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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 17 July 2006, at 3.10 p.m.

President: Mr. HACHANI (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND HUNGER (continued) (E/2006/56)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to continue its consideration of agenda item 4 “Sustained economic growth for social development, including the eradication of poverty and hunger”.

Action on the outcome of the coordination segment (E/2006/L.14)

Draft resolution E/2006/L.14 was adopted.

Oral decision

The PRESIDENT said that, by way of conclusion of agenda item 4, he wished to propose an oral decision in two parts. The first concerned the multi-year work programme for the coordination segment, which the Council was required, by its decision 2005/221, to finalize prior to the beginning of the 2006 substantive session. Consultations on the multi-year work programme being suspended however pending the adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution on Council reform, the Council would need to finalize the programme at a resumed session of the Council once the General Assembly resolution had been adopted. The second part of the decision would take note of the report of the Secretary-General on sustained economic growth for social development, including poverty eradication and hunger (E/2006/56).

It was so decided.

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

Mr. FRISCH (Observer for Switzerland) said that the Swiss Government favoured the promotion of functional and effective relations between the different components of the humanitarian system rather than the establishment of a single system under the aegis of the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator. It also wished the “cluster leadership approach” to be implemented with caution and in a limited number of contexts, and for its impact to be evaluated transparently and in a participative manner. It considered the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to be a useful instrument for saving lives and preserving human dignity,

but it wished to stress that the Fund could only make limited responses and must be considered an additional funding mechanism for humanitarian emergencies. With a view to strengthening the central role of the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinators, it advocated measures to systematize and professionalize their recruitment and training.

The Swiss Government believed that it was the responsibility of the national authorities to ensure the protection of persons in distress on their territory and called on the competent authorities to respect international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. Access to populations that did not participate in the hostilities must be ensured without restriction to humanitarian organizations that respected humanitarian principles. It also encouraged national authorities and the international community to apply the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

As shown by the natural disasters that had occurred in the year under review, there was an urgent need to strengthen local response capacities and to prepare the most vulnerable for major risks in order to limit loss of life and increase the resilience of communities, infrastructures and livelihoods. As underlined by the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, reinforced by the findings of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, coordinated efforts by all partners at the local, regional and global levels were necessary for that purpose. Strengthening of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and the creation of the ISDR Global Platform would contribute to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework. There was also a need for the recovery dimensions to be discussed formally and in depth in the framework of other segments of the substantive session of the Council to create greater synergies between the Member States, the Secretariat, United Nations organizations and other stakeholders.

As for civilian-military relations, his Government welcomed the Secretary-General's note of instruction concerning integrated missions, which it wished to see fully implemented by the Secretariat. His delegation also recognized the primacy of civil humanitarian organizations in humanitarian aid and the validity of existing instruments governing civilian-military cooperation in crises. It urged all concerned to implement the Secretary-General's guidelines and stressed the central role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in that regard.

Ms. FORERO UCROS (Columbia) said that the prime responsibility for protecting the civil population in emergency situations lay with the national government, supported by the international community in order to boost and sustain the relief efforts. The Colombian Government, with the help of the local police and municipalities, had taken steps to rebuild communities destroyed by terrorist attacks perpetrated by armed groups. The Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation was responsible for coordinating assistance to displaced populations, in association with international organizations and specialized agencies. Strategies had been devised to involve civil society in national, regional and local efforts to reduce vulnerability to armed violence, prevent forced displacement and protect the rights of the local population. There had been progress in responding to emergency situations, including the provision of basic food supplies, temporary accommodation, health and education services, emergency transport and psychosocial assistance following displacement.

Efforts had been made to stabilize the socio-economic situation through the voluntary return of displaced persons to their place of origin, their resettlement in places other than their place of origin or their permanent settlement in their initial place of arrival. Central and regional government had assumed responsibility for policy implementation and resource allocation - the sum of 3,970 million pesos having been assigned for that purpose for the period 2007-2010. One of the major challenges involved the strengthening of information systems for the purpose of devising public policies geared to the scale of the problem. Progress in describing and measuring population displacement had been achieved through a unified registry of displaced persons comprising 1,902,966 names. What remained was to take account of those displaced persons who currently lacked identity documents. It was necessary for the national authorities to harmonize its statistics with those of the specialized agencies and NGOs in order to ascertain the impact of the measures already taken in terms of the number of those who had ceased to be displaced.

Finally, the Colombian Government expressed its gratitude to the OCHA and other international agencies for their assistance and monitoring with respect to natural disasters in Colombia, in support of the national authorities responsible for overseeing the relevant activities.

Mr. YUDHISTIRANTO (Indonesia) said that the Secretary-General's reports had highlighted the lessons learned from the humanitarian response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, among other disasters, and ways of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian relief in the future. The recommendation that attention should be paid to regional appeals and coordination mechanisms to promote coherence of response and the most effective use of resources merited further consideration. However, there was a need to identify more clearly the lead institution for regional appeals and the process envisioned for broadcasting such appeals.

One of the important gaps in emergency humanitarian assistance concerned the predictability, accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian response. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) held out the hope of ready availability of resources in times of need. Use of the Fund should be consistent with General Assembly resolution 46/182, which emphasized that humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. In the context of the growing concern with gender-based violence in humanitarian crises, it was important to ensure that measures to prevent such violence showed consideration for established national policies.

While the affected State had the primary role in the organization, coordination and delivery of all humanitarian assistance, the assistance of the international community was needed to boost the very limited capacities of developing countries to cope with the immediate aftermath of disasters and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. Non-United Nations actors such as the International Red Cross had a role to play in that regard, but the most effective long-term solution was to strengthen the potential of the countries themselves to mitigate and respond to natural disasters. By supporting local and national recovery processes, it was possible to transform disasters into opportunities for sustained development.

In Aceh and Nias, the Executing Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction had been working with donor countries and organizations to tackle the largest reconstruction challenge in Indonesia's history in the wake of a natural disaster. Despite the problems encountered, homes and infrastructures were being rebuilt, local government capacity was being developed and the local workforce was being trained. The Government was working hard to ensure that investment measures were effective and that corruption was being fought through investigation, prevention and education. Sustained international commitment was needed in the post-disaster period for

restoring livelihoods, building resilience and reducing vulnerability, and it was hoped that the international community would focus on meeting that need. The tsunami tragedy had highlighted once again the value of collective action and international solidarity, and the demonstration of goodwill from all parts of the world had given meaning to the idea of multilateralism in the lives of ordinary people.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh), endorsing the introduction of the cluster approach, said that its success and that of the CERF would depend on strong country-level leadership. His Government wished for a more effective humanitarian coordinator system and for further strengthening of OCHA in terms of resources and capabilities. Stronger response capacity, more responsible leadership, greater effectiveness in aid delivery and improved coordination were essential. If it was to achieve the aim of more rapid, more predictable and more needs-based humanitarian assistance, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) would have to be properly resourced and pledges by donors converted into actual donations. Its funding should moreover be additional to that of all existing humanitarian assistance mechanisms.

States must strengthen their commitment to respect for the principles and rules of international humanitarian law. Humanitarian actors should comply with the laws, culture and customs of recipient countries. Measures must be taken to prevent gender-based violence and to protect humanitarian and associated personnel in accordance with Security Council resolution 1502.

Humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Greater emphasis should be placed on equity in the distribution of such assistance, and the donor community should make available increased amounts of flexible, unearmarked and predictable funding for relief assistance. Improved and more flexible multi-year funding mechanisms should be developed for that purpose. Methodologies must be devised, particularly in the case of the least developed countries, whereby humanitarian assistance and relief became the seeds for subsequent development.

His Government was committed to reducing the vulnerability of its citizens, in a disaster-prone country such as Bangladesh, to a manageable humanitarian level. It had brought about a shift in disaster management from a conventional response and relief approach to a more comprehensive risk-reduction culture. Its experience through its Comprehensive Disaster Management and Cyclone Preparedness programmes had shown that timely and coordinated intervention could significantly minimize the adverse effects of disaster. Bangladesh was also committed to reducing human suffering at the international level and had decided to contribute to the CERF in keeping with its modest means. Building global partnerships was essential to disaster mitigation, and it was to be hoped that the international solidarity forged in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami would prove lasting.

Mr. KIM Il-hoon (Republic of Korea) welcomed the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund, to which his Government wished to pledge US\$ 5 million. He likewise welcomed the successful application of the cluster leadership approach, while believing that there was a need for more comprehensive analysis of the challenges it faced on the ground. It would also like to see the humanitarian system strengthened through more systematic training and cooperation among international humanitarian agencies, including NGOs. Greater coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance was essential to its more rapid and effective delivery to the international community.

His Government wished to encourage Member States, in close cooperation with international and local communities, to enhance their preparedness for humanitarian crisis by building key partnerships at the regional and national levels. Disaster-prone countries should develop the necessary capacity to cope with potential disasters through investments in education, training and preventive planning. For their part, the providers of disaster-relief assistance should strengthen national and local capacities in support of the affected country. In that connection, the Republic of Korea was shortly to train rescue personnel from 17 countries to effectively respond to humanitarian crises and disasters.

In all such efforts, the observance of humanitarian principles was essential. His delegation noted with concern that humanitarian access to those in need was not fully ensured in many humanitarian crises, resulting in lost lives and extended suffering. It urged all concerned parties to provide unimpeded access in such circumstances to those in need in a spirit of

humanitarianism and in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. The issue of gender-based violence in humanitarian assistance efforts called for urgent attention and action, including strengthened legal measures against impunity and more systematic support for victims.

Finally, his delegation was pleased to see the efficacy and resolve with which the international community had responded to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 South Asian earthquake. While integration of the myriad rescue and relief bodies remained a daunting challenge, recent humanitarian crises unprecedented in number and scale had offered a unique opportunity to strengthen humanitarian response capacity through enhanced cooperation and coordination.

Mr. SILVA (Sri Lanka) said that the subject of disaster relief was critically important in helping his country to recover in the wake of the tsunami tragedy and in turning its experience to account in the development of an effective United Nations disaster management strategy. The guiding principle of the tsunami programme in Sri Lanka had been equity, in terms of poverty alleviation and meeting the special needs of the conflict-affected areas. The sheer number of actors involved and the scale of the reconstruction requirements had posed a huge challenge of coordination, monitoring and evaluation. A clear lesson to emerge had been the importance of communication not only through the media but also with the affected communities, particularly on gender issues. The question of coordination had assumed importance during the recovery efforts - the high degree of duplication having resulted in excessive overhead costs and some confusion as to who was doing what. It had been observed that the cost of relief and rehabilitation could have been reduced by using local material and human resources.

He was pleased to note that the issue of better utilization of resources through improved coordination on the ground formed an integral part of the humanitarian reform programme outlined by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. The cluster approach, if properly implemented, could provide solutions to the problems highlighted by the Sri Lankan experience. In that connection, consideration might be given to the potential benefits of inter-cluster coordination.

Disaster management had become a national priority with the creation of a new Ministry and the development of a national early warning and protection system, including links with other international early warning systems. Local capacity building had been identified as the main objective for international intervention, which should support but not be a substitute for government or local civil society efforts. Full use must moreover be made of local human resources and local procurement as a means of contributing to national economic development and poverty alleviation.

With regard to the issue of transparency and accountability, he believed that the United Nations should play a role in ensuring greater coordination of all donors, including the NGO community. Another matter requiring attention was the accelerated implementation of donor commitments. Excessive delays affected the value and delivery of the final product due to factors such as inflation and donor and recipient fatigue. It was also important to ensure that rehabilitation and livelihood restoration went hand in hand so as to ensure the sustainable development of the affected areas. Restoring livelihoods also called for constant monitoring of the communities in question.

In conclusion, he wished to express his appreciation of all the assistance received and pledged for Sri Lanka and of the excellent coordination and support provided by the United Nations led by OCHA and by President Clinton as the United Nations Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery.

Ms. GHANASHYAM (India) said that a series of major natural disasters over the last two years had tested the capacity of the United Nations system to provide urgent humanitarian assistance. The system had found itself stretched to its limit on some occasions but had learnt the lessons of that experience with the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). India had been closely involved in the establishment of the upgraded Fund and, in a gesture of solidarity, had announced a contribution of US\$ 2 million to the CERF at its launch in March 2006. It noted with satisfaction that the Fund had begun to be employed for assisting underfunded developing countries suffering from natural disasters and looked forward to receiving details on its use at the next session of the General Assembly.

India had noted the introduction of the “cluster approach” and awaited its assessment by the five countries concerned. In the meantime, it requested clarification of the issue of the costs associated with the new approach. It also emphasized the critical importance of national ownership and leadership in humanitarian emergencies as well as the need to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. It supported the use of training programmes for strengthening of the humanitarian coordinator system so as to improve the coordination of United Nations emergency assistance.

With reference to the recommendation in document E/2006/81 on the strengthening of disaster preparation and response capacities at the local, national and regional levels, India had been engaged in a strengthening exercise of the kind for several years. Its Disaster Risk Management Project was being implemented jointly with UNDP in 169 districts with a high vulnerability to natural disasters, and the process for the creation of Disaster Response Teams had begun and was currently at the stage of examining equipment and training needs. India recognized the important role that NGOs could play in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, subject to national control over the establishment of coordination structures and access to funding to local organizations.

On the question of internally displaced persons (IDPs), India held the view that adequately assisting IDPs required knowledge and understanding of the specific context of a disaster and that well-functioning and stable governments with strong national and legal institutions were best placed to understand and respond to problems occurring within their own borders. With regard to the recommendations on humanitarian access contained in document E/2006/81, his Government believed them to be beyond the scope of the United Nations mandate and was unfavourable to attempts that would lead to politicization of humanitarian assistance. It supported the continued strengthening of such assistance based on the established guiding principles of General Assembly resolution 46/182.

Mr. MACEDO RIBA (Mexico) said that 2005 would be remembered as a year of uniquely destructive and costly natural disasters. The American continent had suffered a series of catastrophes - in particular 26 tropical storms, including 15 hurricanes - that had caused irreparable loss of human life and enormous economic damage.

It had accordingly become clear that the international community must abandon its traditional reactive approach and place the emphasis on preventive policies. It was necessary in particular to continue efforts to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action, with special regard to risk mitigation activities and education for a culture of safety. The events of 2005 had likewise highlighted the need to strengthen the capacities of the United Nations to assume a lead role in coordinating efforts by the international community in support of disaster-affected countries, in accordance with the priorities set by the governments of the countries concerned. Affecting as they had done some of the poorest people in the world, the disasters had underlined the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to humanitarian assistance, providing for a smooth transition from the relief phase to the implementation of programmes of sustainable development, with particular reference to the most vulnerable population sectors. Finally, the part played by NGOs in identifying the most urgent needs on the ground had underscored the importance of establishing machinery for systematic coordination between United Nations humanitarian assistance and civil society.

As a country prone to such phenomena, Mexico had a keen appreciation of the role of international humanitarian assistance in emergency situations and had contributed actively to efforts to reform the multilateral humanitarian system. In particular, it had been one of the movers behind the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which represented a significant step in the rapid distribution of humanitarian assistance and its extension to crises whose low political profile had too often led to the neglect of certain population groups. Emergency assistance should not be subject to political considerations or other extraneous concerns and should have special regard to those at risk in the context of natural disasters or situations of armed conflict, such as women, children and the elderly.

Mexico subscribed fully to the international conceptual framework for the provision of humanitarian assistance contained in General Assembly resolution 46/182. It was therefore concerned at attempts to interpret its content in such a way as to constitute an obstacle to the access of humanitarian personnel to populations in need. The result was to exacerbate the social consequences of emergencies, sharpen conflicts and compromise respect for the fundamental rights of the civil population. Protection of the civil population was a requirement of international humanitarian law, and a challenge to which the international community must prove equal at the start of a new century.

Mr. LARIOS LÓPEZ (Observer for El Salvador) said that, in the face of a national emergency in October 2005 as a consequence of the hurricane “Stan” and the eruption of the Iamatepec volcano, the prompt response of the National Civil Protection System and the National Land Survey Service together with the prior organization of local governments had substantially limited the number of victims through the evacuation to temporary shelters of those at risk. His Government wished to acknowledge the immediate response of the OCHA in helping to assess the damage, amounting to some 350 million dollars, and to coordinate humanitarian assistance and international cooperation. It likewise acknowledged the contribution of non-governmental organizations and the private sector in responding to the emergency situation countrywide, notably for restoration of the social infrastructure. With reference to the Secretary-General’s report (A/61/78-E/2006/61), his Government wished to correct the erroneous statement it contained to the effect that no record was made of the humanitarian assistance received in support of the disaster victims.

In view of the susceptibility of the countries of Central America to natural disasters, his Government endorsed the views expressed in the Sachs report to the effect that the United Nations should provide support to the governments concerned for the establishment of information management systems in order to facilitate appropriate decision-making in emergency situations. It was to be hoped that such support would take into account the CEPAL observations concerning the impact of the 2005 events on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. While its effects on their “backyard” economy were not very visible, its negative consequences on their well-being had required the formulation of a short-term strategy to restore their productive capacity and income, with particular reference to women, small farmers and shopkeepers.

Mr. DIALLO (Guinea) said that, in the light of the introduction of the cluster approach in Indonesia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, consideration should be given to sharing the resulting experience with other countries with a view to strengthening their national recovery capacities. His delegation welcomed the initiative involving the creation of village rehabilitation advisory committees, whereby beneficiaries would be involved in implementing and monitoring recovery programmes. The question of damage and needs assessment merited further

examination; and concerns relating to transparency and accountability to donors, including financial monitoring and measuring progress, called for direct contacts between humanitarian organizations, donors and the national authorities.

His delegation supported the creation of independent microfinancing institutions in the context of economic diversification. It likewise appreciated the steps being taken in the context of risk reduction, tsunami early warning and the incorporation of prevention in development planning. It placed particular hopes in the regional early-warning mechanism established under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System. In line with the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2010, there was also a need to strengthen the linkages between disaster management institutions, technical early warning organizations and development planners and to take account of the Cairo guidelines for coastal reconstruction.

His delegation recognized the importance of human rights concerns in emergency situations arising from natural catastrophes. It agreed with the Secretary-General that governments should bear the primary responsibility for delivering assistance and protection and that non-State actors should recognize the fact and cooperate fully with national authorities in providing assistance. It believed that the organization of a panel discussion on the question of sexist violence in the context of humanitarian emergencies would be a useful initiative.

In focusing its efforts on the humanitarian emergencies described in the Secretary-General's reports, the international community should not overlook other complex humanitarian crises. Guinea, for example, continued to suffer the consequences of conflicts in South-West Africa, including the prolonged presence of refugees on its territory, degradation of the environment, occupation and deterioration of the housing stock, and chronic insecurity. An appeal by the Secretary-General for some US\$ 33 million to cope with the humanitarian situation in Guinea had so far produced little more than pledges and the situation remained preoccupying. His delegation therefore took the opportunity to issue an urgent appeal to all its bilateral and multilateral partners to provide greater assistance to Guinea in its efforts to limit the crisis. In that connection, it welcomed the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund, from

which Guinea had already benefited, and looked forward to the submission of reports to the General Assembly that should yield more information on the use of the Fund and its impact on of humanitarian situations.

Mr. FERRER RODRÍGUEZ (Cuba) said that the international community was increasingly witness to unprecedented natural disasters, which were largely due to the irrational policies and practices of the developed countries impacting on the environment in the form of prolonged droughts, torrential rains and an increase in the frequency and severity of tropical storms. Cuba was not only working tirelessly to prevent or limit the impact of the natural phenomena that struck his country annually but was also, since 1963, disinterestedly sharing its experience and helping to mitigate the damage caused by natural disasters in other parts of the world. In 2005 it had established the Henry Reeve International Contingent, specialized in natural disasters and serious epidemics, which had provided extended assistance in Guatemala, Pakistan and Indonesia. Furthermore, following Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the Cuban Government had not only decided to send specialist medical brigades to affected countries but had created the Latin American Medical School to train doctors from Latin America and the Caribbean as well as from Asia and Africa.

Although tsunamis and hurricanes did not discriminate between countries, their consequences were felt more dramatically in the under-developed world, where poverty was endemic and vulnerability to natural phenomena correspondingly greater. Unconditional international cooperation alone could overcome the international obstacles that restricted the capacity of the poorest nations to equip themselves with the means to combat such phenomena.

In that connection, it was alarming to see the relative growth of humanitarian assistance as distinct from official development assistance, as well as its unequal distribution based on non-humanitarian considerations, which threw into question its humanitarian, neutral and impartial character. Strengthening activities geared to development, prevention, mitigation and preparedness, as well as ensuring a prompt international response to the requests of the countries concerned, was essential to saving human lives.

In an international system marked by hegemony and the unilateral and so-called preventive use of force, Cuba reasserted the principle of the impartiality, humanity and solidarity of

humanitarian assistance, enshrined in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182. Aid required to help millions of people should not serve as a pretext for a small number of powerful States to rewrite international law and undermine state sovereignty in the name of “the responsibility to protect” or “humanitarian intervention”. Those who promoted such agendas remained silent, looked the other way and even acted as accomplices when one of their allies flagrantly and with total impunity violated international humanitarian law. It was an essential prerequisite of humanitarian assistance that it should only be provided at the request and with the prior consent of the State concerned, which must play the principle role in initiating, organizing and distributing it within its borders.

Ms. DE HOZ (Observer for Argentina) said that, in accordance with the guidelines set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182 of December 1991, humanitarian assistance should be increased taking into account a number of basic principles. They included: respect for the needs of the target populations; coordination of efforts to maximize the achievement of the identified objectives; recognition of the importance of developing local capacities by training local volunteers, promoting social solidarity and ensuring access to appropriate technologies; and application of the principle that “victims come first” so as to overcome problems of priority among the different United Nations agencies.

Under its White Helmet initiative, Argentina was working to develop and train a countrywide volunteer force, composed mainly of young people, that would form a network capable of responding rapidly and effectively to tackle hunger, poverty and natural catastrophes. A workshop on the promotion of a humanitarian volunteer force had recently been held in Trinidad and Tobago under the OAS/IDB White Helmets Programme-Fund. The significant increase in the number of natural disasters and their devastating impact on people, property and infrastructures had underlined the need for preventive measures to avoid greater damage. In that connection, Argentina supported the implementation of the HYOGO Framework for Action 2005-2015 adopted in January 2005. There was an urgent need to undertake risk-prevention planning and to develop strategies for the mitigation of natural disasters at national and regional level, taking into account the problems of internal and external coordination. Argentina supported the coordination efforts of the United Nations in humanitarian emergencies and hoped that the recently implemented modular system would increase the efficiency of its humanitarian activities.

Mr. AMIN MANSOUR (Iran), noting the close interrelationship between the emergency, rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction and development phases, said that coordination of United Nations and non-United Nations actors among themselves and with national and local governments at all levels was vital to the efficient use of financial and human resources. National governments had the primary responsibility for the different phases of activity within their own countries and for protection of the affected civilians and prevention of violence against individuals, particularly women and children. They should also ensure preparedness by strengthening local capacity and building awareness, particularly in disaster-prone areas, and should promote and facilitate the efforts of all non-state actors to play their roles in all aspects of relief and response operations and reconstruction and development activities. International and regional support through the exchange of knowledge, expertise, experience and resources, with particular reference to the role of OCHA and UNDP, were obviously critical.

The cluster leadership approach, notably the concepts of serving as “first port of call” and “provider of last resort”, were seen as a positive new development in dealing with humanitarian emergencies. His Government looked forward to learning more in the Secretary-General’s forthcoming reports on the results of the pilot projects in the affected countries. Preparedness, including codification and implementation of necessary regulations together with implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, remained crucial in mitigating the impact of natural disasters as well as in risk reduction. In that connection, the support of the international community and the relevant United Nations agencies, in particular the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Secretariat, were very important.

At international level, the principles of impartiality, neutrality and humanity remained valid and should be respected. It was clear that rapid international assistance was required in the case of large-scale emergencies, and United Nations bodies and non-United Nations actors had played a major role in assisting national governments and local authorities in relief and recovery operations. Yet much remained to be done in terms of coordination among international actors, coordination between them and national governments, needs assessments at all levels, increased allocation of financial resources to emergencies, transfer of appropriate technologies, exchange of knowledge, information and experience, as well as preparedness and long-term development. All were essential parameters in helping governments, particularly in developing countries, to

deal more appropriately and effectively with natural disaster. He welcomed in that connection the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund and hoped it would maximize the effectiveness of the United Nations system in emergencies. In conclusion, he wished to underscore the importance of adequate and timely funding of humanitarian operations, particularly under-funded emergencies and under-resourced sectors.

Mr. CABRERA HIDALGO (Observer for Ecuador) said that his country's commitment to the strengthening of the United Nations disaster reduction system predated its presidency of the Preparatory Commission for the International Disaster Reduction Conference and its vice-presidency of that conference in Kobe, where the Hyogo Framework for Action was adopted. Its long experience at the national, regional and national levels had convinced it that disaster reduction should be regarded as one of the United Nations priorities.

Ecuador was one of the few developing countries that contributed to the United Nations disaster prevention system and its association with the topic went beyond its participation in the International Disaster Reduction Strategy (IDSR) Support Group and its involvement in the General Assembly negotiations on the same subject, since it had played and continued to play a leading role in activities such as the creation of the International Centre for the Study of the El Niño Phenomenon, which had its headquarters in Ecuador. It could therefore claim the experience and authority to assert that supporting the strengthening of the United Nation disaster reduction system and its secretariat should be regarded by all as a priority at the present time.

Without rehearsing all the arguments in support of that view, it would simply reiterate the two main conclusions to emerge from the discussions and events that had taken place alongside the current session, namely: the need to strengthen political will and practical initiatives to reinforce the International Disaster Reduction Strategy; and the need to give greater prominence to the topic by including disaster-risk reduction as a standing item in the agenda of forthcoming sessions of the Council.

Mr. AMIRBAYOV (Observer for Azerbaijan) said that the disasters of exceptional magnitude and scope witnessed over the previous year and a half underlined that the international community should work towards a disaster-management approach by engaging with governments in strategic disaster planning and preparedness at regional, local and

international levels, ensuring high-level assistance for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction and prioritizing risk reduction. At national level, institutional capacity-building and strengthening humanitarian response capability, including sharing best practices and establishing national contingency plans, were important elements for disaster preparedness. Prevention, advocacy, awareness-raising and development of early warning capacities were essential constituents of disaster mitigation. It was also important to create an environment for the effective participation of NGOs, community-based organizations and other civil society actors in the planning and coordination of preparedness and response.

The cluster leadership approach represented a positive step towards improving the predictability, accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian response, and his delegation endorsed the request to the Secretary-General to report on the lessons learned in the implementation of the cluster pilot projects. Upgrading the skills and capabilities of humanitarian and resident coordinators was essential to strengthening coordination of the humanitarian response at the country level. Close cooperation and effective coordination were similarly crucial to the efficiency of United Nations system-wide capacity and medium-term relief efforts on the ground.

The establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) for sudden-onset and under-funded crises represented a significant step towards faster, more predictable and needs-based humanitarian assistance. As a country affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis, Azerbaijan attached significant importance to the Fund, had contributed to it and would continue to support it financially and politically. More attention should be paid to strengthening financial mechanisms for humanitarian assistance, particularly under-funded emergencies and sectors.

The situation with regard to internally displaced persons (IDPs) - the total number of whom had remained unchanged for four years and far exceeded the figures for refugees - was one area in which United Nations agencies had to strengthen their cooperation and revitalize their response. It was hoped that the new cluster approach would help address the gaps in that regard. While acknowledging that IDPs generally remained under the sovereignty of their respective governments and that the national authorities had the primary responsibility to protect

them, as the Government of Azerbaijan had been doing over the last decade, the international community had to be in a position to act where there was a genuine need for international assistance and support.

It believed that the outcome of the Council's deliberations, in the form of the draft resolution negotiated by Japan and Jamaica, would help to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance, which in practice meant decreasing the sufferings and vulnerability and improving the lives of people worldwide.

Mr. DOIG (Observer for Peru) said that the increasing incidence of extreme climatic phenomena had dramatically increased levels of vulnerability, particularly among the developing countries on which such phenomena had a disproportionate impact. Their chronic vulnerability formed part of a vicious circle in which recurrent human and material losses progressively limited their possibilities of attaining the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations humanitarian system must respond effectively and predictably through an integrated approach encompassing risk-reduction strategies and disaster preparedness. Peru firmly supported efforts to strengthen the coordination of United Nations emergency humanitarian assistance, whose ultimate aim should be to develop the capacity of local communities to respond to such crises, while recognizing the primary role of the State in the context of such emergencies. However, such efforts should not involve expansion or merging of the mandates of the different actors and agencies but should proceed in a coordinated manner having regard to the specific mandates and competencies of the different agencies of the United Nations system. For preventive measures to be effective, the international community must devote more resources to the implementation of disaster-reduction strategies in keeping with its commitments under the Hyogo Framework for Action. Finally, Peru wished to reaffirm its support for the current strengthening of the International Disaster Reduction Strategy system, which must also include reinforcement of the UN/ISDR secretariat.

Mr. NIÑO (Observer for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his country attached particular importance to the subject of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief at the international level, as testified by the establishment of the "Simon Bolivar" International Humanitarian Assistance Task Force. Venezuela's cooperation was focused on the three phases of disaster management: prevention, emergency assistance, and reconstruction/rehabilitation.

Within the regional framework of the Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development of the Organization of American States, Venezuela had recently made available a series of experts to provide training in disaster prevention, on the basis of successful experience at the national level. Venezuela had in that way extended humanitarian assistance to a number of sister countries in the Caribbean and Central America hit by the hurricanes that had ravaged the region in the course of 2004 and 2005. In that context, Venezuela wished to restate the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance as set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, which must serve as the guidelines for the United Nations interventions in that regard. System coordination was another very important requirement in the context of United Nations humanitarian assistance operations.

In recent years, there had been a significant increase in environmental disturbances, in particular natural disasters, brought about for the most part by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in the developed world, which had mainly affected the most vulnerable countries, that was to say the developing world. The international community bore a great responsibility for that state of affairs.

Mr. MOLCHAN (Observer for Belarus), expressing support for the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said that increasing numbers of people were being affected each year by natural disasters, which required effective and rapid coordinated humanitarian action. Belarus had participated in the assistance operations in connection with all the major natural crises that had occurred in South Asia. Coordination of humanitarian assistance should be strengthened through the provision of additional financial resources. The process of strengthening OCHA should not be politicized and should be approached from the humanitarian aspect alone. Belarus was ready to cooperate with the United Nations and other actors forming part of the international community in responding to emergency situations.

Mr. DALL'OGGIO (International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that the reports of the Secretary-General offered a valuable opportunity for learning key lessons with respect to coordinating emergency humanitarian assistance in crisis situations. IOM welcomed the Secretary-General's call for "broadening engagement with non-United Nations actors" - a process in which it was actively engaged through its partnership in the Inter-Agency Steering Committee and as one of the agencies sharing responsibility for the "cluster approach". While

still in its infant stage, the “cluster approach” had provided a larger collaborative, inter-agency framework stimulating more responsiveness and effectiveness at both global and country levels. It brought the larger international community, member States and host Governments closer together in responding to crises for the benefit of populations in need.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), as the second major pillar of the humanitarian reform, had brought about a greatly improved turn-around time for applications, leading to an immediate improvement of response capacity at the field level. IOM’s contribution to the inter-agency reform process was evident in its engagement in a number of ongoing humanitarian operations, in Pakistan, Timor-Lest, Uganda and Yogyakarta/Indonesia. A key element in the reform of the humanitarian assistance system was the strengthening of local and national response capacities to reduce risk, enhance responses and strengthen mitigation plans. In March 2006, with the end of the emergency relief phase in Pakistan, IOM had committed itself to strengthening and building local capacity by opening an IOM office in Peshawar to begin the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase in the earthquake-affected area, working with the North-West Frontier Province Government. Providing expertise to rebuild houses, clinics and schools, identifying vulnerable individuals and creating income-generating activities for quake-affected populations were among the activities being carried out in that context.

IOM was committed to the most vulnerable in times of crisis and expressed its deep appreciation to the entire humanitarian community for its collaboration and to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the OCHA leadership for its unwavering commitment to the improvement of humanitarian response capacities.

Ms. CRAVERO (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the major crises witnessed in recent years had underlined the inter-connectedness of risks and vulnerability and highlighted the need for a more holistic approach to humanitarian assistance. UNDP firmly believed that local ownership and local leadership were critical both to humanitarian action and to the consolidation of peace and post-crisis recovery. For sustainable recovery to take hold, individuals, communities and governments should have both the confidence and the skills to manage their own recovery processes in a way that reduced risks and vulnerability. Local capacity-building was a prerequisite for strengthening the resilience of societies across the globe.

UNDP was fully committed to strengthening the effectiveness, timeliness and predictability of humanitarian responses. Within the context of the recently introduced cluster approach, it had assumed the lead responsibility for early recovery and, together with its 18 United Nations and non-United Nations partners, was working to ensure that post-crisis recovery efforts started concurrently with relief. It was also working to ensure that longer-term objectives, including risk and vulnerability reduction, were integrated in humanitarian programming.

UNDP shared the growing concern over the chronic lack of funding for many of the world's most serious crises. Certain sectors, including early recovery, showed a persistent pattern of under-funding. In 2004, while the Consolidated Appeals were 64 per cent funded overall, only 26 per cent of the requirements in economic recovery and infrastructure were met. It was even harder to mobilize support for prevention and risk-reduction efforts, despite clear and recognized links to recovery. UNDP looked forward to strengthening partnerships with Member States in helping countries prevent and recover from crisis situations, as core elements of a more holistic approach to humanitarian response.

UNDP reaffirmed its commitment to combating gender-based violence, which not only devastated lives and fractured communities but also impeded development. It was working closely with other partners to address the problem by early identification, monitoring and reporting, ensuring justice to its victims, imposing sanctions on its perpetrators, and building the resilience of women and their families to protect themselves from that most devastating of crimes.

Mr. JURY (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that WFP was conscious of the importance of strategic partnerships, particularly within the United Nations, to better serve the beneficiaries of its work. It reiterated its call for donor provision of un-earmarked, multilateral and predictable funding. With flexible funds, the United Nations humanitarian agencies were able to allocate resources to the projects that needed it most, and ensure that food distribution did not have to be curtailed for lack of money. The expanded Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) was one among a number of tools for improving the predictability of funding for United Nations emergency response. Equally important was support to the emergency funds of

individual agencies and increased unrestricted multilateral contributions to the main United Nations operational agencies. Any contribution to the expanded CERF should be truly additional and not come at the expense of support to operational agencies.

A fundamental principle guiding the WFP was making project funding available when needed, not when mobilized, by managing financing against risk rather than relying on post-event appeals. It was a business model that effectively transferred the risk from the beneficiaries to WFP, which accepted the risk to better service the beneficiaries and deliver more food on a timelier basis at the least cost and on the basis of forecasted income.

As well as improving their own internal capacities, all humanitarian international actors should be strongly engaged in building national capacity to respond to emergencies. For WFP, the ability to identify and analyse hunger and vulnerability and the capacity to plan and implement food assistance strategies were essential aspects of food security. To better understand and respond to the causes of food insecurity and vulnerability, WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Unit had designed and implemented many comprehensive analyses in priority countries. The findings from those studies were currently being used both by United Nations agencies and by specific government ministries in their planning processes.

Increased involvement with local, regional and international partners in emergency needs assessments remained a priority for WFP and the other United Nations agencies. Major assessments carried out in 2005 in the tsunami-affected countries, Sudan, Niger and Pakistan represented an important step forward by integrating information from non-food sectors, such as nutrition, markets, gender and health, and identifying when food or non-food responses were appropriate.

At the same time, pre-crisis information systems continued to be established, in particular with regional partners. Local NGOs were often essential to the work of international humanitarian actors, and in 2005 WFP had carried out its operations in cooperation with over 2,000 local NGOs in 65 developing countries or countries in transition. Finally, it should be noted that WFP's substantial local purchase of food aid served to boost the demand for food products, thereby supporting local markets.

Ms. TELLIER (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that strengthening the capacity of national governments and communities to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises should be the cornerstone of humanitarian assistance reform. UNFPA had worked with the authorities in dozens of countries to train government staff and civil society to ensure that gender and reproductive health issues were a central part of emergency preparedness and response. Inter-agency evaluations conducted in Darfur, Pakistan and during the Indian Ocean tsunami crisis had shown that a number of cross-cutting issues on gender, human rights and HIV/AIDS were not well incorporated in the current system of humanitarian response. Protection of Internally Displaced Persons had been recognized as a particularly weak link in the implementation of humanitarian assistance, and the result could be particularly devastating for women and girls at risk of gender-based violence and exploitation.

The issue of gender-based violence during conflict and natural disasters was of great importance to UNFPA. In June 2006, it had hosted a groundbreaking international symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, in association with the Belgian Government and the European Commission. Delegations from a dozen countries had shared with the meeting the lessons learned in dealing with health, social, psychological and legal aspects of sexual violence and outlined national plans to prevent violence, support survivors and end impunity. The scourge of sexual violence, prevalent in so many present-day conflicts, not only affected individuals and their families but was a barometer of the social and political health of a nation. Although there was now better recognition of the need to address gender-based violence in humanitarian settings, much more needed to be done. The Brussels Symposium had issued a Call to Action to end sexual violence and abuse in conflict and recovery situations, and she hoped that those present would read the document and encourage their capitals to act upon it. UNFPA was committed to work with all IASC and other partners to follow up the Call to Action.

Mr. TOOLE (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), noting that in most emergencies over half the victims were children and women, stressed the importance of emphasizing the protection of civilians at all times, especially children and women. UNICEF strongly supported efforts to ensure more reliable, predictable and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance on the ground. It believed that the cluster approach could help to achieve

that goal, and it had agreed to serve as lead in the areas of nutrition, water supply and sanitation, as well as data communications. It would also lead the emergency education sector and provide significant field-based operations in both health and child protection.

It had also worked closely with its humanitarian partners via the IASC to strengthen the selection process and the pool of potential Humanitarian Coordinators. Strong and experienced Coordinators were needed to ensure that efforts to protect and assist those in need were focused on results, built on local knowledge and well coordinated to avoid duplication. It welcomed the establishment and initial funding for the expanded CERF, while recognizing that the Fund would never be sufficient to respond to all emergency needs. It thanked all Member States for the very significant funding that UNICEF had received in 2005 and early 2006 for humanitarian response, against appeals and through support to its regular resources.

In recent years UNICEF had received support from several Member States to strengthen emergency preparedness and had developed strong systems to ensure improved response. It would continue to expand its work in that area through disaster-mitigation education and training, which were the cornerstone of improved awareness, reduced risk and better local response.

Humanitarian access and security of staff continued to pose significant challenges to all humanitarian actors. In the past year attacks against humanitarian staff had continued and humanitarian access continued to be constrained in numerous locations. Sexual and gender-based violence represented a significant threat to children, particularly young girls. UNICEF was working with UNFPA, UNIFEM and its NGO partners to assist victims of abuse and exploitation.

Finally, UNICEF would continue to work closely with its development partners, including the World Bank, to ensure support for the transition from relief to development. Transition programmes must be government-led, multisectoral in approach and focused on marginalized and vulnerable populations. UNICEF's traditional role in the rehabilitation and recovery of social service in post-crisis situations was a strong element in transitional support to national governments.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.