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Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann. (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Cujba (Republic of Moldova), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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

Agenda item 65 (continued)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/63/81, A/63/277 and A/63/348)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/295)

Draft resolution (A/63/L.21)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/75)

Ms. Núñez Mordoché (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Cuba wishes to associate itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In recent years, we have noted with great concern an increase in the number of humanitarian emergencies and, in particular, the seriousness of natural disasters in

various regions of the world. Each event of this kind must be used to examine in depth the consequences of climate change and ecological imbalance, among many other problems facing humankind today.

Cuba reiterates the importance of implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 and, in particular, its provisions concerning disaster preparedness. Building developing countries' preparedness and response capacity is critical to the ability to cope with and quickly recover from natural disasters. The transfer of new technologies to cope with climatic change is an essential aspect in disaster preparedness. Likewise, the contribution of international cooperation, in particular the allocation of adequate and predictable resources to respond to these meteorological events, is of utmost importance in moving from the recovery phase to development.

Cuba reaffirms that humanitarian assistance must be provided in a manner that fully respects the guiding principles provided in the emblematic General Assembly resolution 46/182. Cuba rejects the intentions of some to impose ambiguous concepts, which can be easily manipulated to justify any action and jeopardize the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. The Charter of our Organization must be respected and its purposes and principles cannot be rewritten, distorted, restricted or conditioned. The Charter is not simply one source of law among many but the very foundation of the United Nations and of the fragile world order we still have.

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The Cuban State takes very seriously its leading role in the initiation, organization, coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance within its territory when the country has been affected by natural disasters, in line with provisions of the General Assembly. In the period of less than a month between 16 August and 10 September, Cuba was directly and indirectly affected by four extreme meteorological events: the tropical storms Fay and Hanna, which caused significant flooding, and the hurricanes Gustav and Ike. These two intense hurricanes had serious affects on the Cuban economy: the first was the most devastating hurricane of the past 50 years and affected the western part of Cuba in particular; the second affected the whole of the national territory.

The sector most affected in terms of material damage was the housing sector, with more than 500,000 houses as well as thousands of schools and health facilities damaged or completely destroyed. One third of the cultivated land has been devastated. Damage to the power and communications infrastructure, as well as in the agricultural and food sectors, has been severe. Rough estimates put the damage caused by those two intense hurricanes at over \$8 billion.

Fortunately, the death toll was minimal, as a result of the huge preparatory efforts on the part of the Cuban authorities and people, which enabled millions of people to be evacuated and sheltered in safe places. Over 3 million people, or 28 per cent of the country's population, were evacuated as a pre-emptive measure before the arrival of hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

The effectiveness of the Cuban civil defence services, in charge of ensuring compliance with civil defence measures and the international regulations and covenants on civil protection to which Cuba is party, was vital for the protection of human lives, including the use of mass media and the coordination with governmental and non-governmental institutions. Likewise, the discipline of people all over the country and the fact that they followed the information and complied with civil defence measures were key to avoiding human losses.

Despite the considerable damage and devastation caused by the hurricanes, no sick person in Cuba was deprived of medical care. Moreover, all Cuban children and the 30,000 young people from 125 countries who study and hold scholarships in our universities are at

this very moment attending their classes. In Cuba, no one has been or will be abandoned.

On behalf of the Cuban Government and people, allow me to show our appreciation to the countries, organizations and people that, in one way or another, have contributed honestly and sincerely, with resources or with moral support, to the reconstruction efforts undertaken by my country.

The Cuban territory has just been hit by another hurricane, hurricane Paloma. Categorized at level three in the five-level Saffir-Simpson hurricane scale, with winds over 215 kilometres per hour, it has also caused serious damage to the Cuban economy. While the capacities of Cuban civil defence services and of the people to face another meteorological event have again been put to the test, there have been, once again, no human losses.

Cuba reaffirms that neither these hurricanes nor the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba will discourage us from continuing to work towards the recovery of the country and to defend the achievements of the Cuban people over the past 50 years. Today, more than ever, we demand the cessation of the United States genocidal blockade, which was voted against almost unanimously by the international community on 29 October in this Assembly.

Cuba reiterates that it is prepared to continue supporting, with solidarity and without self-interest, those countries affected by natural disasters. Likewise, we reaffirm our decision to continue to extend, to our full capacity, our hand in friendship and the support of our greatest resource: the human capital created by the Revolution and our best experiences.

For Cuba, the only way to face the devastating fury of nature is to make available the infinite resources of the planet to those most affected, with no commercial or national self-interest. International solidarity and cooperation are imperative.

Mr. Alimov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Russia attaches great importance to international cooperation in the field of disaster risk reduction, mitigation and recovery. The growing number and scale of natural disasters increases the demand for humanitarian services throughout the world and establishes the need for timely and effective

delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations.

In this context, the international community's commitment to the guiding principles of delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance, set forth in General Assembly resolution 46/182, is of special significance. Attempts to conduct humanitarian activities without respect for the provisions of this resolution, in our view, politicize humanitarian assistance and undermines international consensus in this area. There must be no leeway for using the noble objectives of humanitarian assistance to people in need as a mechanism to advance the political interests of certain States.

We agree that so-called humanitarian access is one of the key issues with regard to humanitarian response operations. In this context, we are referring to adequate and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. Ensuring the physical presence of foreign humanitarian personnel in affected regions is only one aspect of this task and cannot be the end in itself.

In so doing, one should choose simple, feasible and practical ways and means for providing assistance. These can vary in each individual situation. We would like to underscore that the general coordination of assistance, including defining and determining ways and means for delivering aid, as well as the selection of partners, is the exclusive prerogative of the host Government.

We are also convinced that international society, all humanitarian partners including public institutions, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must respect the sovereignty of the recipient State.

Regarding the use of military assets, we have recently witnessed the involvement of the armed forces of certain States in humanitarian aid delivery. It is well known that the international community, humanitarian institutions of the United Nations system and humanitarian NGOs have repeatedly declared that use of military assets in humanitarian operations should be considered only as a last resort in cases when using civilian assets to save lives is impossible.

Moreover, the General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed the fundamentally civilian nature of humanitarian assistance. In our view, the rash use of

military assets runs counter to the principle of the independence of humanitarian assistance from any economic, political and military considerations, compromises the work of humanitarian personnel and jeopardizes their security.

Current considerations regarding assistance include the emergence of yet another humanitarian issue — the global food crisis. We would like to highlight the positive developments produced by the special meeting of the Economic and Social Council devoted to food security.

In our opinion, the Rome Declaration and the Comprehensive Framework for Action developed by the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis can serve as a sound basis for the consolidation of the efforts of the international community in this area.

The role of the World Food Programme has also increased in this context as the main instrument of the United Nations for the provision of food for the world's hungry, whose number has surpassed 900 million people.

Global climate change is a very important factor that certainly must be taken into account when we discuss natural disasters. In recent decades, we have regularly witnessed unprecedentedly frequent and intensive tropical cyclones, protracted heat waves, droughts, heavy rains and floods. These extreme natural hazards, which are linked to climate changes, often reduce to naught international donor efforts and increase the challenges faced by some countries, especially African States, in the fields of agriculture, food provision and disease control.

We believe that, at this stage, international cooperation must be based on a balanced approach to measures aimed at mitigating climate change, as well as those aimed at adapting to the current and forecasted extreme consequences of our increasingly variable climate.

Moreover, the growing economic losses from the adverse effects of climate change in developed and developing countries increase the importance of adaptation measures and disaster risk reduction. The urgent elaboration of joint measures to respond to current and expected extreme consequences of climate change could help to significantly reduce the loss of life, as well as economic losses.

First and foremost, attention should be devoted to strengthening national capacities for mitigating the consequences of natural disaster, the development of early warning systems, including updating existing assessment and forecasting measures. Scientific and applied research should be supported.

We welcome progress achieved in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 on building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters at the national, regional and international levels. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, the international community lags behind the timetable included in the Hyogo Framework aimed at significantly reducing the damage caused by natural disasters by 2015.

There is a need to step up our efforts. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is an important tool in this regard. Russia is ready to actively participate in the midterm review of the Hyogo Framework, which will take place during the second session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in June 2009, and we expect it will be finalized by 2010.

It is with a great deal of interest that we have familiarized ourselves with the results of the independent biennial review of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which shows that the Fund has become an essential financial tool that provides humanitarian assistance in a more timely and flexible manner.

The conclusions of the review reaffirm the effectiveness and relevance of the Fund, as well as the existence of mechanisms to further improve and adapt it to changing conditions of humanitarian assistance environment.

For our delegation, an important element here is the process of needs assessment and criteria adjustment. We would ask that further attention be paid to this, and we hope that these elements will be reflected in the upcoming independent review.

In conclusion, we would like to underscore that, given the growth of humanitarian operations throughout the world, there is a need for all participants in humanitarian assistance to comply with existing parameters for providing humanitarian assistance. We hope that the trend towards the harmonization of approaches will prevail in United

Nations debates. This will enable us to avoid the undesirable trend of further politicization within the United Nations.

Mr. Chávez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): On 15 August 2007, an earthquake, measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale, hit the coast of Peru, and several cities were seriously affected. Pisco was completely destroyed. More than 500 people died, more than 1,500 were injured and thousands suffered damage. The losses in housing, schools, hospitals and in basic infrastructure were immense.

In facing this disaster, one of the most tragic in recent decades in our country, the role played by national services, in particular the national civil defence system, was crucial. But the immediate response and recovery would not have been so effective had it not been for the generous and effective response of the international community, whereby humanitarian aid was provided by many States, the United Nations system, the Red Cross and other international institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society.

That valuable support sent to Peru is a demonstration of the importance of international humanitarian assistance in supporting national responses and the crucial role that it plays in the face of any disaster.

Among the most valuable tools in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief are an early warning system and systems for disaster response preparedness and risk reduction. It is, therefore, important to continue strengthening those systems nationally, regionally and internationally. Exchange of knowledge, experience and good practice, technology transfer and the provision of financial assistance to reduce current risks and avoid new ones are some of the elements included in the Hyogo Framework for Action and must be taken into consideration to strengthen those systems.

Likewise, international coordination is very relevant to the provision of humanitarian assistance. There are significant international endeavours in that sphere. Among them, we would like to highlight the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance as an element in strengthening the legal framework for international disaster relief. It is also worth underscoring the approval by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee of the Inter-Agency

Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance as a means of supporting Member States, regional organizations, international agents and civil society in enhancing their preparedness and organization to supplement national activities.

With regard to disaster response, the States and the international community must always be aware that at times of crisis the rights of victims are exposed and vulnerable. Therefore, assistance and reconstruction policies must focus more on promoting and protecting human rights, with emphasis on women and children, who are likely to be among the most vulnerable groups.

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Governments of countries affected by disasters must be enhanced to ensure effective humanitarian assistance and the security of humanitarian staff. The most tangible form of cooperation is to ensure rapid, safe and unhampered access on the part of staff, equipment and supplies, so that staff can efficiently provide assistance to the civilian population affected, in accordance with the provisions of international and domestic legislation.

It is of particular concern that, in many cases of complex humanitarian emergencies, United Nations and humanitarian assistance staff, including local staff and volunteers, have to deal with various kinds of threats and, in many cases, are subject to deliberate attacks on them. Thus, it is imperative that States take the necessary action to avoid deliberate acts of violence against humanitarian and United Nations personnel, as well as arrest, detention, harassment and impediments to freedom of movement.

Climate change has led to an increase in disaster risk. The global food crisis makes the problem more complex, as an increasingly greater percentage of humanitarian aid goes to purchasing food, thereby reducing the level of donations for humanitarian operations. Thus, in the present situation, the work undertaken by the Central Emergency Response Fund, which has proved to be a rapid and effective instrument, becomes more crucial. Therefore, we encourage States to continue contributing to that Fund.

Those contributions continue to be the most tangible manifestation of political will to support the victims of disasters. Without that political will, little can be done to provide the humanitarian assistance our populations need. Relief for millions of people, who

today are suffering and expect our support, is in our hands.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): The international humanitarian system is under intense and growing pressure. Regions of Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Palestine and Afghanistan are examples where the situation has gone from bad to worse.

At the same time, the combined effects of the financial crisis and high food and energy prices have put severe financial strains on humanitarian assistance efforts, and there are concerns that the financial crisis will affect the level of contributions of donor countries.

A few weeks ago, in the midst of the unravelling of the financial crisis, we made the announcement in Norway that we have reached the goal we set for ourselves three years ago of providing 1 per cent of gross national income to development and humanitarian needs. Hopefully, many more States will accelerate their efforts, rather than cutting them, now under the prevailing conditions when the most vulnerable and voiceless may become even more victimized.

Norway is committed to continue to making significant and predictable contributions to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, common humanitarian funds and United Nations humanitarian appeals. Only when it is soundly funded will the United Nations be able to respond to the many serious global challenges in the years to come, and we ask more countries to come on board and shoulder a larger share of the financial burden. The United Nations plays and must play a pivotal role in coordinating humanitarian assistance. Close cooperation between the United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations, as well as between the United Nations and national authorities, is essential.

Norway expects its humanitarian partners to apply a gender perspective in all programmes and activities. That is necessary not only for justice and equality, but also for quality. It should be obvious that women and men, the young and the elderly, have different needs, and we expect those needs to be reflected in the humanitarian appeals now to be launched in December.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in humanitarian crises. Nowhere in the world is that

fact more obvious today than in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The widespread and systematic sexual violence has devastating consequences not only for each and every victim, but also for future peace and reconciliation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sexual violence is internationally recognized as a savage weapon of war, in fact as a war crime, but it is not an inevitable feature of war. It can be stopped if we take it seriously enough. The awesome fact, however, is that the world has too often looked away.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that such acts do not go unpunished. The Security Council has a key role in following up Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) and to ensure the protection of women and children from sexual violence. Norway calls upon States and all relevant United Nations and humanitarian organizations to improve coordination and strengthen capacity, including surge capacity, in supporting victims and in establishing more effective preventive measures.

In many of today's conflicts — and we debated Afghanistan here yesterday — access to vulnerable population groups is becoming increasingly difficult, and aid workers are being targeted. All parties concerned, including non-State actors and neighbouring States, must cooperate in ensuring access to civilian populations and in protecting aid workers in armed conflict.

Norway will continue to work to promote respect for fundamental humanitarian principles and a clear division of the roles of humanitarian organizations and military forces. The humanitarian space must be understood and protected in all emergencies.

The establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund gave the United Nations a rapid response capacity. Still, the international community should be better prepared to respond to humanitarian crises than we in fact are. We all know that it is less expensive to anticipate and prevent than to react and repair, but the world community seems still more willing to pay for the damages after disaster strikes than to invest in the lesser cost of preventive action.

Climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and preparedness should be lifted up to the top of the humanitarian reform agenda. Moreover, the Security Council, the United Nations system and Member States must consider the links and improve the transition from humanitarian assistance to longer-term development.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions is a historic milestone and a good example of the effective prevention of humanitarian disasters. It prevents the spread of cluster munitions to new countries and reduces future humanitarian suffering. Norway urges all Member States, United Nations agencies and humanitarian agencies to recognize cluster munitions as a serious humanitarian problem and to promote the rapid entry into force and full implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

The Convention will be signed in Oslo during the signing conference from 2 to 4 December 2008. All Member States have been invited and we hope and expect to be able to welcome them all to the signing ceremony so that we can all take part in that upgrading of humanity.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted under agenda item 65 and associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We would also like to take the opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the Governments and peoples that suffered humanitarian emergencies over the past year. We pay tribute to all humanitarian workers for their courage and dedication and appreciate the tireless efforts of host Governments in the areas of disaster relief and reduction and in the protection of the humanitarian personnel.

On 12 May this year, a devastating earthquake of magnitude 8.0 on the Richter scale struck Wenchuan, Sichuan province, China, resulting in colossal human casualties and property losses. I would like to express, on behalf of the Chinese Government and people, our sincere gratitude to all parties that provided humanitarian assistance to the Wenchuan quake zone.

This year, climate change, soaring food prices and the financial crisis have heightened the attention of all to the current global humanitarian situation. While the demand for humanitarian assistance the world over is continuously on the rise, problems such as the lack of disaster relief capacity and resources facing the vast number of developing countries have become ever more pronounced.

A common challenge confronting the international community is the search for ways to

further strengthen cooperation and coordination among all humanitarian actors, maintain the sustainable growth of resources for humanitarian assistance, improve the timeliness and effectiveness of disaster relief, shore up the disaster reduction and preparedness capacities of disaster-prone countries in a practical manner, and ensure a smooth transition from disaster relief to development.

The Chinese delegation believes that the fundamental humanitarian principles set out in resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 represent the prerequisites and bases for the effective provision of humanitarian assistance. All humanitarian assistance actors must strictly adhere to the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality and respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. They must observe international humanitarian law and the laws of the host countries and respect local customs and traditions, so as to ensure the credibility of international humanitarian activities and workers.

Admittedly, the affected State has the primary responsibility for leading, initiating, organizing, coordinating and executing humanitarian assistance within its territory. China believes that all other humanitarian assistance actors, including the United Nations system, have an obligation to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with the host Government, making full use of existing local coordination mechanisms. Timely and adequate emergency humanitarian assistance, especially materials and technical assistance, should be provided in accordance with the actual needs of local Governments and people so as to help the affected State improve its relief and disaster reduction capacity in a meaningful way and achieve its early recovery and long-term development goals.

In recent years, under the leadership of Mr. John Holmes, Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has played an irreplaceable role in reforming the United Nations humanitarian system to improve humanitarian fundraising and coordination — a role that the Chinese Government appreciates.

China supports the further strengthening of the steering and coordinating role of OCHA in the field of humanitarian assistance. We hope that, with the support of Member States, OCHA will further improve the humanitarian resident coordinator system and the

related accountability system and that, drawing on past experience, it will improve the cluster approach, expand partnerships and enhance its disaster-relief coordinating capacity and resource utilization efficiency. We also hope that while, discussing the possible humanitarian impacts of climate change, it will refrain from turning its focus away from or reducing its relief inputs to non-climate related disasters, and that, while stressing the importance and sensitivity of humanitarian access, it will try to help affected countries to effectively enhance their capacity to address the practical difficulties in facilitating safe and unhindered access during complex humanitarian emergencies.

The Chinese delegation congratulates the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) on reaching its expected funding target of \$500 million in 2008, an important step towards success in reforming the humanitarian funding system of the United Nations. China supports the efforts of CERF to aggressively scale up its activities as demands increase and as its implementation capacity improves. We hope that, on the basis of the first independent evaluation, the Fund will continue to refine the criteria for project approval and resource allocation and strengthen its accountability and transparency. At the same time, we appeal to Member States, the developed countries in particular, to continue to make significant contributions to CERF on a voluntary basis in the current global economic context.

Strengthening international and regional cooperation is one effective means to help disaster-prone countries to improve their disaster relief, reduction and preparedness capacities. While encouraging the Governments of disaster-stricken countries to continue to increase inputs into disaster reduction and preparedness, China calls on all humanitarian parties to fully implement the Hyogo Declaration and Framework for Action and meet their resource commitments to disaster risk reduction.

China also hopes that Member States will fully support the annual General Assembly draft resolution, coordinated by the Group of 77 and China, on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development, and that they will effectively strengthen international cooperation, address the gap in humanitarian assistance during the transition from disaster relief to development, and help disaster-prone

countries to improve their national disaster relief and reduction and preparedness capacity in the ultimate aim of achieving with a view to finally attaining the goal of providing assistance that tackles both the symptoms and root causes of humanitarian emergencies.

As a natural disaster-prone developing country, China is hit by a variety of natural disasters every year. For China, disaster reduction, preparedness and emergency relief is an important task that Governments invariably face at all levels year in and year out. While it responds to the enormous challenges posed by natural disasters, the Chinese Government also recognizes the importance of international cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance. In response to requests from the Governments of disaster-afflicted countries and the appeals of the international community, China has actively participated in international assistance activities.

Mr. Alim (Bangladesh): Allow me to begin by commending the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports under agenda item 65 (a). Bangladesh aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The world is increasingly facing daunting challenges posed by disasters in a myriad of manifestations, which are now occurring with greater intensity and devastation than ever before. The phenomenon of climate change has intensified the challenges. Nine out of every 10 disasters are now climate-related. Disasters caused by floods are more frequent and have increased from about 50 in 1985 to more than 200 in 2005. The humanitarian implications are enormous, to the say the least. Soaring global food prices, high volatility in the international commodity markets and the global financial crisis have further intensified the challenges.

Strengthened preparedness and effective responses are essential to saving lives and livelihoods in disasters. Increasing capacity to predict, monitor, warn and respond to the needs of those who have been adversely affected is vital to effective humanitarian action. It is against that backdrop that the role of the United Nations in humanitarian assistance has assumed added significance.

Although the vast majority of small and medium-scale disasters are responded to locally by national

authorities, it is necessary to strengthen regional and international preparedness and response systems for large-scale events that overwhelm local capacity to respond. Well-concerted efforts at the national, regional and global levels are of paramount importance. The international community must come up with the necessary means and resources. Channelling humanitarian funding to such upstream activities as disaster preparedness, early warning and contingency planning is also critically important. A substantial increase in investment in disaster risk reduction is urgently required to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The development of a stronger standing response capacity, more responsible leadership, greater effectiveness in aid delivery and improved coordination can produce better results. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a welcome initiative of the United Nations. The two-year evaluation found that the Fund has proven to be a valuable and impartial tool. In a short time, it has become an essential feature of international humanitarian action. It must be adequately supported so that it can reach the annual target of \$500 million set by the General Assembly. Early and multi-year commitments to the Fund would ensure predictable and sustainable access to resources for humanitarian response. The size of the Fund should also be increased progressively. Donor funding to CERF should be additional to existing humanitarian assistance and not an expropriation from it.

We would like to reaffirm that General Assembly resolution 46/182 remains the framework and guiding principle for governing humanitarian assistance. The resolution emphasizes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Those principles must be complied with. We strongly support complete safety and security for humanitarian personnel.

Bangladesh is a country that faces natural disasters with relentless regularity. The emerging threats of climate change reinforce the existing challenges. They underline the need to strengthen disaster preparedness and risk-reduction efforts as a means of reducing the humanitarian impact of various disasters. The Government remains committed to reducing the vulnerability of people to a minimum level. Improved preparedness and early warning

systems have already proven effective in saving human lives and livelihoods in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has adopted a comprehensive disaster risk reduction policy, the objective of which is to contribute to sustainable development by reducing the burden of disasters on the poor and the most vulnerable. The National Disaster Management Council, headed by the Prime Minister, is the highest-level forum for the formulation and review of disaster management policies. The Inter-Ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee is in charge of implementing disaster management policies.

Recently, Bangladesh developed a comprehensive climate change strategy and action plan. It is a 10-year programme to build the capacity and resilience of the country to meet the challenges of climate change and extreme weather events. The action plan envisages 37 intervention areas and will cost \$5 billion over five years. Comprehensive disaster management constitutes one of the six basic pillars of the climate change strategy in Bangladesh and will further strengthen the country's effective disaster management system to deal with increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters.

Implementing the comprehensive strategy and action plan will, however, impose a massive burden on our fiscal resources. We cannot do it alone. We therefore call upon the international community to come up with necessary support measures on a predictable basis.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): It is my privilege to participate in this important debate on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. We thank the Secretary-General for his various reports under agenda item 65. Pakistan wishes to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Secretary-General's reports note that the number of recorded disasters have doubled over the past 20 years. While we cannot control the overpowering strength of natural disasters, we can reduce the impact and devastation they cause. Traditional wisdom in all our societies emphasizes preparation for future eventualities. Those who prepare in advance suffer less in emergencies. As mentioned in the Secretary-General's reports, preparedness helps affected communities and Governments to respond effectively to disasters. That requires an efficient

emergency response system capable of handling large-scale disasters and to mitigate their negative impact. It should therefore be our task to strengthen capacity at all levels and to reduce the impact of disasters.

The implications of disasters in developing countries are immense, due mainly to the long-lasting consequences for affected populations and the adverse impact on the environment and livelihoods of millions of people. It is important to take measures that improve the response capacity of affected nations and for the international community to provide assistance and cooperation when they are most required.

Climate change, inter-State and intra-State conflicts, compounded by the food crisis, will likely increase the demand for humanitarian assistance in the coming decade. During the past year, the largest driver of disasters was the increased incidence and severity of extreme weather events. Nine out of every 10 disasters are now climate-related. Similarly, another 100 million people will be added to the ranks of the 800 million people who are already suffering from food insecurity in our world.

South Asia is viewed as a region most affected by climate change in a series of recent studies and reports. The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change mentions increased rainfall, risk of floods, land degradation and water stress, among others, as factors that will adversely affect millions in South Asia who will bear the brunt of the consequences of climate change in many ways.

In recent years, Pakistan has suffered from high-magnitude natural disasters. Different parts of the country have been hit by those disasters, which have caused loss of life and infrastructure. Those include the devastating earthquake of 2005, which measured 7.6 on the Richter scale; heavy rains and subsequent floods in 2007 and 2008; and the recent earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale that hit Baluchistan province in October 2008. While the initial phase of providing relief to the earthquake-hit population in Baluchistan province is under way, the Government of Pakistan has also started working on a long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation plan.

The earthquake of 2005 in Pakistan reinforced awareness of the need for disaster preparedness. We were confronted by a situation in which we had to go beyond the conventional disaster management model of response, relief and recovery to a better and more

holistic model, which includes the processes of hazard identification and mitigation, community preparedness, integrated response efforts and recovery, which had to be undertaken contiguously within a risk management context to address issues of vulnerability. We are thankful for the international community's help in post-2005 earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, which are still ongoing.

From our experiences, especially in the post-earthquake period in 2005, we have learned the following lessons.

First, the integration of disaster risk reduction into all sectoral and national development policies and practices is necessary for achieving sustainable social, economic and environmental development.

Secondly, we learned the importance of developing and strengthening institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels, in particular at the community level, that can systematically contribute to building resilience against natural disasters.

Thirdly, communities play the role of the first responders in any disaster management and disaster risk reduction effort. Community-based approaches offer viable solutions for managing and reducing risks and ensuring sustainable development.

Fourthly, we learned the importance of building on people's local knowledge, coping mechanisms and cultural practices. We are convinced that top-down disaster reduction interventions alone are insufficient.

Fifthly, we learned the need for the systematic incorporation of risk reduction approaches into the design and implementation of emergency preparedness, response and recovery programmes in the reconstruction of the affected areas.

The lessons learned helped us to envisage a devolved and decentralized mechanism for disaster preparedness and disaster management. That mechanism includes the following.

First, we created an Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority.

Secondly, we promulgated a national disaster management ordinance and subsequently established the National Disaster Management Commission and Authority. We have given the senior post in that position to the Prime Minister of Pakistan to show the importance of the institution.

Thirdly, provincial disaster management commissions and authorities have been established, while similar arrangements have been made at the district level and district disaster management authorities have been notified across the country. Those are the linchpins of the whole system and play the role of the first line of defence in the event of a disaster.

Fourthly, a national disaster risk management framework has been formulated to coordinate and guide the work of the entire system in the area of disaster risk management. The framework has been developed through wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders at the local, provincial and national levels.

Fifthly, by the next academic year, starting in April and May 2009, disaster management will be part of the curricula of schools in our country. It is also being included in the curricula of non-formal education.

As the number of natural disasters increases, so has the magnitude of their destruction. Effective preparedness, post-disaster relief and rehabilitation require cooperation within the international community to build capacities and increase funding resources to respond to the challenges of natural disasters. However, respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must remain the overarching parameters in all efforts for coordination of humanitarian assistance. The role of the concerned State in the identification, coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance, where assistance is requested from the international community, remains primary.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks the Secretariat for the reports on the agenda item on the strengthening of the coordination of the United Nations urgent humanitarian assistance provided by United Nations agencies. The reports underline the major challenges that the United Nations has had to face in the past year. The number of civilian victims of armed conflicts and of natural disasters remains alarming. In addition, we are confronted by such global challenges as the humanitarian impact of climate change, the food crisis and, on top of all this, the international financial crisis.

I would like briefly to address three subjects: first, humanitarian access; secondly, the security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel; and thirdly, humanitarian reform, in particular the strengthening of response coordination.

Current crises have brutally reminded us that respect for relevant international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and for humanitarian principles by parties to a conflict have been severely put to the test, and the protection and assistance needs of civilian populations are often not met.

Rapid and unimpeded access by humanitarian organizations to all victims, whether in the case of armed conflicts or of natural disasters, is therefore essential. Switzerland is aware of that fact and organized a meeting of experts in Montreux, Switzerland, on 30 June and 1 July 2008, aimed at identifying the main obstacles to humanitarian access in situations of armed conflict and at considering methods of overcoming those obstacles at the legal, political and operational levels. Switzerland intends to organize a follow-up to that meeting in 2009. A forthcoming contribution could be the drafting of a good practices guide in this area.

The security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of United Nations personnel are another major cause for concern. It is imperative for the actors concerned to respect their obligations in that regard in accordance with international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

Switzerland encourages the Secretary-General to take the measures necessary to implement within the United Nations system the recommendations contained in the report of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises Worldwide, published in June 2008.

The time has come to consolidate at the operational level the achievements of humanitarian reform. Switzerland has long promoted a collaborative approach among all humanitarian actors. We thus note with satisfaction that humanitarian reform is formally taking account of the principles of collaboration and improved inter-agency coordination. Switzerland encourages the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to pursue their efforts to enhance coordination.

Moreover, effective responses cannot be made without highly competent leadership. Strengthening the capacities of resident and humanitarian coordinators to deal with complex crises should be among our priorities. We should like to see improved joint humanitarian needs assessments, appropriate

management of the various capacities of operational actors and a constant focus on compliance with humanitarian principles.

We also believe it important to take action in areas other than humanitarian reform to ensure a more effective collective response by the United Nations system to the protection needs of civilian populations before, during and after crises or armed conflicts. Switzerland believes that the various ongoing initiatives to identify specific measures that will enable us to make coherent, complementary and coordinated responses are not only welcome, but also necessary.

Ms. Alzhanova (Kazakhstan): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for submitting his reports on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations.

Kazakhstan commends the positive conclusions of the Secretary-General regarding the two-year assessment of the work of the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF), which remains a principal body for resolving humanitarian issues. Within a short period of time, CERF has successfully achieved most of its predetermined goals and become a useful and objective instrument for the implementation of humanitarian activities. In that context, we welcome the high-level conference on the Fund that will take place in December as a great opportunity to strengthen the political and financial commitments of United Nations Member States.

My delegation appreciates the Fund's work regarding the voluntary contributions of Member States and the equitable, timely and effective distribution of resources. That said, we would like to note that Kazakhstan has doubled its voluntary contributions in recent years. In the light of a number of recent natural disasters in Central Asia, we would like to emphasize the increasing role of the regional office in Kazakhstan of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and to suggest transforming that office into a Central Asian coordination centre for the prevention and mitigation of emergency situations.

Furthermore, our country has promoted an initiative aimed at establishing an international logistics unit modelled on the coordination centre at the Almaty airport. We believe that that city is in a very convenient geographical location for providing rapid responses to emergencies and humanitarian support in

Europe and Asia. In that regard, we look forward to receiving the endorsement of OCHA and our neighbouring countries.

The impacts of climate change and military conflicts are being exacerbated by soaring food and fuel prices, which have caused violent protests in many countries. According to World Bank projections, as a result of the food crisis, the number of people suffering from hunger, which currently stands at 800 million, could increase by another 100 million. In order to mitigate the consequences of the crisis, donor countries will have to allocate additional resources to humanitarian operations.

During this year alone, the Republic of Kazakhstan has provided humanitarian support in the form of foodstuffs, clothing and medicine to Afghanistan, China, Cuba, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine, totalling approximately \$10 million.

Kazakhstan accords priority attention to cooperation with the United Nations on issues related to the global environment and climate change. With an ecological problem of a global scale on its national territory — a problem inherited as a result of 40 years of nuclear testing in the Semipalatinsk area — Kazakhstan faces serious practical challenges related to global climate change.

In that context, we would like to draw the attention of members to resolution 60/216, “International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan”, a three-year resolution containing a provision requesting the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session on the progress made in implementing the resolution. In that connection, we request the Secretary-General to accelerate the issuance of that document by the Secretariat for consideration by the General Assembly at a plenary meeting during the current session.

To conclude my intervention, I would like to underscore once again that, by synergizing our efforts, we can prevent the horrendous consequences of cataclysms and ensure a better future for millions of disaster victims.

Mr. Normandin (Canada) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Government of Canada, I should like at

the outset to thank the President of the General Assembly for the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

Every year, natural disasters and conflicts endanger the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. All too often, those people are increasingly vulnerable to widespread human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, as well as forced displacement. We continue to witness the deliberate targeting of civilians, including humanitarian workers, by those who refuse to comply with international humanitarian law and fundamental humanitarian principles. Moreover, as recent natural disasters clearly demonstrate, it is more important than ever before that we make concrete efforts to effectively reduce disaster risks and put mitigation strategies in place.

Thanks to modern means of communication, the world is increasingly aware of the living conditions of populations affected by natural disasters and emergency situations. However, it remains difficult to achieve concrete and lasting results in the area of humanitarian aid. Examples such as Sri Lanka, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Haiti and the Sudan are stark reminders of the repercussions that such situations can have for civilian populations. The lack of full, safe and unhindered access by humanitarian workers to affected populations only exacerbates the situation. That is why such access is a fundamental requirement for any humanitarian response.

All too often, however, some still attempt to deliberately delay or even deny such access or to use it as a political bargaining tool, further aggravating the suffering of civilian populations. Such obstacles to the delivery of foodstuffs, medicine and other relief supplies reflect a blatant disregard for humanitarian principles endorsed by Member States.

Humanitarian personnel provide essential services to millions of people in need, often at great personal risk. The recent attacks carried out against humanitarian actors in Somalia, the Sudan and Afghanistan highlight that vulnerability. Unfortunately, that is particularly true for the national personnel working for humanitarian organizations. Increasingly, humanitarian workers are the targets of violent acts and face harassment, kidnappings and deadly attacks. Likewise, aid convoys are hijacked or blocked and humanitarian personnel are expelled from the countries

in which they were deployed. We are deeply saddened by such abhorrent and deliberate attacks against humanitarian personnel and condemn them as violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Thus, we urge all Member States to ensure the protection and security of those who provide essential emergency assistance to populations in need.

(spoke in English)

Canada fully recognizes the important role played by the United Nations in responding to crises, and we strongly support efforts by the United Nations agencies, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to enhance international humanitarian action. Better coordination, comprehensive needs assessments and the identification of gaps in response are key to ensuring timely and effective humanitarian action.

The cluster coordination approach is a valuable model and is helping to improve the predictability, timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian action, while paving the way for recovery. It has enabled us to address weaknesses in response, strengthen inter-agency cooperation by including the Red Cross Movement and non-governmental organizations, and provide a more predictable and consistent response, with designated agencies now accountable for a specific sector.

Of course, with any new approach there will be challenges, including recognizing the need to help build the capacity of national Governments to facilitate the coordination of humanitarian response. We also need to assist those clusters that are not performing to our collective expectations and ensure that cluster lead agencies have the tools required to enhance coordination and response. Canada remains committed to the cluster coordination approach and encourages the United Nations system to continue efforts to implement the approach in all emergencies.

We also note the vital role played by humanitarian coordinators in providing the leadership needed to ensure effective international humanitarian action. The combination of their skills, their experience with the humanitarian system and knowledge of and presence in a local context makes them an invaluable resource.

On a separate subject, flexible and responsive financing mechanisms are also critical to ensuring

effective humanitarian response. The Central Emergency Response Fund has become an integral funding tool that agencies can turn to in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, speeding up humanitarian response. Providing a predictable source of funding also helps to ensure a more equitable allocation of resources across crises. Yet we must ensure that reliable and evidence-based needs assessments underpin humanitarian funding mechanisms. This is at the core of good humanitarian donorship.

Rising food prices and their impact on global food security have emerged as a priority issue and have the potential to impact upon our collective capacity to meet the food and nutritional needs of populations at risk. Canada is committed to assisting those most affected by the food crisis.

In April 2008, we announced an additional \$50 million in food aid, bringing our contribution to over \$230 million for this fiscal year. Canada has also completely opened its food aid budget to international procurement. Special emphasis is on procurement from developing countries to provide Canada's food aid partners with the flexibility to purchase commodities locally and regionally, which is more effective.

In conclusion, as we move forward, we need to continually re-examine and refine the tools and strategies we rely on for effective and timely humanitarian action, and learn from recent experiences. It is also important that we have the means to monitor and assess restrictions on humanitarian access and the ability to hold accountable those responsible when such access is infringed upon or denied.

It comes down to a matter of collective will — the pursuit of common efforts to assist and protect the vulnerable — if we are to assert our conviction to refuse to stand silently in the face of humanitarian crises.

The Acting President: I call on the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We are here today to discuss an issue to which the Palestinian people attach great importance: international assistance. For the Palestinian people, international assistance represents the unwavering commitment of the international community to the Palestinian people and the ultimate realization of their inalienable rights. Over the past six decades, this assistance has been key to the resilience

of the Palestinian people and to ensuring that they, the majority of whom are dispossessed refugees, are not forgotten or forsaken despite many years of conflict, turmoil and suffering.

This assistance has time and again served as a reaffirmation of the right of the Palestinian people to live a life of dignity and to build their societal institutions to enable them to survive and withstand the imposed misery of military occupation and prepare for a tomorrow free from its shackles. This assistance is a reflection of a clear political will to stand by international legitimacy and the principles of international law, a commitment for which the Palestinian people will always extend their gratitude and thanks to the international community.

The past eight years have seen mounting burdens on Palestinian society; as well as on international donors; as a direct result of deliberate, systematic and illegal actions and policies by Israel, the occupying Power. These policies and actions have, on numerous occasions, directly targeted donor-funded projects, retarding the path of internationally supported Palestinian development and forcing, on both the Palestinian people and the international donors, an agenda of emergency relief, rather than development and sustainability.

In fact, aggressive Israeli policies against the Palestinian people have imposed a process of “de-development” in the occupied Palestinian territory, including occupied East Jerusalem. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Israel’s continued illegal construction of the wall and settlements and its regime of closures, siege and military checkpoints have been the direct cause of this de-development, as well as of the erosion of productive capacity in the occupied Palestinian territory. In 2004 alone, the projected income loss was \$4 billion — an intolerable price to pay for a people living under occupation and struggling to lift themselves out of dependency and hardship.

Despite the best efforts of the Palestinian Authority and the international donor community, recovery from this forced plunge into deep poverty and economic shrinkage has been slow and extremely difficult because neither the painful daily reality of occupation nor its devastating consequences has changed.

International agencies including all United Nations agencies, the Quartet’s Special Envoy, the World Bank and many others widely recognize Israel’s closure policy as the most devastating factor limiting the Palestinian economy. In this regard, Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Works Agency and Project for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, recently said:

“I must express my alarm about the devastating economic and human cost of the situation. [As numerous expert studies have concluded,] the fundamental cause of this distress is the system of closure and other movement restrictions imposed by the Government of Israel on Gaza and the West Bank.”

The World Bank, in particular, has left no doubt in this respect, concluding that the Palestinian economy would have probably doubled in size between 2000 and 2007 were it not for the restrictions and other punitive measures imposed by Israel, the occupying Power.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs also clearly states that:

“seven years of restrictions ... [have] developed into an entrenched multi-layered system of obstacles and restrictions, fragmenting [the occupied territory] and affecting the freedom of movement of the entire Palestinian population and its economy”.

The facts here are undeniable; so, too, are the looming prospects of unjustified suffering should these circumstances be allowed to persist.

The continuing Israeli military occupation has created two sets of punitive realities for Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. One is in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where access to land, crops and other property has been severely restricted, and the effects of which, experts warn, will be devastating for years to come. According to a report issued by the World Bank in October 2008, entitled “The Economic Effects of Restricted Access to Land in the West Bank”, Israeli restrictions on movement of people and access to natural resources extend much beyond its most obvious manifestations. According to the World Bank, Israel, the occupying Power, physically barred Palestinians from accessing 38 per cent of the land, reserved to

serve illegal settlements and punitive closure regime that constrain movement of people and goods within and out of the West Bank. The World Bank then concludes that

“recurrent destruction of trees, private homes and public infrastructure, as well as settlers’ encroachments on private land create a permanent state of insecurity that deters Palestinian investment”.

In the Gaza Strip, poverty is even deeper, as is the suffering. With 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and more than 80 per cent dependent on food aid, Gaza is experiencing a grave humanitarian crisis. This is due to an inhumane and illegal siege that continues to be imposed by Israel, the occupying Power — a siege that has denied more than 1.5 million people their fundamental human rights, including the rights to food, to health care, to livelihood and adequate standard of living, and to live a life of dignity as they are cut off from the most basic requirements of a normal life, including essential humanitarian imports. Nearly all Gaza’s industrial operations have come to a grinding halt, with the number of industrial sector establishments falling from 3,500 at the beginning of 2005 to less than 150 at the end of 2007.

The situation I have just outlined has far-reaching consequences extending beyond daily misery and reaching well into the future of our children. According to the United Nations Development Programme, in 2007 more than 53.7 per cent of Palestinian families lived below the national poverty line — more than double the number in 1998. UNICEF reveals that, in the occupied Palestinian territory, nearly half the children aged 6 to 36 months and 40 per cent of expecting mothers suffer from anaemia.

A joint survey by the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East shows that, despite humanitarian aid, food insecurity is on the rise and now affects 38 per cent of the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory. These alarming figures are expected to rise if the current conditions continue.

Over the past few years, international aid to the Palestinian people has increased significantly, and we are grateful for that. Yet, this increase has had little

effect on the grim reality on the ground. Unfortunately, this is not surprising, given what we have discussed for so long, as the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate because of the Israelis’ systematic illegal policies. No amount of international aid can compensate for the astonishing losses. Instead, this increased aid is channelled to meet the rising emergency needs brought about by these policies. This is counterproductive, as the much-appreciated and much-needed international aid should be serving the important goal of building the Palestinian State towards the realization of the two-State solution. But, according to the World Bank, under the current circumstances and with the increased campaign of aggressive Israeli measure, this aid “has succeeded in doing little more than slowing down the deterioration of the economy, despite ever larger volumes”. This picture needs to change dramatically.

Despite the difficulties I have just outlined, the Palestinian Authority’s commitment to lifting the Palestinian people from deep poverty and misery is unwavering; so, too, has been the commitment of principled members of the international donor community. In December 2007, the Palestinian Authority presented its three-year reform and development plan. In response to this serious commitment, the international donor community pledged at the Paris Conference \$7.7 billion over the subsequent three years. One year on, despite initial shortcomings in meeting pledge commitments, the pledged assistance has been committed and dispensed this year as planned. Naturally, this has greatly contributed to the fiscal stability of the Palestinian Authority, allowing it to plan and execute projects of crucial importance to restoring stability and security to Palestinian cities, as well as providing the necessary environment for economic development and investment.

If empowered and not continuously repressed by the occupying Power, Palestinians can achieve these goals and more because the Palestinian people have the power and potential to achieve results. Let us not forget that, in 1999, the Palestinian Authority, despite all the restrictions of existing under occupation, ran a surplus. We can do so again.

When discussing international assistance to the Palestinian people, we must be very aware of two important points: the goal that is driving this assistance and the need to create the necessary conditions to

ensure that this assistance achieves its intended goal. That is why we continue to call on the international community to intensify its efforts to bring an end to all of the illegal Israeli practices I have outlined in order to ensure that aid is directed to development instead of emergency relief.

The past series of meetings of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, as well as donor conferences and political conferences, including the Annapolis Conference, have clearly called for the lifting of restrictions imposed by Israel on Palestinian economic activities to allow for donor assistance to be effective and for the private sector to recover. Moreover, the World Bank and the United Nations have stated very clearly that there has been little or no progress with regard to easing Israeli restrictions on daily life in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, not least in connection with the intensification of illegal Israeli settlement activities.

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, Mr. Richard Falk, states in his report:

“Israel is not only failing to fulfil its legal obligations as the occupying Power under international humanitarian law, but is also obstructing Palestinian efforts to mitigate the impact of those violations on the well-being of Palestinians enduring occupation” (A/63/326, para. 22).

Now the question is: What will the international community do about such irresponsible policies, which have reversed all the progress we have achieved together? No economy can actually succeed with the presence of any one of the many restrictions that the Palestinian economy faces. That is why determined steps should be taken to curb Israel's intransigence and flagrant disregard for international law and all agreements and commitments. We must not allow for the situation to continue whereby international aid is now being spent to pay for repairing the colossal damage caused by Israel's illegal actions. Instead, the occupying Power must be compelled to recognize that such actions come at a price. Only then would these illegal actions stop and could we once again embark on the important effort of making a difference in the lives

of the Palestinian people, providing them with hope for a better tomorrow and convincing them that our efforts for development and economic stability are not hostage to Israeli measures and that, rather, they are concrete steps that will lift them from the misery of poverty under occupation to the hope of prosperity in freedom.

Development cannot coexist with oppression and hegemony, whose worst manifestation is foreign occupation and its oppressive practices. We need to uphold our commitment to spare no effort in ensuring that children and civilian populations under foreign occupation are given every assistance and protection so that their lives can return to normal and they can be empowered to look forward and work towards a better future.

Palestine should not be the exception. Hence, we expect the full due support of the international community in order to uphold the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, which the world has come to realize and agree is a prerequisite not only for peace, but for development and for getting back on track.

I conclude by offering special and sincere thanks on behalf of the Palestinian people to all United Nations agencies for their commitment to the welfare and rights of the Palestinian people. On this day, on which our people are commemorating the passing of a great Palestinian leader, President Yasser Arafat, who dedicated his life to the realization of the inalienable rights and national aspirations of the Palestinian people, we express our gratitude for the international community's unwavering support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people on all fronts. Our appreciation is also extended to Member States whose assistance and support has enabled the Palestinian people to persevere and be steadfast despite overwhelming challenges and the brutal injustices imposed upon them. We hope that, together, we can soon ensure that this assistance is once again directed at sustainable development and State-building for the resilient people of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, to convey to the President of the General Assembly our deep gratitude and appreciation for his efforts in steering the work of this session; we wish him every success. I would also like to associate myself with the statement

delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We have followed closely the reports of the Secretary-General on United Nations humanitarian activities, which spell out the seriousness of the challenges facing the Organization in this field imposed by the growing number of people in need of emergency and humanitarian relief assistance due to the frequency of natural disasters, the impact and devastation of which are especially exacerbated in developing and poor countries. Moreover, the global financial and food crises have had serious repercussions for millions of people in countries already suffering from poverty, the negative impact of climate change, armed conflicts and serious diseases. All of this calls for increased efforts by the United Nations and its relevant partners to meet the growing need for humanitarian assistance, and emphasizes the urgent need to supply the Organization with financial and human resources necessary to discharge its growing responsibilities.

In this context, I would like to emphasize my country's support for the people and Government of brotherly Yemen in the crisis following the recent floods in that country. I would like to reiterate our support for draft resolution A/63/L.21, introduced by the representative of Yemen, on providing special economic assistance to Yemen. We have already begun to provide urgent relief assistance to Yemen since the floods occurred last month.

The United Arab Emirates emphasizes the essential role of the United Nations and commends its valuable work in mobilizing and coordinating international efforts to provide humanitarian emergency relief assistance for millions in the affected areas. We recognize that international partnership and cooperation with the Organization are the most effective way to ensure the optimal results for humanitarian activities in different parts of the world.

My country has thus been eager to coordinate many of its humanitarian initiatives and contributions with the United Nations and its specialized agencies through bilateral partnerships and direct collaboration in implementing many emergency relief and long-term projects in countries affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts. As a member of the Donor Support Group of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), we have contributed to

enhancing OCHA's work, thus strengthening the efforts of the Organization in the humanitarian field so it can achieve greater efficiency when providing relief in emergencies.

Besides honouring its many financial commitments to the United Nations entities concerned with humanitarian assistance and development activities by contributing more than \$1 million annually, the Government of the United Arab Emirates, together with a number of charity foundations, including the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society, contributes to all international assistance for people in affected areas in all parts of the world. Our contributions over the past three years have amounted to more than \$1 billion, in addition to other contributions directed towards the reconstruction of countries affected by armed conflicts, including Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the same time, we collaborate with United Nations major funds, programmes and agencies to finance and coordinate the implementation of a number of relief and development projects in those countries. In order to mitigate the effects of increasing food prices in the global markets, over the past few months we have sent tons of wheat and food products to many affected countries.

Furthermore, my country plays a major role in coordinating and strengthening international relief efforts by providing highly efficient logistics facilities on our land, such as the Dubai International Humanitarian City, one of the world's largest centres providing integrated logistics facilities and services to local, regional and international humanitarian organizations and agencies. In 2007, the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent signed an agreement with the United Nations Office for Project Services to provide logistical support to ensure the more efficient and effective delivery of relief supplies to persons affected by natural disasters and other crises, especially in Africa and Asia. Recently, we established an office for the coordination of foreign assistance, the first of its kind in the Middle East, in order to coordinate with United Nations entities and donor countries, at the international level, with a view to enhancing and accelerating our response to emergencies and emerging conditions in affected areas.

We emphasize the importance of implementing the recommendations and resolutions of all international conferences on national and international strategies for dealing with disasters and their aftermath at all stages, including by urging developing countries to shoulder their responsibilities in implementing such strategies and encouraging developed countries to fulfil their commitments to assist developing countries to build national capacity to deal with natural disasters and the aftermath of armed conflicts. We have worked with some countries that receive our assistance to build their national capacity to deal with disasters through financing and other support for programmes and research aimed at enhancing their ability to predict disasters and contain their aftermath and to strengthen infrastructure.

At the national level, we have taken all the necessary measures to implement those recommendations, such as launching a crisis management and emergency response project aimed at setting up an integrated local response mechanism for emergencies and environmental disasters. In addition, we are committed to implementing an environmental strategy that will reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

The United Arab Emirates attaches particular importance to supporting and assisting the Palestinian people and their Government during the humanitarian crisis caused by the cruel, aggressive policies of the Israeli occupying forces. My country holds a firm and principled position in its support of the legitimate and inalienable political rights of the Palestinian people and supports the Palestinian National Authority. We have translated this political and moral position into action, with continuous material and economic support that has included emergency humanitarian, development and technical assistance.

Our assistance to the Palestinians from 1994 to mid-2008 is estimated at \$4.2 billion, including our pledge at the Paris Donor Conference of \$300 million to rebuild Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and for housing projects in Gaza, Jenin and the West Bank as well as our pledge in Vienna to contribute to the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon. In September of this year, the head of State of the United Arab Emirates ordered the disbursal of \$5 million as urgent assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the

Near East (UNRWA) to help meet the needs of refugees in the camps.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In this regard, we stress the urgency of compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately stop its aggression, lift its restrictions and blockade against the Palestinians, comply with resolutions of international legitimacy and resume peace negotiations on the basis of relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We further urge donor countries to strengthen their assistance to the Palestinian people and Government in order to ease their suffering until the end of the Israeli occupation of their land and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and to continue financial support for the regular and emergency activities of UNRWA so that it can fulfil its commitments to the Palestinian refugees.

Mr. El-Bahi (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased at the outset to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/63/81) on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations in order to better respond to complex emergency situations in many parts of the world, as well as for his other relevant reports.

We appreciate the valuable efforts undertaken by the various organs and agencies working in the humanitarian field such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and all other non-governmental organizations. I would like to specifically mention the efforts undertaken by various national non-governmental and civil society organizations for the purpose of accelerating the delivery of relief assistance.

Facing the present global challenges, prominent among which are humanitarian needs, requires a broader and better understanding of how to strengthen cooperation and coordination with national institutions. The world today is witnessing an increase in both natural and man-made catastrophes. The frequency of such disasters has increased, which requires joint coordination and early monitoring in order to predict these events.

The growth in the frequency of these disasters has led to what we can call the globalization of humanitarian disasters that transcend the political borders of States. This doubles the impact of those disasters and underscores the importance of commitment to the main guidelines of humanitarian activities, the most important of which are neutrality, independence, transparency, integrity and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. We hope here that all of those principles will be translated into tangible action on the ground.

In this regard, we would like to commend the tireless efforts to strengthen national capacities for preparedness and response, as described in the report of the Secretary-General, and we hope that further steps in this direction will be taken without delay.

The role of States at the country level is central and fundamental in complementing the efforts undertaken by the United Nations through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The experience of the Sudan clearly demonstrates the importance of the role of the State. As the Sudan previously hosted one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world, Operation Lifeline Sudan, which established a model for the coordination of international humanitarian assistance in cooperation with the national Government of the Sudan, my country was able to sign a complimentary humanitarian assistance protocol with the United Nations for Darfur. This has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Darfur through a fast-track system.

It is worth mentioning here that the Sudanese Government has formed a high-level committee to follow up on the implementation of the protocol. This committee includes representatives of the Secretary-General and of specialized agencies of the United Nations. The Government of the Sudan was eager to include donors on this committee by inviting observers of donor States to follow up on the implementation of the humanitarian protocol. This has stabilized humanitarian indicators, which is reflected in all of the Secretary-General's reports on the situation in Darfur.

The situation is stable, and there has been a decline in mortality rates and a general improvement in public health indices. Moreover, at present, there are no epidemics in these provinces. None of that would have been possible without the commitment of the Sudanese Government to support and protect its citizens and its willingness to cooperate and coordinate

with the United Nations and its agencies. Here, a large, and growing, role is being played by our national organizations and agencies at a time when particular value is attached to humanitarian efforts. At the same time, the United Nations must attach greater importance to peaceful solutions, because ultimately it is these that will last. This would enhance the initiative recently launched in the Sudan: the Sudan's People's Initiative to solve the problem of Darfur.

Here, we must point out the intention of the United Nations to move from emergency humanitarian action to the development phase, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General. This could mesh with my Government's continuous, intensive efforts to spread development throughout the Sudan, particularly in Darfur, as a basis for bringing about peace and stability. The absence of development, as is well known, is the main cause of this conflict.

We would like to commend the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/81) on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, in particular his observations on Darfur, contained in paragraph 11. As concerns areas in which humanitarian action was affected because of lack of security, those areas are controlled by the rebel movements and are the only ones where attacks on humanitarian workers have occurred. Reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council have indicated that it was the rebel movements that actually carried out those attacks. In this connection, my delegation would like to extend its thanks and appreciation to all those who have contributed towards providing humanitarian assistance to our citizens in Darfur.

As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/348), the experience of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) shows how important it is to go beyond the scope of the work of the Fund in providing emergency funding in response to the initial recovery challenges, such as the return of victims from camps to their areas of residence. In this connection, my delegation would like to underline the importance of coordinating emergency relief and development assistance through funding development projects, through small quick-impact projects encouraging people to return from camps to the areas from which they were displaced. We should attach importance to building national and regional capacities in the area of humanitarian emergency relief and

development work through consultation with the national Governments concerned.

Again, we would like in particular to stress the importance of complementing humanitarian assistance with meeting development needs in order to avoid the problem of dependency and to ensure a smooth transition from humanitarian assistance to development and reconstruction.

The Secretary-General stresses the importance of strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We would like to underline the important role of NGOs in humanitarian efforts.

However, we must point out that some organizations exploit the appearance of humanitarian assistance for purposes other than humanitarian ones. Therefore, we appeal to all relevant actors to be fully committed to the guidelines for humanitarian action in order to achieve the desired objectives. We should urgently strengthen the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance so that we can respond to emergencies and other complex situations in many parts of the world.

Mr. Okuda (Japan): We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other humanitarian agencies for the work they have done in responding to humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters and complex emergencies.

We welcome the progress that has been made in effecting humanitarian reform. The Government of Japan supports the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which has been facilitating the initial response of United Nations agencies to humanitarian crises and strengthening responses to chronically underfunded crises. We also are pleased to see that an independent review found that the Fund has proven itself a valuable and impartial tool. I would just note that a Japanese national was recently appointed to the CERF Advisory Group, and Japan intends to contribute to the improvement of the Fund through that increased engagement.

The further roll-out of the cluster approach is another sign of progress, but as fault has been found in a number of areas — for example, the fact that excessive time is spent on coordination and that the system lacks priorities — additional improvements are needed.

I would like to make three points today. First, we are concerned about the serious impact which the current global food crises are having on the implementation of emergency humanitarian assistance. The international community must address this issue in order to achieve human security. At the Toyako summit of the Group of Eight this year, leaders called on the international community to expand emergency assistance for everyone who is still suffering from hunger and malnutrition; remove export restrictions on agricultural products; and increase aid to and investment in the agricultural sector of developing countries. We hope that every Member State will respond positively to this initiative.

For its part, Japan has provided approximately \$1.5 billion in food aid and other agricultural assistance since January this year. We are committed to implementing the pledge we made at the summit as quickly as possible and intend to strengthen the measures we have already taken. In addressing the food crisis, it is vital for each actor to implement its own measures steadily under a global partnership with all the relevant entities, such as developing countries, the private sector, civil society, donors and international organizations.

The extensive damage caused by the cyclone in Myanmar and the earthquake in China reminds us of the importance of disaster preparedness and risk reduction. If further evidence were needed, it would be necessary only to look to Cuba, which, without a doubt, by carrying out a range of measures before the hurricanes struck that country recently, saved the lives of a great number of people. For its part, Japan has experienced every type of natural calamity and has centuries of experience in addressing them. With our extensive experience and knowledge, and with the technology we have developed, we are determined to contribute to international cooperation in this area.

Thus, for example, we made a contribution to the formulation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and the development of the Tsunami Warning System (TWS), coordinated by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery. In May this year, the Government of Japan announced that it intended to promote cooperation in the area of disaster risk reduction and preparedness and to create a disaster management and infectious disease control network in Asia. Agreement on the same subject was

reached when the foreign ministers of Japan, China and the Republic of Korea met in June. Looking to the future, Japan intends to strengthen cooperation through interaction with the Asia disaster risk centre, the newly opened International Strategy for Disaster Reduction office and other institutions based in Kobe.

We commend humanitarian personnel for carrying out their heavy responsibilities under conditions that are often extremely difficult, and we are concerned about the deterioration in ensuring their safety and security. The Secretary-General needs to consider carefully the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises Worldwide, and to implement them. And we are proposing, together with Brazil and Switzerland, the establishment of a world humanitarian day to honour and pay tribute to all humanitarian personnel who have lost their lives in the fulfilment of their duties and to raise awareness of the importance of humanitarian assistance. We wish to urge all parties to conflicts around the world to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and to strengthen cooperation with regard to humanitarian activities. We also call upon the international community to support this initiative.

There are other vital issues confronting us as we strive to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The effective use of military assets is a challenge, for example, and we therefore welcome the results of the study commissioned by OCHA.

Before concluding my statement, I wish to underline the importance of ensuring a smooth transition from relief to development assistance. That is particularly true in post-conflict countries, where peacebuilding efforts contribute to the prevention of further conflict by providing sustainable reconstruction assistance along with humanitarian assistance. The Peacebuilding Commission will provide input for the report of the Secretary-General on early recovery and peacebuilding to be issued next year. As Chair of the Commission and as a Member State, Japan will do its utmost to move forward the discussions on the issue of transition.

Mr. Tarragô (Brazil): The increase in the number and scale of natural disasters this year is a cause of sadness and concern. The Secretary-General's report (A/63/84) alerts us to the severity of the new challenges compounding the suffering caused by natural disasters, such as the effects of climate change

and the global food crisis. Although those crises are felt worldwide, they have the greatest impact on developing countries.

The extraordinary resilience and solidarity shown by the peoples of Myanmar, China, Haiti and Cuba — countries that have been especially affected in 2008 — are praiseworthy. The efforts and the dedication of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and of the humanitarian personnel involved in responses to humanitarian emergencies are also to be commended.

The dire consequences of natural and man-made disasters, as well as the persistence of armed conflict in many regions of the world, heighten the need to strengthen the central role of the United Nations in coordinating international humanitarian assistance in keeping with the mandates of its organs, agencies, funds and programmes and with full respect for the principles set out in resolution 46/182.

With regard to the essential but complex issue of access to populations in need, I would like to stress the importance that Brazil attaches to the principles of non-intervention and non-indifference. Those principles are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they reinforce each other when the activities of the various actors are performed in a transparent way. The assistance provided by Governments, the United Nations system and other partners must add up to benefit for the populations in need. Denial of access constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law and, in many cases, international human rights law and refugee law as well.

More should be done to strengthen national and local capacities, not only to ensure timely and adequate responses to humanitarian needs, but also to enhance preparedness and disaster risk reduction. There is a role for the international community in helping disaster-prone countries to develop such capacities. As we know, investing in preparedness saves human lives and greatly offsets the costs of response.

Another cause of concern is the reported increase in the number of violent incidents involving humanitarian and United Nations personnel. Five years ago, on 19 August 2003, we all mourned the loss of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and five other people. Many more United Nations officials and humanitarian personnel have lost their lives since then. It is unacceptable that humanitarian workers continue to be deliberately

targeted and killed in the discharge of their duties. We appeal to all parties, especially in armed conflicts, to comply with their obligations under international law regarding the safety and security of humanitarian and United Nations and associated personnel.

Brazil believes that a commemorative day should be established to pay tribute to all those who have lost their lives in the cause of duty and to raise awareness about the importance of humanitarian assistance worldwide. We invite all countries to join us in that endeavour.

Brazil is fully committed to international efforts to provide assistance to countries affected by humanitarian emergencies. The Brazilian Government has steadily increased its provision of assistance, with a special focus on food security. The creation of an inter-ministerial working group in 2006 to direct our efforts in that regard has been effective in ensuring greater predictability and better coordination.

Our humanitarian activities have significantly increased since then. In 2007 and 2008, the Brazilian Government provided assistance to approximately 20 countries each year, mostly in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, through an annual contribution of \$15 million. Although the bulk of that assistance was provided bilaterally, we have also increased our contributions to the United Nations system, including the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). It is encouraging to note that CERF, which has been supported by more than 80 countries, has become an important tool in addressing emergency humanitarian situations.

We take a special interest in the development by the World Food Programme of new tools such as the pilot project Purchase for Progress. In Brazil, a twin-track approach is being implemented through a policy of procuring agricultural goods for assistance. The policy benefits small farmers both in Brazil and in affected countries, thus helping to decrease rural poverty while addressing the emergency needs of the recipient community.

My country is greatly concerned at the humanitarian situation in Palestine. The international community must step up its efforts to address it. Brazil made pledges at the Stockholm Conference in 2006 and at the donor conference held in Paris in December 2007. We also intend to provide technical cooperation

in the development of public policies on food security and in the areas of health, sports and elections. In 2007, Brazil received a group of 117 Palestinian refugees.

Finally, we see an increased role for regional arrangements in assisting affected countries. A successful example is the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency. Usually, neighbours are those best suited to help and understand the needs of affected countries and populations. My country is willing to discuss ways to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance in our region. In that context, we wish to thank Mexico for hosting in September the first Regional Meeting on Enhancing International Humanitarian Partnerships. We are pleased to follow up on that successful event by organizing the second meeting in Brazil in May 2009, when we will welcome all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ms. Graham (New Zealand): Over the past year the international community has had to respond to a growing number of humanitarian emergencies. Those emergencies wreak havoc on nations and communities, threatening economic growth and undermining development, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We welcome the Secretary-General's report on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/63/81). The report highlights the potential for erosion of the progress we have made towards the MDGs, if we fail to address root causes and fail to better link development and humanitarian efforts.

It is our duty to seek to prevent and to respond to humanitarian crises. On top of the climate-related disasters and conflict situations that have affected us, the global food and financial crisis this year has impacted, and will continue to impact unduly on the poorest of the poor.

Our own Asia-Pacific region is no exception to those challenges. High vulnerability and the severity of natural disasters have resulted in significant loss of life and economic damage. We have been pleased to participate in the roll-out of the clusters at a regional level in the Pacific to improve capacity, predictability and response in the event of disasters. In times of humanitarian crisis, immediate lifesaving work must be undertaken, but development efforts such as disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, a focus on

more effective long-term food security, social safety nets and sound economic and legal frameworks are all part of the solution, as are more effective partnerships.

Turning now to the Secretary-General's report on the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) (A/63/348), we are pleased to note the evaluation's positive assessment. However, we believe there is still room for improvement in terms of consistency of quality, efficiency, timeliness and accountability. Implementing the recommendations will require a concerted and coordinated effort and we look forward to the release of management responses to the CERF evaluation later this week.

In line with Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, New Zealand will continue to provide unearmarked predictable multi-year contributions to the CERF and to multilateral agencies with which we partner, to allow agencies to plan and work effectively on the basis of agreed strategic priorities.

New Zealand supports the key role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action, especially the role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We also consider civil society participation as critical to solution and reform efforts. Development and humanitarian activities by communities, non-governmental organizations, the Red Cross Movement and the private sector are substantial and they must be recognized as equal and complementary partners to the United Nations humanitarian system. Humanitarian policy development, planning, programming and financing needs to be undertaken in a way which supports and enhances the activities.

New Zealand applauds all those humanitarian workers who put their lives on the frontline to help those most in need. We remain deeply concerned that there has been an increase in deliberate and targeted attacks on humanitarian workers and we urge all parties to a conflict to respect the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol. New Zealand will continue to advocate for the preservation of humanitarian space and for the safety and security of all humanitarian workers.

In all situations where humanitarian assistance is provided, the end goals are the preservation of human life, the alleviation of suffering and a sense of well-

being and dignity. Those goals are worthy of our collective effort.

Mr. McMahan (United States of America): The United States continues to support a stronger and more effective international response to humanitarian crises and we welcome the opportunity to comment on efforts to better coordinate the emergency relief efforts of the United Nations.

Access by aid workers to communities in need continues to be one of the most significant constraints on the speed and quality of humanitarian response. The ability of the humanitarian community to deliver the levels of assistance needed as a crisis progresses is largely contingent upon sustained and safe humanitarian access, along with sufficient organizational capacity to meet assessed needs. Even with improvements in the humanitarian community's response capacities, aid is not always delivered in time due to access restrictions. Humanitarian agencies cannot assist people they cannot reach. The international community looks to the United Nations for leadership in advocating unimpeded humanitarian access to vulnerable populations.

Deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers, especially local staff and their families, remain a significant impediment to lifesaving aid in many crises and we must all work together to guarantee the safety and security of humanitarian workers as well as civilians. A renewed commitment by all States to protect humanitarian workers is a vital component of improved effectiveness and coordination of humanitarian response.

Protracted civil conflicts continue to create some of the largest situations of forced displacement and are a tragic reminder that civilians are at times deliberately targeted. Last year, a million or more internally displaced people returned to their homes in Africa. Yet in the same year, recent estimates indicate that Africa produced 1.6 million new internally displaced persons. The United States calls on Member States to protect those whose lives or freedom are threatened by civil conflict and to support coordinated efforts by humanitarian organizations with protection mandates and expertise.

One of the key humanitarian assistance priorities of the United States is the protection of women and children from gender-based violence. We believe that prevention and response to gender-based violence

should begin at the onset of every emergency. The United States strongly encourages all humanitarian assistance actors to integrate programming to counter gender-based violence into their humanitarian efforts. Those approaches should be multisector and aim to combine protection activities, community services, health care and referral services into humanitarian assistance operations.

This year, establishing effective lines of communication and clear lines of responsibility has been a priority of donors in the realm of humanitarian reform and has strengthened overall United Nations leadership and responsiveness in humanitarian crises. We also continue to stress the importance of the participation of non-governmental organization at all levels of coordination, including the cluster approach. The United States commends the progress achieved on the cluster system and urges the United Nations to continue efforts to fully integrate and operationalize cluster efforts in the field.

Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations are placing increased emphasis on the need to improve immediate and coordinated emergency response to vulnerable populations facing urgent humanitarian needs. The introduction of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a positive step forward, but in welcoming the CERF, we should also highlight the significant bilateral and regional mechanisms that already exist to provide humanitarian assistance. Given the magnitude of need and ongoing efforts, no single mechanism should be advocated over other funding options. A variety of funding mechanisms and responses is needed in this complex environment.

I want to reaffirm the strong support of the United States for neutral, impartial, independent and robust responses to humanitarian needs around the globe. We support adherence to the core humanitarian principles, as outlined in the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, and recent efforts to strengthen needs-based assessment, improve donor coordination at the central and field levels and review best practices and performance measurement. The United States calls on Member States to support United Nations management reforms that seek to develop strong systems for assessing needs and measuring performance.

Given the complexities of aid programming, the importance of humanitarian space and maintaining the

impartiality of aid delivery is critical. The United States supports the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief and appreciates that the leading role of civilian organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, particularly in areas affected by conflicts, is essential to humanitarian access and to upholding the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

In conclusion, we extend our appreciation to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations agencies, as well as fellow Member States, for their continued efforts to improve the swiftness and effectiveness of our response to humanitarian crises.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): In the light of the negative impact of climate change, Mexico believes that efforts must be redoubled to reduce the human and material losses resulting from earthquakes and extreme weather events. This year started with the earthquake in Kyrgyzstan, and since then more than 40 countries throughout the world have been struck by disasters, in addition to hurricanes Hanna, Gustav, Ike, Kyle and Omar and typhoons in the Asian region.

Mexico reiterates its solidarity with the victims of those events and emphasizes how important it is for the international community to continue to progress towards an integrated disaster prevention culture. In that respect, Mexico therefore believes that the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 is a strong step in that direction, as it provides specific guidance on how to address the different levels of risk management. In particular, priority five of the Framework provides a list of basic actions to strengthen preventive measures, such as carrying out studies, drawing up risk maps, establishing early warning systems and raising awareness among people, inter alia.

Mexico believes that the time has come to understand and focus on natural disasters and climate change in a holistic fashion, availing ourselves of the advantages and opportunities provided by the agenda for climate change adaptation and disaster reduction efforts.

Mexico believes that the maturity of the international community in terms of its focus on disasters is demonstrated by the diverse means the humanitarian community employs. Promoting that diversity to the benefit of our communities, in

particular those struck by disaster, means having the right tools to appropriately coordinate our efforts. Progress in enhancing the coordination of humanitarian assistance will require a commitment to engage actively in political dialogue at all levels, in institutional and humanitarian capacity-building and in the provision of financial resources.

Today, we have the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and in particular specific emergency response mechanisms, such as the expert contingents of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team. Appropriate coordination will also require financial tools that correspond to the requirements of the time. The recently established Central Emergency Response Fund represents a predictable, transparent and increasingly important tool for responding to such concerns in an opportune and immediate manner. Mexico supported the creation of the Fund and over the years has increased its contribution to it. For 2008, we have contributed \$100,000, and we will provide \$150,000 in 2009.

It is also important to have tools that facilitate requests for — and the receipt of — humanitarian aid. Mexico therefore believes that it is important to have common rules in this area. We believe that this Organization has an important role to play in providing technical assistance to States. Mexico reiterates the importance of avoiding redundancy and the waste of resources on tasks already carried out by existing mechanisms. In that context, Mexico promotes the coordination of humanitarian assistance by taking advantage of the synergies that exist between already operational mechanisms at the international, regional, subregional and national levels. In that respect, Mexico, as the pro tempore secretary of the Rio Group, will promote the establishment and registration of national platforms for disaster responses, thereby giving political momentum to the commitments undertaken in the Hyogo Framework for Action.

Our country is concerned that restrictive and anti-humanitarian stances will undermine victims' rights to humanitarian assistance. When emergencies strike, we as a State are called upon to consider the limits of our national capacity and to exercise our prerogatives to request aid and receive it under the appropriate conditions and procedures. That is not in question. However, those who scrutinize humanitarian assistance in such situations, putting sovereignty

before the needs of the victims, undermine the pillars of such assistance and jeopardize peoples' lives, human dignity and health.

Intensifying dialogue in order to improve disaster responses is in the interests of the entire community. Mexico has therefore combined its efforts with those of Canada and OCHA to hold the first Latin American and Caribbean meeting on international mechanisms for humanitarian aid, which was held in Mexico City on 10 and 11 September. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange information and experience on the matter and to explore ways of improving cooperation between States and the United Nations. Here, Mexico wishes to welcome Brazil's initiative to continue that exercise, which will undoubtedly be of benefit to the region.

Lastly, Mexico wishes to underscore its commitment to the endeavours of the United Nations and the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to ensure better coordination of humanitarian assistance, and reiterates its support for OCHA and Under-Secretary-General John Holmes.

Mr. Al-Salem (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to participate in the discussion of an important item on the agenda of the General Assembly, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". We concur with the Secretary-General regarding mention in his report (A/63/277) of his grave concern regarding the increase in frequency and intensity of natural disasters reported during the past year in comparison to previous years. Those disasters killed and injured thousands and caused economic losses that exceeded \$75 billion.

The State of Kuwait is at the forefront of those States that offer all kinds of humanitarian assistance for those afflicted by natural disasters and contributes to alleviating their suffering, particularly in developing countries.

Based on its sense of responsibility and its conviction of the need to respond promptly, Kuwait provides such assistance bilaterally and directly. During the past three years, Kuwait provided more than \$700 million in financial assistance to many countries and regions afflicted on every continent without discrimination. The assistance my country provides is in net amounts, with no transportation, shipping or administrative handling costs being discounted.

In this regard, I wish to mention that Kuwait has contributed to the Central Emergency Relief Fund since its establishment and is very keen to continue its annual support to this Fund. Since it was established, the Fund has acted quickly to provide immediate and neutral financing to all urgent appeals for emergency situations.

While we commend the performance of this Fund, we call upon the international community to increase their contributions to it, so that it can continue to reach its annual target of \$500 million, as set by the General Assembly.

Kuwait commends the excellent role that the United Nations system has played during the past years, through its various specialized agencies, programmes and offices, in responding to emergencies and facilitating the transportation, shipping and distribution of emergency humanitarian assistance. We also greatly appreciate the efforts and sacrifices of all those working in the field of humanitarian assistance. Kuwait expresses its concern over the explicit threats directed at those workers in areas afflicted by natural disasters or conflicts.

My country calls on all the host countries to exert all efforts necessary in order to guarantee the security of all those working in the humanitarian field. We also reaffirm the call of the Secretary-General urging all parties involved in responding to emergency situations and natural disasters to strengthen respect for the humanitarian principles required for humanitarian action: neutrality, impartiality and independence.

It is incumbent on all of us to respect the commitments of the international community to saving the Palestinian people from suffering. In this context, I wish to commend the rapid emergency interventions on the part of the United Nations, its specialized agencies and non-government organizations aimed at providing support for the basic needs as well the economic and development needs of the Palestinians.

Here, I wish to refer to the continued assistance that Kuwait provides to the Palestinian people in all its forms, whether it is given directly to the Palestinian Authority or through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

On a related topic, we read with great interest the report of the Secretary-General concerning assistance

to the Palestinian people. Based on this report, Kuwait demands that Israel cease all of its inhuman practices against the Palestinian people and we emphasize the need to promptly lift the harsh restrictions imposed on cross-border transportation and pedestrian crossings in Gaza and the West Bank. Additionally, all settlement activities must end and the building of the separation wall stopped, since such practices have led to a steep deterioration in the economy and have hindered the delivery of urgent international humanitarian aid as well as the basic materials necessary for development.

Kuwait extends its heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of the brotherly Republic of Yemen, for the scores of people who were killed and injured, the thousands who were displaced, as well as all the infrastructure damage owing to the heavy rains and floods that recently affected the eastern parts of the country.

We also confirm that we shall continue to provide all kinds of aid and assistance as we call upon General Assembly members to sponsor and support the draft resolution concerning providing special economic assistance to the Republic of Yemen in order to alleviate the suffering of the brotherly Yemeni people.

In conclusion, I wish to state that Kuwait shall continue to contribute, on the bilateral level and through United Nations specialized agencies, to efforts to mitigate natural disasters, challenges and global crises, which impede the realization of development goals.

Kuwait shall also continue to provide assistance for reconstruction efforts through its official and unofficial development institutions, such as the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, private Kuwaiti associations and charitable organizations as we continue to aspire to a world where everyone lives in peace, stability and prosperity.

Ms. Davies (Australia): The past year's events have demonstrated the vital role of international humanitarian assistance. Increased food prices have exacerbated existing emergencies and contributed to sharply increased food insecurity in many parts of the world. Millions of people in countries affected by complex emergencies remained dependent on international assistance to meet their basic needs. Natural hazards, especially climate-related hazards, had devastating consequences in Myanmar, southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Regrettably, there are reasons to expect the demand for humanitarian assistance will continue to increase in the years ahead. Investments in disaster risk reduction and preparedness and in strengthened coordination arrangements will be essential if the international community is to tackle the humanitarian challenges ahead.

Australia recognizes the need for greater focus on disaster risk reduction, including prevention, mitigation and preparedness measures. We may not be able to prevent cyclones, droughts or earthquakes, but planning and preparation can minimize the impacts of natural hazards on vulnerable communities.

Disaster risk reduction must be incorporated into humanitarian action and early recovery efforts in order to build the resilience and preparedness of communities. We support efforts by the international community to build on the existing knowledge and momentum for disaster risk reduction, particularly through the Hyogo Framework for Action, to help meet the challenges of climate change.

Australia values the role of the United Nations in promoting coordinated, effective and accountable international responses to humanitarian emergencies. We recognise the Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the operational agencies of the United Nations for the key role they play in humanitarian relief.

We acknowledge the considerable efforts that have been made to strengthen systems for needs assessment, planning, delivery and monitoring of humanitarian assistance. Much more needs to be done, but we have a strong foundation for future work.

In particular, we support the role of the Humanitarian Coordinator in strategically coordinating the international response on behalf of the United Nations, working closely with national authorities. We encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to build an expanded pool of humanitarian coordinators ready for deployment with the high-level capacities needed for these challenging roles. Greater investment is also needed in improving the skills of all United Nations resident coordinators in humanitarian relief and disaster management, given that resident coordinators may be required to take on the humanitarian coordinator role in response to a crisis.

The value of the humanitarian cluster coordination approach has been clearly demonstrated in a number of emergencies over the last year. Clusters have been successful in enhancing coordination, prioritization and partnerships in key thematic areas. While the cluster approach can be further improved, including through ensuring the clusters consistently promote strengthened accountability to national Governments, beneficiaries and other stakeholders, the benefits of improved coordination are clear.

We know that women and men, and boys and girls, are affected differently by conflict and natural disasters. It is imperative that a gender perspective be integrated into all aspects of humanitarian policy, planning and implementation. We stress the importance of integrated measures, as part of humanitarian action, to reduce gender-based violence. We need to strengthen the awareness and responsiveness of peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel to women's and children's protection needs.

Australia advocates for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which, in addition to women's protection, provides for women's full and active participation in peace processes and peacebuilding. We call also for special attention to be given to ensuring that women have access to reproductive health services in emergency settings.

Australia is deeply troubled by the increasing incidence of violent attacks against humanitarian personnel. Such attacks impact not only on humanitarian aid workers and their families, but have also led to the suspension of a number of humanitarian programmes, preventing relief from reaching those who need it most. That disturbing trend must be reversed.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to reaffirm Australia's commitment to supporting the United Nations crucial role in disaster risk reduction and in building a more effective international humanitarian response capacity.

Mr. Punkrasin (Thailand): Every time a picture of human suffering from a natural disaster is broadcast to our offices and living rooms, the common humanity inside each and every one of us is inevitably touched. When faced with this image of human suffering, we know that we cannot look away.

So far, the international community has responded generously and effectively to many natural disasters, but we cannot be complacent. The urgent need for action by the international community has never been greater. According to a report of the Secretary-General on that issue (A/63/81), since 1987, climate-related disasters have increased by almost 90 per cent, while geological hazards have increased by nearly 40 per cent. The largest driver of disasters during the reporting period was the increased incidence and severity of extreme weather events, mostly associated with climate change. Alarming, nine out of every 10 disasters are now climate-related.

The international community must realize the urgency and respond immediately to those gathering threats. To that end, Thailand strongly believes that leadership at the national, regional and international levels is needed.

First and foremost, national leadership is vital to any successful humanitarian response. The national leadership shown by countries affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami serves as a good example. As acknowledged in a report by the Secretary-General (A/63/84), progress is now apparent across the affected region.

In Thailand, the Government has been making earnest efforts not only to rebuild damaged structures, but also to make sure that those structures will be rebuilt better. Engagement with and participation by local communities have proved to be a crucial elements in attempts to raise disaster awareness and design prevention and response capabilities that are best suited to each specific locality.

Administrative and legal reforms have also been made to ensure greater efficiency and improved system-wide coordination. The most important of those legal and administrative reforms was the enactment of the new Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Act of November 2007 to serve as an overarching framework for Thailand's disaster management system. We have been working closely with United Nations agencies and the private sector in the spirit of partnership to pool expertise, lessons learned and resources in a joint effort to strengthen disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response capabilities at both the national and local levels.

Looking ahead, Thailand stands ready to continue to share our experience and to work with interested

countries in the area of disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response capabilities, as well as in achieving the goals set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action, 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

Secondly, regional leadership is necessary to complement national leadership. When national capability has proved to be insufficient in responding to an emergency humanitarian situation caused by a natural disaster, regional countries can offer needed emergency assistance to shore up national response due to comparative advantages, such as proximity and the trust and confidence that regional countries enjoy with the affected country.

The most vivid case of regional leadership is the response to Cyclone Nargis that struck Myanmar in May 2008. Individually, regional countries responded swiftly and generously to help the affected population in Myanmar. For example, the first batch of emergency relief assistance from Thailand reached Myanmar within 72 hours after the cyclone struck. A constant flow of relief supplies from the Government and people of Thailand to the affected people in Myanmar soon followed via air and land bridges. Medical teams from Thailand were also sent to the hardest hit areas of the Ayeyarwady Delta to work with medical teams from Myanmar and other regional countries.

Thailand also offered the Don Mueang International Airport as a staging area through which humanitarian assistance and equipment from around the world could be channelled into Myanmar in an orderly and systematic manner. From 24 May to 22 August 2008, a total number of 232 flights carrying approximately 4,000 tons of humanitarian assistance passed through the air bridge from Bangkok to Yangon.

Cyclone Nargis also energized the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to take a leadership role by acting as a critical diplomatic umbrella under which the international community, acting through the United Nations, could work in partnership with Myanmar. The leadership role of the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis and the creation of the Tripartite Core Group — which comprises Myanmar, ASEAN and the United Nations — have contributed to the smooth coordination of humanitarian assistance and joint planning for longer-term recovery and preparedness.

However, ASEAN cannot rest on its laurels. That is why Thailand, as the Chair of ASEAN, has attached importance to strengthening regional arrangements for disaster risk reduction, preparedness and mitigation, and response capabilities. We want to make sure that when the next major natural disaster occurs in the region, ASEAN has effective trigger mechanisms in place to mobilize all regional coordination and assistance in a timely and systematic manner. We would look at ways to integrate military assets into ASEAN's standby arrangements and standard operating procedures so that those critical assets can be mobilized in the event of a disaster.

We would also explore ways to develop the pre-positioning of regional stockpiles and distribution hubs for relief supplies. In that case, the experience of Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok as a staging area for humanitarian relief delivery in the wake of Cyclone Nargis could serve as a good foundation for the region to build upon. ASEAN is ready to share our experience and lessons learned on that issue with interested countries and regions, as well as the United Nations.

Thirdly, collective leadership at the global level is a must in reinforcing national and regional leadership and resilience. The international community must realize that extreme climate variability and its consequences are likely to become a fact of life from now on. This year alone, we have witnessed unprecedented devastating storms, flooding, droughts and desertification across the world, not to mention many large-scale earthquakes in various regions. Many lives were lost and livelihoods destroyed as a result of those disasters. Such natural disasters could happen again in the future. Thus, we have to be better prepared.

In that regard, Thailand supports the Secretary-General's call for sufficient and predictable resources at the global level to meet current humanitarian challenges in a timely manner. In response to that call, Thailand has this year increased its contribution to the Central Emergency Response Fund. At the same time, Thailand strongly believes that the international community should place greater emphasis on funding disaster risk reduction and preparedness. More technical and financial assistance for disaster risk reduction and preparedness programmes should thus be made available for developing countries situated in disaster-prone areas. The United Nations should also work in partnership with regional organizations to facilitate the mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise, as well as devise effective modalities for joint action in times of emergency.

Last but not least, the international community must show collective responsibility in tackling a major driver of the increase in natural disasters: climate change. Therefore, Thailand urges all parties to ensure that the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Poznan, Poland, early next month will be successful.

Faced with the gathering threats of increasing natural disasters caused by climate change and geological activities, we have a choice to make between action and inaction; between being better prepared and being unprepared; between working together as one and working separately as disparate parts; and between survival and loss. For Thailand, the choice is clear. We must act, we must be better prepared and we must work together as one.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.