only be used to complement civil society actors if the latter were incapable of meeting the needs of the population. Military personnel should be unarmed and wear their national uniform unless otherwise agreed with the affected State.

The project, in particular its article 11, complemented the Oslo Guidelines on the use of military and civilian defence assets for natural disaster relief, which acknowledged the contribution the military could make in relief operations as well as the potential danger of their unrestricted use, and called for limiting their use to last resort situations and to a supporting role only. The Federation supported the Oslo Guidelines and was working to promote their increased use. It also looked forward to widespread international participation at the upcoming international conference on its draft guidelines and to their adoption as an important contribution to more effective humanitarian action.

Mr. ZUCULA (National Disaster Management Institute (INGC), Mozambique) said that emergency response could be divided into an initial search-and-rescue phase, followed by delivery of services to the affected population; military assets could play an important role in both phases. In 2000-2001 in Mozambique the military had basically acted effectively yet independently during search-and-rescue operations. The delivery of services phase had however been characterized by lack of coordination between civilian and military actors, leading to confusion in the loading and transportation of assistance, causing backlogs and bottlenecks; the delivery of the wrong goods to the wrong areas at the wrong time; and a tendency by the military to try to take control of operations in the absence of a civilian control structure.

In 2000-2001 the actors involved had simply reacted to the situation on an ad hoc basis. That had underscored the need for disaster preparedness planning and had led to the establishment of a permanent civilian mechanism comprising representatives of Government, donors, the United Nations system and the local armed forces. Effective coordination with the local armed forces was in fact essential to ensuring the efficient use of foreign military assets. In Mozambique, a General had been seconded to that coordination mechanism and had been

involved in all stages of disaster planning, from early warning to monitoring, search and rescue and delivery of assistance. That officer had been able to ensure coordination of military and civilian efforts as well as of national and foreign military assets.

The existence of a coordination mechanism between the armed forces of Mozambique and the armed forces of South Africa had provided the basis for joint command of national and foreign military assets. Search-and-rescue operations, including the use of foreign military assets, had been overseen by the National Civil Protection Unit, which included representatives from the armed forces, the National Disaster Management Institute, the national society of the Red Cross, and civil society; that body was responsible for the use of foreign military assets in search-and-rescue operations. On the other hand, foreign military assets used for delivery of goods and services would fall under the responsibility of the normal Government and United Nations emergency assistance framework.

Ms. BAILES (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)) said that the Institute was engaged in an empirical review of the response to a number of recent natural disasters, in which foreign military assets had played an important role, particularly when civilian capacity to provide humanitarian relief had been inadequate. Changing government policies and the unpredictability of natural disasters might further contribute to the trend toward the deployment of military assets in the context of natural disasters.

Currently foreign military assets were predominantly deployed through ad hoc bilateral arrangements, often in countries where the military was the only organization equipped to respond to natural emergencies. Requests for or offers of military assistance were typically routed through military channels and often facilitated by existing relationships between the militaries concerned, for example between the Pakistani and British militaries following the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. Many countries with experience in the bilateral provision of military assistance were of the opinion that a bilateral arrangement was more efficient than a multilateral framework.

Experience suggested however that bilateral assistance could give rise to problems of coordination: gaps in or duplication of services provided and lack of consultation with the

affected country, leading to the deployment of inappropriate assets. Affected countries also did not receive adequate assistance to help them make targeted requests for assistance; a better understanding of the country's needs would help avoid supply-driven provision of military assets that tended to be based more on the provider's political agenda. Furthermore, lack of coordination was exacerbated by the practical effects of what might be called multi-bilateralism on the ground. The deployment of United Nations Disaster and Coordination (UNDAC) teams could play a useful role in helping affected countries assess their needs and ensure assets provided matched those needs and were channelled through a coordinated framework. That would however require the strengthening of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in particular its Civil-Military Coordination Section.

Countries often did not have standardized procedures for responding to natural disasters, either in their own territories or in other countries, although recently some countries that had provided military assets for disaster response had taken steps in that direction. The United Kingdom for example had drafted an inter-agency memorandum to clarify and improve the process. Similarly, some countries had strengthened their domestic emergency management structures. As a result, Mozambique, for example, had responded more effectively to the floods of 2007 and reduced its need for foreign military assets. The Oslo Guidelines provided a framework for the use of foreign military assets for international disaster relief assistance but were not consistently applied due to a lack of awareness of them in a number of provider countries, particularly in the military.

A pervasive issue in the debate on the use of military assets was that of cost effectiveness. There was however little clarity on how the deployment of those assets was financed in the provider countries. The Institute's initial finding was that while in some countries the full costs of such deployments were borne by the agencies responsible for humanitarian assistance, it appeared increasingly common practice to charge only the additional costs incurred for humanitarian operations, thereby reducing the burden on humanitarian agencies. For example, the additional costs incurred by the United Kingdom Department for International Development for the use of military assets during the South Asian earthquake had been 1.8 million pounds, which did not seem enormous given the context.

There needed to be a wider discussion about the competence and suitability, not just the relative cost, of the use of military assets in disaster response. Military assets could be useful in ensuring the immediate delivery of relief assistance but generally were not efficient or desirable during the rehabilitation phase once civilian and trained humanitarian actors could take over.

Mr. GUIMARES (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that in recent years both the developed and the developing countries had been struck by major natural disasters. The developing countries were however often more vulnerable to the short- and long-term effects of such disasters. In an era of climate change natural disasters posed a global threat that must be taken seriously. While humanitarian organizations should play the leading role in disaster response, experience had shown that national and international military forces could play an important part in search-and-rescue efforts and, where appropriate, the delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly in the early stages of an emergency when civilian capacity was not yet available. The use of military assets should of course be cost-effective and at the request of affected governments.

He stressed the importance of compliance with: the Oslo Guidelines, which Member States should integrate into their preparedness plans; the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality; and the relevant provisions of international law. The use of military assets, whether provided bilaterally or multilaterally, should also be based on assessed needs and be appropriate to the situation on the ground. That required that the affected government and humanitarian actors rapidly provide accurate information. Successful coordination of the use of military assets increased efficiency, as had been the case in the 2007 flood response in Mozambique, where assets had been coordinated by a joint operations centre. Such efforts should be emulated in order to avoid bottlenecks, delays and duplication in the distribution of relief supplies.

Military assets should only be used as a complement to existing relief mechanisms; their use should be exceptional and proportional to needs. Prevention and risk reduction strategies should however be the norm and constitute a first line of defence. In that context he recalled the priorities set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action, which would play a key role in disaster

reduction. The European Union would continue to strengthen its capacity for rapid response to natural disasters but at the same time acknowledged the merit in the use of military assets as appropriate in relief operations.

He asked the panellists for suggestions on how Member States could integrate military assets into response mechanisms in a way that made local actors and partners feel comfortable with their presence. He also wondered if the panellists could provide examples of the most successful use of military assets and indicate what factors had contributed to that success.

Mr. CONDORI-CHALLCO (Bolivia) expressed his Government's gratitude to the Mexican military, which had coordinated the armed forces of other countries in assisting Bolivia in the aftermath of the recent floods that had affected more than 170,000 families. It was clear that the Oslo Guidelines did not suggest that the potential of the armed forces in emergency situations should no longer be exploited. However, the armed forces, at least in his country, required training to ensure proper interaction with other actors in emergency situations, particularly as the military needed to adapt to the emergency operation centres being organized on a functional rather than hierarchical basis.

He agreed that it was necessary to consider the additional resources or costs that the intervention of military assets would involve. He asked Mr. Zucula to comment on the causes of a lack of coordination among civilian organizations in emergency response situations. He also asked Ms. Bailes what criteria were used when deciding when to request the support of the armed forces.

Mr. HAYEE (Pakistan) said that the role of the Pakistani military in responding to the 2005 earthquake had indeed been one of the success stories of the use of military assets in mitigating the effects of a major natural disaster. With regard to the proposed future discussions on the Oslo Guidelines, he said that his delegation considered that any discussion on the use of military assets in a natural disaster situation should be based on the premise that the clear consent of the affected State was required. His delegation looked forward to the outcome of the IFRC proposal.

He asked the panellists to elaborate on how bilateral arrangements for the provision of military assets could result in their inefficient use. He wished to know whether there were any

criteria to determine which assets should be used in a given situation. He would like to know to what extent the fact that military forces already present in a region were used if the area was struck by a disaster might be an incentive for the prior deployment of military forces in a region and how such a situation was reconciled with the principle of last resort.

Although he recognized that cost was an important element in the discussion on the use of military assets, it became relatively less important when weighed against the precious lives of human beings that were at stake.

Ms. ECKEY (Observer for Norway) said that the capacity of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) at headquarters and field level was a key issue, and the reform of OCHA was crucial to ensuring that the humanitarian coordinators in the field had the necessary capacity and authority to coordinate both civilian and military operations, which would hopefully lessen the problem of bilateralization. OCHA reform should be seen in the context of wider United Nations reform and more integrated United Nations field missions.

Norway supported the SIPRI study, and participated in the working group on the subject. Civilian humanitarian activities were constantly being evaluated, and the use of military assets should come under the same scrutiny. She encouraged SIPRI to examine the cost of alternatives to using military assets, that is, what could alternatively be provided commercially or by the civil society sector, rather than solely the relative cost of the additional humanitarian efforts. The military should be used solely for complementarity.

She asked the panellists to elaborate more on the wider implications of the use of military assets, in particular when natural disasters occurred in zones where there was ongoing conflict. Finally, she noted that the use of military assets should take account of the gender perspective and the consequences for the local population.

Ms. SMITH (Observer for Australia) said that her country was an active provider of military assets in natural disaster response, particularly in its region. Australia was involved in regular responses in the South Pacific, for example in the aftermath of cyclones and droughts in Papua New Guinea. In Australia, there was close collaboration between the Australian aid agency (OZAID) and the defence forces in responses to natural disasters and other situations.

In that context, it was important to take due account of the differences in the humanitarian and military institutional cultures. She noted that the current head of the humanitarian section in the Australian aid agency was a former member of the defence forces, which gave him a unique perspective.

She said she agreed with the need for further reflection on the definition of the concept of last resort, as a civilian capacity was meaningless if it could not be deployed in a timely manner, and she would be interested to hear how such reflection would be undertaken.

Bearing in mind that natural disasters often occurred in areas of ongoing conflict or tension, she wondered whether the issue of security for humanitarian and military personnel was being addressed, and how the two studies under way on military assets were coordinated.

Mr. BONSER (Canada) agreed that the civilian sector was best suited to the vast majority of humanitarian tasks, but that there were instances in which military forces had specific assets that could be used to support civilian humanitarian efforts. Canada had deployed military assets as part of a wider civilian humanitarian response to situations such as the 2005 tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake.

With a view to further disseminating and building understanding around the Oslo Guidelines domestically, within the federal departments, the development agency, the Foreign Ministry and the military, it had been decided to develop internal Canadian Government guidelines that mirrored the Oslo Guidelines and ensured a firm understanding of the principles of last resort and neutrality, among others. Canada had employed those guidelines in real operational contexts in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, for example. His delegation strongly supported OCHA's role in disseminating the Oslo Guidelines. He asked what role Member States could play in further disseminating and raising awareness of the Guidelines, and what role they could play in ensuring that, when provided, military assets made a significant difference on the ground in real time.

Mr. NAMBA (Japan) noted that all of the panellists had insisted on the importance of the role of military assets. Yet the fact that rescue and medical activities were performed successfully by civilian teams must be taken into account. He recognized the capacity of military assets: indeed, in the aftermath of the severe earthquake in his country that morning, and a

typhoon the day before, local government had requested the defence forces to engage in rescue activities. However, Japan exercised great caution in sending its defence team abroad, and relevant Japanese legislation stipulated that the defence forces should only be dispatched as part of international disaster relief missions when deemed necessary by the Foreign Minister, in consultation with the Minister for Defence. He urged other Member States to likewise exercise caution when considering whether to send military teams.

He noted that if the Government of the affected country continued to function well in the aftermath of the disaster, coordination of foreign rescue teams, including military assets, could be performed on a bilateral basis. However, as Governments in affected countries were not always in a position to do so, it was necessary for the coordination role to be played by neutral organizations. In that respect, the role of the United Nations, particularly OCHA, was very important. He asked the panellists how OCHA could be consolidated and encouraged to assume that important responsibility in affected countries.

Mr. THEVENAZ (Observer for Switzerland) said that, although humanitarian aid was a genuine civilian task, military assets often bridged a gap. Responsibility for response rested with the affected States and authorized international assistance, including foreign military assets; regional organizations could play a supporting role in capacity-building. The United Nations assumed the standard-setting and coordination function, and the Oslo Guidelines were the main pillar for the coordination of civilian and military disaster relief operations. Switzerland had a long tradition of civil/military practice in disaster relief. Switzerland implemented the Oslo Guidelines, engaged in constant dialogue with neighbouring countries and regional organizations, and would continue to support OCHA civilian and military coordination activities. He asked Ms. Bailes how she saw the role of regional mechanisms and whether they could be considered a solution to overcome the doubts raised with regard to bilateral activities. He drew the Council's attention to a document prepared by his delegation on the issue, which was available in the meeting room.

Ms. ATTFIELD (United Kingdom) said that her delegation fully endorsed the statement made on behalf of the European Union. The United Kingdom had taken some practical steps on the issue of the use of military assets in emergency response situations. A Memorandum of Understanding had been drawn up between the Department for International Development

(DFID) and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that there were strong links between the two departments and the key personnel involved in disaster response. Thus, when DFID instituted very early assessment of a disaster situation, it had access to all the necessary expertise to ensure that decisions could be made as rapidly as possible on whether military capabilities might be called upon. The fact that DFID had been established as the lead agency for humanitarian affairs meant that when the military were called upon to act in support of humanitarian operations in third countries, it was clear that the lead was from the humanitarian agency perspective, which reassured recipient governments of their intent. She said that her delegation would be happy to share a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding with other participants.

Mr. ZUCULA (National Disaster Management Institute, Mozambique) said that there was a great potential risk of lack of coordination among civilian actors in emergency situations. In Mozambique, for example, one or two emergency simulations were organized every year, involving various government actors, donors and civil society. Nonetheless, when a disaster actually occurred, actors that had not participated in the simulation exercise were also involved in the emergency response. For the most part, those actors brought with them their own institutional culture and a different approach to disaster management, which, while not incorrect, created the potential for lack of coordination. It was the responsibility of those outside actors to adapt to the system in place in the recipient country.

He agreed that there was a need for further discussion on the concept of last resort, as at present there appeared to be differing interpretations of when that principle should be applied. Contingency planning was also an important element for governments, as it allowed them to predict what could happen in their country and what their capacity to respond would be so that they would know at what stage, if at all, it would be necessary to request military assistance.

Ms. BAILES (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) said that while her Institute's study would not set a golden rule for when military assets should be used for disaster relief, it would make relative assessments of the value of using the military. Military assets should not be used if they were being sent to interfere in a country or gain a strategic advantage, or to compete, or to be trained, and the consent of the legitimate Government of the host country was crucial in order to establish that the engagement of the military met those conditions. A strong national military in the host country was often useful in ensuring the success of external

military intervention. International standards stated the importance of true impartiality of the military in humanitarian circumstances, which, along with genuine humanitarian motives, should be the primary consideration of those providing aid. Account must also be taken of local cultural and security conditions in deciding whether to use military assistance. While in some countries public confidence in the military was great, in others - particularly those experiencing civil conflicts - the military were not trusted, and particular sensitivity was required if the armed forces were to be involved in humanitarian relief efforts.

In certain cases, international forces might already be present in the host country for peacekeeping or monitoring missions, and could therefore assist in humanitarian relief if necessary. Those forces represented the international community, were known to be impartial, were aware of the local security conditions and were not likely to exacerbate the conflict in the country concerned. In very sensitive situations of internal conflict, an international flag over the military assets entering the country was particularly important to avoid misunderstanding of the intention of that intervention. Some countries and organizations deployed forces for reasons of defence or surveillance in areas that later became subject to natural disasters. In such cases disaster relief could be a secondary function for those forces.

Criteria for deciding whether military assets were required in disaster relief included the scale of the disaster, particularly if there had been large-scale damage to public infrastructure; and the location of the disaster, particularly if it had taken place in an extreme physical location, such as at high altitude or in a remote area. Military options should always be weighed against civilian options, which should also include commercial options. Contingency planning and exercises on the demand side would allow an assessment of the civilian and commercial assets available and those that would be required from external sources. Countries that provided assistance and disaster relief could conduct an assessment of the assets at their disposal and experiences of past cases. Regional organizations that worked together for humanitarian or development reasons and for security reasons could establish what accumulated assets they had and coordinate and harmonize their responses. The European Union was making efforts in that regard, through efforts for policy coordination, particularly in respect of the implementation of the Oslo Guidelines.

Ms. JOHNSON (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), responding to the issues raised by the European Union and Japan on national and community capacity, said that it was important to bear in mind that when a disaster occurred the first life-saving actions came from neighbours and families, and increasing their long-term capacity to respond in disaster situations was the work of national societies and local governments. The short-term response to a disaster situation should aim to enhance in the long-term the capacities of the affected community. Humanitarian actors should be able to conduct quick and comprehensive needs assessments to establish the specific vulnerabilities of certain social groups, such as women, children and the disabled, through action and interaction with those communities.

In the event that governments considered using the military in humanitarian action and disaster response, military personnel must be trained, particularly on methods of interaction with other humanitarian actors, in order to ensure respect and understanding for the roles and responsibilities of all those participating in a disaster response. Short-term action taken by the military, particularly in conflict-affected areas, must take account of the experiences of the local community and how it might perceive military involvement. Efforts must be made to understand the potential impact of deploying different kinds of actors to participate in a disaster response.

IFRC had launched its International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles Programme based on a mandate given to it in 2003 to research ways to improve delivery of international disaster relief and recovery assistance. On the basis of its findings, IFRC had drafted guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance, intended to facilitate effective humanitarian assistance in a range of contexts.

Mr. GRAISSE (Senior Deputy Executive Director, World Food Programme) said that relief work in Pakistan, Mozambique and following the 2004 tsunami were the most recent examples of cooperation in disaster responses. Further back in history the Australian Air Force had been instrumental in assistance in Timor-Leste. Although there were a number of good examples of military cooperation in humanitarian responses, military involvement could also be problematic, since the military required greater physical space in which to operate than civilian

organizations for security reasons, which increased the cost of their involvement. While he agreed that no price could be put on saving a life, any resources saved could be made available for other aspects of relief operations. The cost of the use of military assets could be particularly high. It was often useful to use local military personnel in relief operations, since they had a good knowledge of local languages and cultural specificities. Similarly, there had been great advantages of working with the Singapore and Malaysian military during the tsunami in Indonesia. While the military had made efforts to learn how to work alongside humanitarian organizations, those organizations, similarly, must ensure that their staff were trained to work in cooperation with the military. WFP ensured that it had military experts among its personnel in the field where necessary, and often purchased second-hand military equipment, such as vehicles.

Turning to the issue of coordination and the role of OCHA, he said that when WFP representatives entered a conflict zone they always consulted with the OCHA Civil-Military Coordination Section for advice on certain activities and logistical issues regarding the use of military assets. Regarding search and rescue, he said that during the floods in Mozambique, South African military helicopters had been used for rescue operations. WFP had collaborated with the South African military in an agreement to fund helicopter fuel and subsistence costs for the crew in order to continue operations in Mozambique during the crisis. Military assistance was also useful in operations that required heavy-lifting equipment, and in search-and-rescue operations.

Mr. DEL ROSSAL IBARRA (Ministry of Defense, Mexico) said that greater order was required in the national civil protection system in Mexico, and a coordination agent had been appointed to ensure that the work of the bodies of that system was harmonized. The armed forces were present throughout the territory of Mexico, and had contacts at the municipal, regional and State government levels in order to ensure the protection of local areas and provision of assistance to the civilian population. Experience in military involvement in humanitarian operations had demonstrated the need to establish a culture of civil protection within the armed forces. The military education services had successfully participated in coordination and simulation exercises in that regard. A number of funds were in place to provide the national civilian protection system with financial resources. Those included funds for disaster

prevention, to address unforeseen crisis situations and a private initiative in cooperation with the Federal Government that worked to develop the necessary infrastructure, education and projects to mitigate the aftermath of disasters. Turning to the issue of regional experience, he said that joint courses with civil personnel and other military services had been established to provide a coordinated response to disaster situations by people with a shared linguistic and cultural background.

Ms. WAHLSTROM (Moderator) said that when OCHA had been established, civil and military coordination support was one of the tasks assigned to it. OCHA activities focused on training in many areas of the world where armed forces were working in humanitarian and disaster situations. An advanced course had recently been developed to establish a strong cadre of senior staff with greater experience and policy awareness and an ability to engage with senior operational staff in the international humanitarian community. Learning from the tsunami, the advantages of working with the military had been acknowledged, and OCHA had therefore invested in permanent staff to train to work with the military. The concept of last resort was flexible, and a consultative group on the use of military and civilian defence assets was currently discussing the definition and context of interpretation of that term. With regard to the dissemination of the Oslo Guidelines at the national level, possible approaches mentioned included their integration in national guidelines or the establishment of policies within national frameworks on interaction with civil and military resources. The Oslo Guidelines would hopefully serve as a platform for developing relevant collaboration at the national and international levels, drawing on the many good practices to be shared between countries, including national models in terms of competences, practical experience and subregional and regional collaboration.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.