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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Monday, 16 July 2007, at 10 a.m.

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

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

### **Debate on humanitarian questions**

**Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance** (Item 5 of the agenda) (A/62/87-E/2007/70, A/62/72-E/2007/73, A/62/83-E/2007/67, A/61/699-E/2007/8, A/61/699/Add.1-E/2007/8/Add.1, A/62/94-E/2007/83)

**Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) presented the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/62/87-E/2007/70). Although some progress had been made in the period under review, especially in respect of the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the peace processes in Nepal and northern Uganda and ongoing reconstruction in southern Sudan, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons had greatly increased, the extent of sexual violence remained alarming, natural disasters were resulting in more and more victims and destruction, and numerous conflicts were still rife. There was an ongoing pressing need, therefore, to establish a concerted response system capable of responding to current and future humanitarian challenges.

Since 2005, considerable progress had been made towards improving the effectiveness of the emergency humanitarian relief provided by United Nations agencies. National and local partnerships had been consolidated. A global humanitarian aid mechanism encompassing all United Nations humanitarian agencies, competent NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the IOM had been put in place and had espoused a series of principles with respect to partnership, namely equality, transparency, results-oriented action, responsibility, and complementarity. Moreover, the principle of sectoral responsibility, established to improve coordination of responses so as to ensure the predictability, responsibility, and effectiveness of humanitarian operations, made it possible to strengthen local resources and to maintain appropriate contact with national and local authorities, while — at the global level — reconstituting stocks of materials and files of competent personnel. Action by sectoral groups had been welcomed by the beneficiary countries, such as Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Mozambique, but as the

sectoral responsibility principle gained more widespread acceptance, an effort would have to be made to pay more heed to women's issues, the environment and HIV/AIDS, and to work more closely with the countries. For that, the support of the Member States was essential.

As regards financing, the measures taken to improve the global appeal procedure and the joint humanitarian action plans that go with it by adopting a more rigorous project approval system, more systematic analysis of needs and greater NGO participation, had begun to bear fruit. Donors had become more generous. The Central Emergency Response Fund had yielded good results, with the volume of contributions announced for 2007 amounting to US\$ 346 million, thanks to harmonization of procedures, the provision of training and guidance, and more refined financing criteria. The joint humanitarian funds used, for instance, in Sudan and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the humanitarian emergency response funds had made it possible to meet needs swiftly by mitigating certain shortages. However, proper application of the sectoral responsibility principle and rational use of funding mechanisms required qualified humanitarian coordinators, which depended, in turn, on improved recruitment mechanisms.

Nevertheless, there was little to be gained by being more effective, expeditious and reliable if there was no access to populations in need. The fundamental principle of free access, extolled every year by the General Assembly, really had to be implemented in practice by guaranteeing access for humanitarian personnel, safely and without let or hindrance, and transportation of their supplies and equipment. It was important, in that regard, to improve safety conditions on the ground by striving more actively to reduce bureaucratic obstacles — a process that had begun in Sudan and in Gaza, even though in each of those cases the measures adopted needed to be consolidated and expanded — and to bring about greater recognition of the independence and impartiality of humanitarian action, while insisting on respect for the cultures, traditions and customs of the countries in which actions were carried out. This task was all the more important now that it was becoming increasingly commonplace for private enterprises and military resources to participate in humanitarian activities,

thereby potentially altering response conditions and the way humanitarian personnel were perceived.

In order for it to remain ready to respond swiftly, effectively and predictably, the humanitarian system — which would no doubt be increasingly in demand in coming years — had to continue to improve its response capacity to growing needs at the global, regional, and local level; strengthen the means at the disposal of national and local authorities and regional organizations for reducing vulnerability; support humanitarian assistance financing mechanisms and harmonize their use; carry out a more accurate assessment of needs and use of funds; and promote acceptance of the fundamental principles of humanitarian aid and international humanitarian law.

To conclude, Mr. Holmes emphasized that humanitarian assistance was not steered by any one group of countries, nor did it serve some hidden political design or programme. Rather, it was the concern of all and sought only to come to the aid of the weak, vulnerable, and suffering. He said he had no doubt that the work of the Economic and Social Council and of the General Assembly would lead not only to greater strategic effectiveness in operations but also to firmer commitment to the principles and practice of humanitarian assistance.

**Mr. Inomata** (Joint Inspection Unit) presented the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled “Towards a United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Disaster Response and Reduction: Lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster” (A/61/699-E/2007/8). This report was geared to endowing the United Nations system with increased capacity to coordinate and sustain humanitarian assistance for disaster response and reduction by integrating programme and resource management and coordination and by simplifying and standardizing operational, administrative, and financial practices relating to disaster response and reduction. The unprecedented scale and transboundary nature of the tsunami disaster and the enormous volume of resources mobilized by the international response it triggered required highly complex operations and revealed the shortcomings of the global humanitarian system in its current state. Particularly glaring were: the absence of a governance and management framework for dealing with large-scale disasters, lacunae in humanitarian assistance principles and policies, especially at the inter-agency level, and insufficient mastery and

ownership of those principles by the countries concerned; fragmentation of the humanitarian assistance system; a dichotomy between the disaster relief and reconstruction phases, with the fortunate exception of the Indian case; and a lack of transparency and accountability in the use of funds collected in Flash Appeals, above all during the recovery and reconstruction phase.

To overcome these shortcomings, it was proposed that a United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Disaster Response and Reduction be established, with an intergovernmental mechanism for examining principles and policies and a global framework for resource planning and management. An information management and exchange system should afford a broad idea of actions undertaken by responders at the global, regional and national levels. A core financing mechanism would be put in place with the establishment of a General Special Allocation Fund, which would pool the funds administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), and which would be placed, like the Central Emergency Response Fund, under the aegis of the humanitarian assistance programme.

The JIU report contained 17 recommendations. On behalf of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB), the Secretary-General had subscribed, generally speaking, to most of them and, in particular, had unreservedly approved eight items relating to recommendations 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12. Pursuant to five of the recommendations in question, the Chief Executives would be asked to conduct studies or put forward proposals that would require a decision by the Economic and Social Council. Mr. Inomata stated that the establishment of a United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Disaster Response and Reduction was warranted given the large volume of resources and the diversity of stakeholders involved. For its part, the establishment of an intergovernmental committee was justified inasmuch as it was the only means by which governmental bodies could ensure collective mobilization and management of system resources. Mr. Inomata assured the Chief Executives that the intergovernmental committee would rely on the technical skills and conclusions of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and would base

its decisions solely on their recommendations. Finally, he pointed out that, if properly implemented, many of the JIU recommendations would help to strengthen complementarity between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, given each one's mandate and specific functions.

**Mr. Lalli** (United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB)) presented the note of the Secretary-General (A/61/699/Add.1-E/2007/8/Add.1) containing his observations and those of the Chief Executives regarding the report by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Towards a United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Programme for Disaster Response and Reduction: Lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster" (A/61/699-E/2007/8). The Secretary-General and the Chief Executives recognized the need for better implementation at the national level of multilateral procedures and directives, for stronger national, regional and global disaster risk reduction and response capabilities and for improved collective planning with the participation of the populations affected. Nevertheless, they feared that the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Units might lead to duplication inasmuch as, since the report was compiled, institutional frameworks had been consolidated. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, in particular, established the responsibilities of the different players and advocated the inclusion of risk reduction in all United Nations programmes and national development plans, while the First Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Geneva on 5-7 June 2007, reaffirmed the importance, for implementation of the Framework for Action, of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The United Nations agencies had agreed that it was necessary to avoid overlapping in the mandates of the different coordination organs and mechanisms (such as the Standing Committee and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, and international financial and development institutions), but they feared that the system would remain fragmented if institutional frameworks, instruments, and policies were not coordinated with the United Nations agencies concerned with man-made disasters, post-conflict recovery, including disaster response and reduction activities, peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations, and the whole set of preparedness issues associated with regular development programmes.

The United Nations agencies had approved the recommendation that the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the CEB, should take the initiative to resume the biennial report of the Board on the programmes and resources of the United Nations system covering humanitarian assistance and disaster management and submit it to the Economic and Social Council.

Their observations regarding several of the CEB recommendations were due to the fact that measures had already been adopted in the area they addressed. Recommendation 14, for instance, asking the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive review of the common support services system managed by OCHA, had already been taken into account in the framework of a study commissioned by the Working Group of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in July 2006 in connection with the new approach based on the principle of sectoral responsibility. Overall, the United Nations agencies unreservedly supported the gist of the report to the effect that it was possible to do more to improve the effectiveness of the activities undertaken in the field of disaster response and risk reduction. So they were set on strengthening their cooperation efforts in line with the unity of action principle highlighted in the reform of the United Nations system.

**Ms. Janjua** (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that emergencies posed an increasingly complex challenge for the United Nations system and that it was important to strengthen and more effectively coordinate the international community's response mechanism, as well as to rationalize already existing international arrangements in this field.

Apart from the fact that natural disasters were occurring more frequently and wreaking greater damage, their repercussions in developing countries were exacerbated by poverty. It was therefore important to consider measures capable of strengthening both the response capabilities of disaster-stricken countries and the assistance provided by the international community. In that respect, resolution 46/182 of the General Assembly on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations and the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality built into it remained the basis for any response. Respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity of States had to

continue to shape efforts to coordinate humanitarian assistance. It was primarily up to the affected State to determine what assistance was needed, as well as the mechanisms for coordinating and delivering that assistance. It was important, too, that the United Nations work with the competent authorities at the regional and national levels to build capacity at every level so as to ensure better tailoring and more effective deployment of resources, such cooperation being especially useful for disaster preparedness.

The provision of emergency assistance had to be fitted into the wider scheme of the affected country's recovery and long-term development. That being so, humanitarian assistance should not replace, but rather complement, the cooperation for development associated with the regular activities carried out through United Nations funds and programmes.

With regard to preparedness, it was important to apply the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, in which Priority 5 underscored the need to establish, especially at the national level, the capacities needed to reduce impacts and losses at times of disaster. In that respect, the Group of 77 and China supported the Secretary-General's proposal aimed at supporting the efforts of developing countries through transfers of technology and expertise and the expansion of multisectoral cooperation, especially in the areas of health, sanitation and housing. They also took note of the conclusions of the First Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, held in June 2007.

Since the Economic and Social Council was responsible for supervising coordination of the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) had to report to the Council, possibly at a special session, in the event of a major natural disaster and a request for assistance by the affected country. That would help the international community to assess the magnitude of the disaster and provide the required assistance. In addition, the principle of equitable geographical representation within the Secretariat had to apply to the Office as well; and the next report of the Secretary-General should contain precise data on the composition of the personnel working for the Office at Headquarters and in the field.

Finally, it was important to look more closely at the strengthening of financial mechanisms for humanitarian assistance, including during post-disaster recovery. It was advisable, in that regard, to examine the possibilities afforded by the Central Emergency Response Fund, which should, however, essentially continue to be an instrument for delivering assistance during the initial phase of an emergency. Other sources needed to be explored with a view to making the funds earmarked for humanitarian activities more predictable.

**Mr. Pereira Marques** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia), the stabilization and association process countries and potential candidates (Albania, Montenegro), and the Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, said that humanitarian activities were hampered by obstacles that governments and the United Nations had a duty to remove. Indeed, many organizations had had to suspend operations because of attacks against humanitarian personnel. Solutions had to be found, above all at the regional level, in the framework of the organizations already there.

As for natural disasters, the United Nations had to strengthen its lead role in preparedness and risk reduction, above all in the framework of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery. It was also necessary for States to abide by the priorities established in the Hyogo Framework for Action, especially Priority 5. In that regard, capacity-building and preparedness had been boosted by initiatives undertaken by United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners to train local authorities and provide relief supplies in advance of emergencies. For their part, by attaching importance to preparedness and the drawing up of emergency plans, governments could contribute substantially to a reduction in the human losses and material damage wrought by disasters. Issues affecting women and persons with disabilities had to be addressed without delay in response and reconstruction strategies. Finally, to ensure that a response was useful, it was necessary to gather the accurate data required to assess needs.

The European Union regarded the principle of sectoral responsibility as a tool for enhancing the quality and consistency of humanitarian activities at the global and national levels. The lead institutions should — in close cooperation with others involved and with local authorities — develop rapid mobilization capabilities and draw up files of reserve

personnel. Sectoral groups could play an important part in the transition from the relief phase to development activities by ensuring coordination and strengthening resources in numerous areas, such as assistance for displaced persons, for instance. It would also be necessary for States to respond to the appeal launched in April 2007 for the financing needed to set up humanitarian response facilities all over the world.

Consolidation of the Humanitarian Coordinator System was a key facet of the reform of humanitarian assistance and there was much to be said for compiling a file of qualified individuals and for efforts to improve resident coordinators' knowledge of humanitarian relief issues. The European Union favoured expanding partnerships entered into for humanitarian purposes and encouraged governments, United Nations agencies, other organizations active in the humanitarian and development sector, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and non-governmental organizations to coordinate their activities. In many emergency situations, it was becoming increasingly vital to mobilize the NGOs and, where appropriate, the private sector. In that respect, the Global Humanitarian Platform was well positioned to examine best practices and to seek solutions to the problems encountered.

Humanitarian assistance should be delivered first and foremost by humanitarian organizations, even though the army might have an important logistical role in the transportation of assistance or in search and rescue operations, above all during the initial phase of an emergency. In that respect, it was best for States to follow the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (the Oslo Guidelines) and to incorporate them into their national disaster-related plans and policies.

The Member States of the European Union, which together constituted the principal source of financing for humanitarian assistance, were well aware of the imperative need for swiftness, fairness and flexibility in the provision of such financing and underscored the importance of the different financing mechanisms already available, particularly global appeals and flash appeals, the emergency funds of the competent agencies and the fund pooling mechanisms, including the Central Emergency Response Fund. Appropriate use of the available funds required an accurate grasp of the needs of the beneficiaries and transparency in their allocation, areas in which the

financial monitoring system already in place could make a useful contribution.

**Mr. Ferrari** (Observer for Switzerland) recalled the primacy of civilian humanitarian organizations in emergency assistance, as well as the express mission assigned to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. However, it was legitimate to resort to military assets under certain circumstances, it being understood that the financing of such operations should not come from the humanitarian assistance or cooperation for development budgets. The use of military assets was governed by the Oslo Guidelines. States should specify the distinct spheres of competence of civilian and military responders in their emergency preparedness plans, thereby making a concrete contribution to implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

As regards strengthening humanitarian assistance through improved assessment of the needs of beneficiaries, joint appeals continued to be useful, even though more refined instruments were necessary to gather, analyse and make good use of the data.

It was important to guarantee neutral and impartial humanitarian organizations access to persons needing relief. Switzerland was planning to organize a meeting of experts on the subject at the beginning of 2008, to take stock of the current state of affairs in the light of international law and to work out concrete solutions.

**Mr. Pankin** (Russian Federation) expressed satisfaction with resolution 61/16 of the General Assembly, which entrusted the Economic and Social Council with a broader role in the coordination of international humanitarian assistance.

Efforts to make humanitarian assistance more effective had to be judged by the yardstick of the lessons drawn from the recent large-scale humanitarian crises. In that regard, the United Nations Secretariat, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance in particular, had managed to update the system in place at the global level, based on the work of the Council during its 2005 session. As for application of the principle of sectoral responsibility, where progress had been slower, the Council and the General Assembly should consider a clearer mandate. It would be useful if the Secretariat could provide additional information on the results obtained in the countries in which that principle had been applied on

an experimental basis. States also needed to pay more attention to the proposals of the Emergency Relief Coordinator regarding the updating of the humanitarian assistance financing system and the participation of non-governmental organizations in campaigns orchestrated by the Office.

The greater frequency and increasing magnitude of natural disasters meant that it was necessary to boost the resources available for search and rescue operations, the evacuation of affected populations, and the transportation of assistance, which, in turn, often meant turning to the army. That said, it was important not to blur the distinction between military and civilian operations and to avoid compromising the security of the humanitarian staff of international organizations. The decision to resort to military assets and the forms that recourse takes had to be made by the State concerned, which had sovereign powers in that respect. The Oslo Guidelines could serve as a benchmark, on the understanding that civilian organizations were primarily responsible for humanitarian assistance and that humanitarian activities had to remain independent of any political, economic, military or other objective.

Given the possible reorganization of the external offices of the humanitarian organizations in line with the recommendations put forward by the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence, it was not certain that the measures advocated sufficed to preserve the autonomy of humanitarian responses. It was important to achieve a clearer definition of the respective roles of OCHA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), but OCHA had to continue to be the principal coordination body in the area of humanitarian assistance.

**Mr. Fujisaki** (Japan) said that, in the humanitarian assistance area, the United Nations had come a long way. Above all, thanks to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), important institutional changes had taken place, be it with regard to the activities of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Humanitarian Coordinator System, the introduction of the sectoral responsibility principle, or the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund. The Peacebuilding Commission should also make a useful contribution.

Still to be addressed was the ongoing problem of lack of continuity between humanitarian assistance and development assistance. Governments had still not

convinced themselves of the need to do anything about it. The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security could prove to be a useful tool in that regard.

As for disaster preparedness and rapid response capability, considerable progress had been made: the strengthening of the role of the Disaster Relief Coordinator, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, the initiatives undertaken in the framework of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the work of the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, and the Tsunami Alert System set up under the aegis of UNESCO were all cases in point. Nevertheless, much remained to be done and Japan was determined to contribute to those efforts.

**Ms. Verdugo** (Observer for Chile) said it was important that the United Nations work to strengthen disaster management mechanisms at the national level and that the Economic and Social Council initiate a process open to all actively involved parties of preparing a set of coherent international instruments and establishing an intergovernmental decision-making mechanism. In the case of Chile, the National Office for Emergencies (ONEMI), which comes under the Ministry of the Interior, was responsible for civil defence and, in that capacity, in charge of national policy with regard to natural or man-made disasters.

**Mr. Miller** (United States of America) reaffirmed his country's support for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which plays an essential role in the coordination of international assistance and paid tribute to the vital work carried out by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and by NGOs. He expressed satisfaction, too, with the debate on different mechanisms for financing humanitarian activities. Each Member State had to find its way to take on, as effectively as possible, its share of responsibility for international humanitarian assistance. While financial support was undoubtedly crucial for effective humanitarian operations, certain and untrammelled access to vulnerable populations was equally necessary. It was therefore important that States take steps to ensure that humanitarian workers have access to needy populations, notably in Sudan, Chad and Afghanistan, as the Secretary-General emphasized in his report (A/62/87). The United States reiterated its appeal to all parties, including non-State players, to abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law.

The United States supported the application of disaster reduction measures. To that end, in keeping with the Hyogo Framework for Action, it supported efforts to strengthen national mechanisms. Likewise, it was in favour of the principle of sectoral responsibility, as well as a financial monitoring system. Specifically, it had set up more than 30 underwater observation stations all over the world to assess tsunami threats, and it had cooperated with Thailand in establishing an inter-agency mechanism that would make it possible to improve the Tsunami Alert System. The United States had also helped install a mechanism, in India and Sri Lanka, designed to improve planning in the event of floods, cyclones, and extreme temperatures. Mr. Miller called upon all Member States, the United Nations, NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to work together to achieve swifter and more effective operation of the international humanitarian system.

**Ms. Smith** (Observer for Australia) pointed out that, given the human and economic costs of disasters, it was essential that the United Nations enhance the effectiveness of its actions in that area. For that, it was necessary for the affected countries themselves to be at the forefront of the relief effort. Since the main objective was to achieve concrete results on the spot, it was essential to take women's role into consideration and to promote equality in all aspects of humanitarian responses. It was also indispensable that OCHA continue to play a key role in coordinating those activities.

While welcoming the adoption of the sectoral responsibility principle, which would henceforth be extended to agencies outside the United Nations system, Ms. Smith considered that further improvements were needed and she stressed that accountability was essential. She wanted to know how the sectoral responsibility principle was implemented in the so-called "rapid recovery" phase. At the same time, she supported efforts to improve coordination of civilian and military resources in humanitarian action and called for swift and predictable financing of responses, while recalling that all such measures were useless if access to the affected populations was denied; hence the need to provide better protection for humanitarian personnel. Much could and should still be done to strengthen the role of the United Nations in general, and that of OCHA in particular, in coordinating humanitarian activities.

**Mr. Ghabbasov** (Kazakhstan) said that it was not possible to reform emergency humanitarian assistance without establishing solid natural disaster reduction mechanisms at the regional and national levels. Such a mechanism had been put in place in Kazakhstan, where those issues were handled directly by the Head of State and where, pursuant to domestic legislation, the Government directed the work involved. Kazakhstan had the resources needed to take swift action in the event of a natural disaster and was in a position to furnish assistance to other States on its borders or beyond. For the past several years, humanitarian issues had attracted the attention of the authorities and, in 2007, specific measures were adopted. In June of that year, Kazakhstan received a visit from OCHA representatives and, in September, a United Nations humanitarian assistance office will open in Almaty. The country was geographically well positioned and enjoyed peace and stability and the necessary technical resources to receive humanitarian supplies, store them in its territory, and reship them to affected countries in Asia. That was how Kazakhstan, for its part, intended to contribute to the solution of humanitarian problems.

**Mr. Carvell** (Canada) said that, although the previous year had been marked by some major progress and promising developments, it was important to remain watchful. International responses to crises were still, at best, unequal and humanitarian agencies faced numerous challenges that still had to be overcome in order to assist populations put to the test. Canada shared the concerns of the Secretary-General regarding recurrent obstacles restricting humanitarian access and welcomed the commitment of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to monitor such restrictions more systematically, assess the reasons for them, and bring the most worrying cases to the attention of the Council. As for the security of the increasingly endangered humanitarian personnel, there should be no impunity for those who take it out on those workers and it was up to the Member States to investigate the perpetrators of such assaults.

Canada welcomed the progress made thus far with the reform of humanitarian activities, especially thanks to the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund and to the principle of sectoral responsibility. It supported OCHA's efforts to increase the number of humanitarian action coordinators and enhance their skills.



As for resorting to military assets in responding to natural disasters, Canada considered that the civil sector was better suited for the vast majority of humanitarian tasks, even though, in certain areas, the military had special resources that could be useful in the event of large-scale disasters. It was therefore essential for the Secretary-General to establish more systematic ties with the Member States offering such resources. It was just as important to forge solid ties with regional organizations, in order to ensure respect for the lead role of OCHA for coordination of civilian and military responses. Canada reiterated its support for efforts to reinforce the international humanitarian system, the purpose of which was to improve — through rigorously coordinated, effective, and timely responses — safeguards for the well-being of those who, in times of crisis, depend on the international community.

**Mr. Petranto** (Indonesia), in supporting the statement made by Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, emphasized that, given the growing number of disasters in the world, international humanitarian assistance and the transition from the relief phase to the development phase were important issues that ought to be addressed by the Economic and Social Council. In that context, it was worth stressing the need for full observance of the principles set forth in General Assembly resolution 46/182: neutrality and respect for the sovereignty of states, their territorial integrity, and national unity. Furthermore, humanitarian assistance could only be delivered at the request or with the consent of the affected country.

It would be interesting to ascertain to what extent the principle of sectoral responsibility had facilitated system-wide preparedness, global technical capabilities, and the provision of humanitarian assistance at the national level. In that connection, OCHA could relay information on the use of resources mobilized as a result of the sectoral fund appeals launched in 2006 and 2007. The United Nations and the international community should help developing countries to acquire the capabilities needed for disaster preparedness and planning, as envisaged in Priority 5 of the Hyogo Framework for Action. The assessments by governments regarding their countries' recovery from a natural disaster should be the principal sources for gauging transparency towards donors, the United Nations, and the international community.

As a victim of the 2004 tsunami, Indonesia was conscious of the grave repercussions of natural disasters for development. For that reason it urged the international community to continue supporting efforts to make the transition from the relief phase to development, particularly in order to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

**Mr. Ferrer Rodríguez** (Cuba), who also subscribed to Pakistan's statement on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, emphasized that natural disasters exacerbated poverty in developing countries already suffering the after-effects of colonization in a world that was now more unequal than ever. Climate change and the plethora of natural disasters it triggers were the result of the pollution caused by irrational and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources by huge multinational enterprises bent on feeding the consumer society in developed countries. Unswerving political commitment was needed to tackle this neo-liberal globalization phenomenon. Industrialized countries had to stop wasting their resources on military outlays, change their consumption patterns and face up to their responsibilities, thereby contributing to disaster reduction efforts in developing and least developed countries, while honouring their official commitments in respect of official development assistance.

The increase in humanitarian assistance vis-à-vis official development funding was also worrying: the former was not supposed to replace the latter but rather to complement it. Furthermore, that assistance had been unequally distributed as a result, in particular, of political considerations that had nothing to do with humanitarian concerns.

Cuba had long since striven to reduce natural disasters in its territory and to mitigate their impact, and it had contributed disinterestedly to humanitarian efforts in other countries. Thus, in the wake of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the Cuban Government had created a medical school for Latin American countries to provide cost-free training for medical personnel. It continued to this day to train numerous doctors in a number of developing countries.

**Ms. Moschinskaya** (Belarus) paid tribute to the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the area of emergency relief following natural disasters. The activities undertaken by Belarus to mitigate the effects of the worst technological disaster in history — namely,

Chernobyl — entitled it to express, based on more than 20 years' experience in these matters, its gratitude for the effectiveness of the response of the United Nations, other international organizations and foreign countries that lent assistance to the people of Belarus. It was vital, however, that United Nations agencies improve their coordination and that more be achieved in terms of bilateral cooperation. Belarus had already entered into cooperation agreements with numerous States and was to sign one with the United Nations. Ms. Moschinskaya called upon Member States of the Council to incorporate the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in their national development programmes, thereby greatly improving preparedness for natural disasters. It was also important to strengthen national early warning systems as well as those for assessing damage and mitigating the consequences of natural disasters, while at the same time expanding the financing base, above all by tapping private international funds. It was also advisable to prepare the population more systematically for natural disasters and to improve the training of the personnel responding to emergencies. In Belarus, that work was being done by associations and through classroom courses on the subject. Furthermore, an international centre for training rescue workers had been set up in the Ministry for Emergencies, open to countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other countries. Belarus was ready to participate in the preparation and running of training and exchange programmes for international responders and invited the Member States of the Council to support such an initiative.

**Mr. Ameerajwad** (Sri Lanka), subscribing to the statement made by Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, explained that his country, which had been heavily impacted by the tsunami disaster, had made considerable progress towards a return to normal life, thanks to the Government's determination, the national response, and the support of the United Nations. Thus, 72 per cent of homes had been rebuilt and between 75 and 80 per cent of the population had recovered a means of subsistence. Of the 183 schools destroyed, 134 had been rebuilt and attendance at those schools had returned to normal. The Ministry of Health and development partners had managed to prevent the spread of diseases among the population and a national nutrition policy had been formulated. In the northern and eastern parts of the country hit by the tsunami, the reconstruction and recovery led by the Government had

been swift. Most displaced persons had been able to return home. These achievements were remarkable, given the challenges the country had to face during that period — especially the ongoing conflict — and they could not have occurred without the support of the international community. The lessons learned from that disaster were now being taken into account in efforts to provide emergency assistance to the population living in the areas affected by the conflict. In addition, Sri Lanka had drawn up a 10-year disaster management plan, which was now being implemented, with the participation of numerous stakeholders. The Ministry for Disaster Management was setting up an Early Warning System for all natural disasters. Thanks to the institutional, legal, and strategic frameworks it had established and to the unflinching support of the international community, Sri Lanka was on the way to becoming a safer country.

**Ms. Eckey** (Observer for Norway) noted that humanitarian crises had become more frequent and more complex (in 2006, 143 million people had been affected in 426 natural disasters), a trend that would undoubtedly be confirmed in the coming years due to climate change, population growth, and other factors. It was therefore necessary to rethink development assistance. It was necessary to strengthen political will in the areas of disaster preparedness and risk reduction at every level. The link between risk reduction and effective development had to be spelled out, particularly with a view to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. More attention had to be paid to measures aimed at boosting resilience at the local level. More precise data were also needed on the potential savings that could result from investments in disaster risk reduction mechanisms.

It was therefore encouraging to note that risk reduction now plays a more important part in national and international strategies and that emphasis is now placed on local community preparedness. The conclusions of the First Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in the framework of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction could help countries establish their own national mechanisms.

Norway supported the report on violence against women presented by the Secretary-General in 2006. Acts of sexual or sexist violence were becoming increasingly frequent during humanitarian crises, particularly in conflict situations. Sexist violence was a deliberate tactic of war and one that was also becoming

more frequent when conflicts ended. It was therefore essential to bring those responsible to justice. Impunity, at all levels, was unacceptable.

Recent humanitarian emergencies had shown that military assets do also have a role to play in disaster-related relief operations. It would be advisable to encourage all those intervening, civilian and military, to follow the guidelines on the use of military assets in complex emergency situations and the Oslo Guidelines, and to recognize the key part played by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in that area. Finally, the use of military resources had to depend on demand for them and essentially be geared to providing swift and effective relief to those in need of it.

**Mr. Liang** (China) recalled that 2006 had been a year of numerous disasters all over the world and that the United Nations had provided major assistance, particularly following the earthquake in Yunnan, China, when UNICEF had been quick to assist with US\$ 200,000.

Effective coordination of international assistance required a stronger role for OCHA and enhanced implementation of the sectoral responsibility principle. Parallel to those improvements, it was necessary to expand partnerships and consolidate the global humanitarian assistance mechanism.

While international assistance was essential in the event of a disaster, the affected State had to bear primary responsibility for relief, reconstruction, and the coordination and provision of humanitarian assistance. United Nations agencies should talk to the government concerned, with full respect for the principles of neutrality and impartiality.

Since its establishment in 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund had enjoyed widespread support from the international community, which boosted the United Nations capacity to act and made it possible to overcome the financing problems typical of the initial phase of an emergency. Nevertheless, the international community needed to further increase its contributions to the Fund, especially those that are not earmarked for specific uses, in order to attain the established goal of US\$ 500 million in 2007.

**Mr. Matawanga** (Observer for Kenya) said it was essential to improve coordination of the humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations, given the crucial role that the system

continues to play when natural and other disasters occur and the importance of its neutrality and of its role as a catalyst. Moreover, the multiplication, complexity and increasing intensity of disasters all over the world required coordinated action, particularly with a view to ensuring that assistance is tailored to needs.

Kenya had suffered a number of disasters in recent years and had benefited from international humanitarian assistance, especially in the aftermath of droughts, floods and epidemics. The international community and the United Nations had supported the Government's efforts to assist those affected, although it had to be said, too, that all too often calls for assistance had not resulted in a response capable of meeting the needs of the population.

Kenya insisted that improved coordination of humanitarian assistance required respect for the principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence; the consent of the affected countries and their participation in the humanitarian assistance process; consideration of the Hyogo Framework for Action, particularly as regards capacity-building; care not to resort to a one-size-fits-all approach; implementation of mechanisms encouraging rapid transition from relief operations to development activities; and recourse to local or regional suppliers of humanitarian materials in order to support national development efforts. Furthermore, Kenya hoped for a substantial increase in contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund.

**Mr. Phuangketkeow** (Thailand) recalled that Thailand had been hard hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami and that it had learned a number of valuable lessons from that experience. Firstly, effectiveness in emergency responses to a disaster required the adoption of an integrated approach taking short- and long-term needs into account. Secondly, disaster preparedness had to be a core ingredient of any disaster mitigation strategy. That being so, it was of the utmost importance to build and strengthen national and regional alert systems. Thirdly, it was essential for affected countries to feel that they too are responsible for relief operations. United Nations agencies and their partners should coordinate with national responders to ensure coherent humanitarian assistance based on the needs of affected countries. Thailand supported the efforts undertaken to strengthen ties and synergies between the United Nations and regional organizations

and initiatives. Since harmonization of assistance was a crucial factor, it was necessary to prepare shared operational procedures for deploying personnel, supplies and equipment in the affected areas. Finally, Thailand considered that it was incumbent upon the governments of the countries concerned to allow unrestricted access to relief personnel and to guarantee their safety.

**Mr. Graisse** (World Food Programme) stated that the security of personnel and access were prerequisites for humanitarian action because, for the millions of victims of conflicts or disasters, access to such assistance was their only chance to survive. The WFP constantly evaluated security conditions, looked for ways to open up humanitarian corridors and strove to reconcile personnel security requirements with the need to keep open supply routes to affected populations.

2006 had been a year of positive developments in respect of access to populations suffering from lack of food security during and immediately following conflicts, but obstacles to humanitarian access remained a major problem during emergency food aid operations in a number of countries, such as Sudan, Chad and Somalia. In Iraq, Gaza and Afghanistan, the WFP was striving, in coordination with other humanitarian agencies, to gain access to the affected populations. The WFP welcomed the adoption, at the inter-agency level, of the framework aimed at improving security for NGO and United Nations personnel in the field. However, the international community and the beneficiary countries needed to lend further support to that instrument.

The WFP was committed to enhancing the quality of needs assessment in order to ensure that food aid is better tailored to the needs of affected populations. A project backed by the European Commission and other donors had facilitated progress in that direction. However, an effective needs-oriented financing system was also necessary. In order to be able to respond rapidly in an emergency and avoid interruptions in the transportation of supplies, if the emergency continues, the WFP relied firstly on its internal mechanism. More recently, it had also benefited from contributions from the Central Emergency Response Fund amounting, in 2006, to US\$ 108 million. However, it was better for the Fund to continue to be a supplementary financing tool, its resources adding to those disbursed directly to the operational agencies. The WFP staunchly supported

the principle of sectoral responsibility, which was bound to boost the effectiveness of humanitarian activities.

**Mr. Alwan** (World Health Organization) said that, for the second year running, WHO Member States had requested its secretariat to strengthen and expand its emergency mechanisms, above all by helping Member States to develop emergency response programmes in the health sector and by enhancing the WHO's logistical capacity to respond to crises. To that end, the Director-General had strengthened the Health Action in Crises Department, which will have a much higher budget as of the next fiscal year (US\$ 200 million, as opposed to the current year's US\$ 110 million).

Within the framework of the sectoral approach adopted by the international humanitarian assistance system, a group responsible for health issues had been established in 2006. The WHO headed this group and worked with some 30 partners — United Nations agencies and NGOs — to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action in the area of health. The Central Emergency Response Fund had made it possible for the WHO quickly to obtain the financing needed and to earmark funds in a more targeted manner tailored to needs, thereby intervening more effectively in 26 countries.

Within the group, the collective commitment to health was based on four fundamental tenets: (1) needs, capacities and operational constraints had to be impartially assessed; (2) coordination was essential to make activities more effective and those conducting them more accountable; (3) it was necessary to overcome shortcomings and plug gaps without delay, because they posed a threat to human lives; (4) national partners had to be fully involved in humanitarian assistance activities. However strained local systems might be in times of crisis, the affected communities always had to be the first to respond.

The WHO was convinced that capacity-building will be an essential activity for years to come — at the local level because it will help improve community preparedness to deal with the health consequences of crises and at the national level because it will contribute to better risk management and less vulnerability.

**Ms. Breines** (UNESCO) stated that the humanitarian crises caused by conflicts or natural

disasters were fundamental obstacles to countries achieving the six goals for education for all established at the World Education Forum, held in Dakar in 2000. Educational services were a cornerstone of any humanitarian undertaking and, increasingly, affected communities and countries were assigning priority to education from the initial stages of relief operations. For that reason, UNESCO provided direct assistance to affected populations in the framework of operational programmes aimed at restoring and improving the educational system as a whole, notably in Iraq, in the occupied Palestinian territories, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan.

UNESCO continued to play an active part in the group responsible for education, co-chaired by UNESCO and Save the Children, by providing the skills needed to enhance preparation capacity at the local and national levels. UNESCO welcomed the fact that emphasis had been placed on risk reduction and prevention mechanisms, along the lines of the Tsunami Alert System in the Indian Ocean established by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. Despite the progress made in that field, much remained to be done to improve the alert systems and to ensure that communities are better prepared.

In the context of its mandate to guarantee free circulation of information in crisis situations, UNESCO supported the implementation of channels designed in the first instance to convey humanitarian information and later to disseminate objective and neutral information in the local media.

The importance of protecting the cultural heritage at times of crisis and following a crisis was too often neglected. Reconstruction of the cultural heritage had great symbolic importance because it allows affected communities to regain hope and give them a sense that life had returned to normal.

The assistance provided by UNESCO following conflicts or disasters formed an integral part of the global efforts of the United Nations as a whole. That was why the Organization had asked to be included in the group responsible for rapid recovery.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*