![United Nations emblem]

# Economic and Social Council

Provisional

1 October 2010

Original: English

**Substantive session of 2010**
Humanitarian affairs segment

**Provisional summary record of the 34th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 14 July 2010, at 3 p.m.

*President*:     Mr. Errázuriz (Vice-President) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . (Chile)

# Contents

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance
(*continued*)

Please recycle

*In the absence of Mr. Ali (Malaysia), Mr. Errázuriz (Chile), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

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

**Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance** (*continued*)

1.     **The President** said that the Council would hold a panel discussion on "Humanitarian assistance operations in highly hazardous or insecure or unsafe environments". The fact that Member States had chosen that topic demonstrated their grave concerns about the increasing number of attacks against humanitarian personnel and facilities and the implications for affected populations. The panellists would elucidate how such situations were addressed in the field and what lessons could be drawn from those experiences. He invited Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator to act as moderator for the panel.

*Panel discussion on "Humanitarian assistance operations in highly hazardous or insecure and unsafe environments"*

2.     **Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), moderator, introducing the discussion, said that direct access to populations in need was crucial to conducting effective assistance efforts. That kind of access was jeopardized by the growing number of threats, including criminal and terrorist attacks. Such threats were also increasingly global and radical. The number of humanitarian workers killed in the field had escalated in the past several years, with national staff bearing the majority of casualties. In the past year alone, at least 30 workers had been killed and nearly 200 kidnapped or injured.

3.     Tackling the issue posed complicated questions, such as how agencies could deliver on humanitarian mandates when they themselves were the targets of attacks and how the security of staff could be increased while still reaching populations in need. It was important to communicate to targeted populations the neutral nature of humanitarian missions, separating them from political and military actors and goals. That required outreach and long-term investments. Any military presence — even the presence of United Nations peacekeepers — could contaminate messages

of neutrality. A careful analysis of each specific context was required and would reduce the threat.

4.     However, acceptance of humanitarian actors in affected areas was not enough. Additional security and management of policies was required for sustained actions. Examples of such measures included increased physical security and better threat analysis. Such a security management approach required financial resources for long-term investments.

5.     He was encouraged that the Council was holding a discussion on the problem and recognized that it could be a sensitive matter. He emphasized that the goal was not to single out situations in particular Member States, but rather to describe general measures and lessons learned in the delivery of humanitarian aid in difficult circumstances.

6.     **Mr. Starr** (Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security) said that while humanitarian assistance workers had faced conditions of extreme poverty and post-conflict situations in the past, they were now also operating in situations of actual conflict, resulting in more intense security problems. He recalled the deadly attacks against the World Food Programme office in Pakistan and the United Nations compound in Afghanistan in 2009 and stressed that kidnappings were also detracting from humanitarian work.

7.     Progress in understanding the numerous threats had been made in the past year. Funding had been provided to conduct an analysis of the various risks and to determine how to implement programmes under difficult conditions without having to perpetually withdraw staff. Humanitarian missions faced a process of balancing security with the need to remain in high-risk areas. In addition, his Department was focused on developing standard incident reporting to better understand the totality of the security situation and put metrics in place to maximize resources. A criticality review was also in progress to assess whether particular programmes were worth the risk they posed. The United Nations would continue to suffer casualties as its staff worked in tougher places, and the Organization had to be certain of its reasons for maintaining a presence in those places.

8.     Sharing information was crucial for conducting accurate threat analyses and was a moral imperative when people's lives were at risk. The "Saving Lives Together" framework laid out guidelines for information-sharing between the United Nations

system, in particular the Department of Safety and Security, and non-governmental organization partners.

9. He emphasized that appropriate funding for security in United Nations operations should be requested from their inception, and Member States and donors must understand that security costs would be higher for operations in high-threat situations. Only the resolution of conflicts would lower security costs.

10. The present scenario required a change in attitude, starting with United Nations security officers, who had been used to shutting down activities in risk situations. The essential role of the Department of Safety and Security now was to enable United Nations operations to continue. That involved offering alternatives and creative ways of negotiating risks while programmes were implemented.

11. **Mr. Lopes da Silva** (Deputy Executive Director of External Relations, World Food Programme (WFP)) said that hunger was worsening in crisis-affected environments, a problem that had long-term effects on fragile States. For example, just a few months of malnutrition could have lifelong negative effects on health, education and productivity, resulting in a lower gross domestic product in many countries.

12. About 80 per cent of the World Food Programme's resources in 2009 had been dedicated to countries experiencing or recovering from conflict, and the agency expected to be more involved in such contexts in the future. Given that food was a cumbersome resource to manage, with an extensive supply chain, the work of the Programme was particularly exposed to threats. The supply chain involved more than traditional logistics; it encompassed every moment from the first needs assessment exercise to the point when beneficiaries received resources and thus created many areas for potential threat.

13. A new challenge was the changing character of conflicts. In the past, distinctions in conflicts, usually between rebel movements and the State, had been clear. Humanitarian workers now faced a plethora of different movements, including insurgents, militias, religious groups and the State, often with shifting tactical alliances among them. The principles of humanitarian action were no longer always understood or accepted, resulting in grave danger to staff and affected populations. In addition, in situations of armed conflict, the perceived role of humanitarian actors was

increasingly becoming blurred with that of the military, challenging their acceptance as neutral actors. For example, the need to protect food convoys with armed escorts made it difficult to distinguish their humanitarian mandate.

14. The World Food Programme had developed some approaches to remaining effective in high-risk situations, including prioritizing local engagement. Involving local capacity and encouraging feedback from the community promoted acceptance. In addition, the Programme was outsourcing monitoring capacities to companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were known and respected in affected areas.

15. A recent meeting of experts on risk management convened by the Programme revealed the key lesson that even if all risk mitigation mechanisms were deployed, a residual risk always remained. If the decision was made to remain engaged in a particular area, managing that risk was a shared responsibility between programme managers, national Governments, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board and the Economic and Social Council.

16. **Mr. Mawazini** (Executive Coordinator, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI)), accompanying his presentation with computerized slides, said that Iraq was in a state of ongoing instability, with the Iraqi people bearing the brunt of rampant violence. Political instability prevented the Government from guaranteeing security in the country, as it could not address issues such as the withdrawal of foreign troops, administration of oil resources, disagreements over disputed territories and the disarmament of armed groups.

17. He concurred with the other panellists that the confusion of humanitarian and military roles was a serious constraint. In Iraq, the fact that humanitarian organizations were associated with the United States armed forces undermined their acceptance. While such agencies attempted to keep their distance from the military, many Iraqis still affiliated them with what they saw as "the occupation". The limited presence of United Nations operations on the ground also hindered humanitarian work. Due to security restrictions, the main office of the United Nations mission was based in Amman and its staff had a minimal presence at the community level, hampering their ability to assess needs and coordinate projects on the ground.

18. About 70 international non-governmental organizations were active in providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq. They played a critical role in fulfilling development needs and involving the community in the recovery process. Most of the international organizations did not use armed protection, instead relying on their acceptance by the people they helped. Most domestic NGOs had been established in the 2003-2005 period, when security conditions had begun to deteriorate and international organizations had withdrawn. While they were adaptable to changing conditions and provided basic services to people, domestic organizations still greatly depended on international NGOs for capacity-building.

19. NGOs had learned to adjust and were able to provide sustainable assistance in areas where insecurity had worsened. That was due to their quick response time and the trust they had built in communities, including involving citizens in implementing projects that met their needs. Humanitarian agencies that operated in security "bubbles" of enclosed compounds or armed protection lost meaningful access to people in need. However, access without safety measures was unsustainable and had resulted in the closing of programmes. Security should be mainstreamed into all actions, with an emphasis on the security of staff. As a zero-risk scenario was not possible, all stakeholders should participate in risk-benefit analyses.

20. Successful operations in Iraq hinged on their clear communication of neutrality, and a presence free of armed security. Their acceptance was based on networking, community participation and local ownership. Information-sharing among humanitarian agencies needed to be improved, as many believed that it compromised security, when it in fact did the opposite. It was also important that programmes be based in the field, as remote programming did not respond to people's actual needs.

21. **Mr. Mogwanja** (United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Pakistan), accompanying his presentation with computerized slides, said that United Nations humanitarian assistance operations around the world were governed by the same standard, namely, General Assembly resolution 46/182, which required humanitarian actors to be impartial and neutral providers of assistance to all in need. There were, however, many emergencies around the world where the necessary continued large-scale humanitarian response was severely challenged by indiscriminate fighting, extreme violence and generalized insecurity. Such complex security environments were characterized, inter alia, by deliberate and direct attacks on, or kidnapping or hijacking of, humanitarian, NGO and United Nations staff, aid convoys, warehouses, offices and distribution points, and by deliberate random attacks on public installations such as churches, mosques, schools, hotels, roads, markets and internally displaced persons camps. The authorities or the parties to conflicts might establish no-go areas for humanitarian workers, limit safe and sustained access to all of the vulnerable populations or resort to other forms of restricting or intimidating humanitarian workers, especially national staff and women. Complex security environments might also include multiple parties that had diverse motivations (criminal, political, ethnic or sectarian, and changing command structures). All of those problems limited the full application of the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity, independence and assistance based solely on needs.

22. Although the General Assembly had called on all parties to conflicts to respect humanitarian principles, protect humanitarian workers and grant access for humanitarian work, that did not always happen. In cases where international humanitarian law applied, humanitarian workers needed to obtain the consent of all parties in order to gain safe and reliable access to all vulnerable populations and to ensure their own safety and security. In order for them to obtain such consent, all parties, even non-state armed groups, had to be included in negotiations and agree to abide by the universal humanitarian principles over and above their own interests.

23. Even where international humanitarian law did not apply, the human rights framework applied to all people who had the right to certain services and to certain protections, including humanitarian assistance. The failure by some parties to respect resolution 46/182 limited the ability of humanitarian workers to adhere to humanitarian principles, raising doubts about the impartiality and independence of humanitarian organizations and creating the perception of humanitarians as partial and political actors. When the humanitarian community felt forced to increase physical security protection measures, barriers to communication and engagement with the affected populations sprang up and field presence and direct contacts with beneficiaries were restricted. Frequent

suspension of humanitarian activities interfered with timely quality assessment and the implementation and monitoring of humanitarian delivery. Such problems led to increased human and financial costs, higher stress and lower productivity.

24. To some extent, low-profile operating modalities were helpful, e.g. using unmarked vehicles and adopting local dress codes. Risks should be taken on only when programme priorities were clearly established, and security procedures were in place to minimize any negative impacts on local relationships and on contacts with beneficiaries. Alternatively, humanitarian work could be managed remotely where possible, or reliance on local organizations and partners and on local staff to deliver could be increased, even in complex security environments, with adequate monitoring to assure quality. However, transferring tasks and risks to partners when it brought no overall reduction in risk was unethical. Another approach was to change operational modalities and priorities, if implementation might directly threaten the lives of staff, although it was difficult to leave humanitarian needs unmet. Any compromise on humanitarian principles had to be avoided if at all possible.

25. Advanced technology could also be exploited, for example, by replacing unnecessary physical presence and travel with virtual meetings and to video-/teleconferencing, by utilizing mobile phones to mass-message humanitarian information to beneficiaries and by using portable data entry technology. It was always useful to develop partners' capacities and operational skills, including response planning, assessments, security operations, logistics, monitoring and reporting.

26. In complex security environments, persistence was often necessary to convince all parties to accept the humanitarian principles; advocacy and negotiation with them might include establishing and implementing civil-military coordination guidelines, agreeing on a national policy on internally displaced persons or explaining the codes of conduct for humanitarian work and the principles of engagement. Absent a greater global political commitment to the humanitarian principles, humanitarians themselves would have to advocate and negotiate for the safety and security of their operations from a position of relative weakness. The conflict between the humanitarian imperative to act and the commitment to the humanitarian principles to act only when it was

possible to be impartial, independent and neutral would push humanitarians to continue to adopt a pragmatic approach.

27. **Mr. Stillhart** (Deputy Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that, as an organization working for the protection and assistance of persons affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) by definition operated in challenging security environments. Red Cross staff needed constantly to strike a balance between the expected humanitarian impact of their activities and the risks those activities entailed for their beneficiaries' and their own safety. ICRC took security-related decisions at the field level where operations were actually being carried out. Studies showed that the number of humanitarian aid workers killed, kidnapped or seriously injured was rising sharply and had exceeded 250 in recent years. Security incidents fell into three broad categories: exposure to collateral damage in volatile environments, acts of criminality for economic gain, and politically motivated attacks against humanitarian workers. Of particular concern was the marked increase in politically motivated attacks against humanitarian workers in recent years, suggesting a deeper trend of what might be an unprecedented crisis of credibility and acceptance of the humanitarian sector at large. Since the 11 September 2001 attacks, the return of Western armed forces to a variety of battle zones had triggered an intense debate on how the humanitarian organizations had come to be identified with political agendas of the West, seriously undermining their credibility and acceptance and their ability to access people affected by conflict across the front lines.

28. Confronted with the new reality, in which some armed groups obviously considered humanitarian organizations as legitimate targets, ICRC had had to take a hard look at its operational and security approach. Three major decisions had been taken, namely, to strengthen the organization's identity through the demonstration of the added value of neutral, independent humanitarian action in the field; to maintain a decentralized security management concept based on acceptance of ICRC by all warring parties; and to reinforce dialogue with all those involved in the various operational contexts where ICRC was present. Acceptance and trust by all actors involved in a conflict, as well as by the people in need

of protection and assistance, was critical to ensuring the ICRC staff's ability to operate in safety and reach those in need. ICRC needed at all times to demonstrate a visible dissociation from any kind of agenda that was not strictly humanitarian and to maintain independent control over its decision-making process. The ability of ICRC to sustain a dialogue with all those involved in a particular context, including non-State actors, was crucial and it required continuous networking and confidential dialogue with all actors. What mattered in the end, however, was not words or perceptions but the difference that the organization could make in humanitarian terms, demonstrating the specific added-value of neutral, independent and strictly humanitarian action.

29.  The ICRC was aware that its approach could not serve as a blueprint for the humanitarian community at large, but it was deeply rooted in its clear, albeit limited, mandate to act in the midst of armed conflict, including as a neutral intermediary between conflicting parties. Furthermore, not being part of a wider system pursuing objectives far beyond the delivery of humanitarian services, ICRC enjoyed very large autonomy over its own decision-making process.

30.  Given States' responsibility under international humanitarian law and other relevant norms to provide or facilitate the protection and assistance of populations and individuals under their authority, ICRC welcomed the increased involvement of States in the provision of humanitarian aid to their own populations in situations of violence or natural disaster. States must not, however, use humanitarian aid for political or military purposes. Furthermore, if humanitarian organizations were perceived as implementing partners or as acting under the orders of a State, which might also be an active party to a conflict, their acceptance and their staffs' security could be at risk. A space needed to be preserved for neutral and independent humanitarian action and for organizations that were not perceived as siding with any party to a conflict. Confronted with the risk of being perceived as part of a wider, Western-driven political agenda, ICRC had renewed its strict adherence to principled humanitarian action as a means to gain access to all those affected by conflict and armed violence. ICRC had also learned the hard lesson that acceptance could never be taken for granted and had to be nurtured continuously through dialogue and performance.

31.  **Mr. Aleinikoff** (Deputy High Commissioner, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that the forced migrants covered by the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees were increasingly residing in unsafe places, often conflict areas, which made humanitarian action much more difficult in terms of access, the security of camps and their residents, and the security of humanitarian workers. Furthermore, given the protracted nature of refugee and internally displaced person situations, camps became breeding grounds for frustration and fertile grounds for the recruitment of combatants.

32.  Difficult and fundamental issues arose out of efforts to balance access and assistance with security. Those responsible for security tended to be very conservative, and excessive caution could severely limit movement and access and reduce trust. Sometimes, the mere presence of international personnel could improve security. The One UN doctrine could also lead to some blurring of the distinction between the humanitarian agenda and more politically, socially or economically focused agendas, with consequent diminution of the credibility, impartiality and neutrality that were crucial to effective humanitarian activities. Attacks that led to restriction or even closing of a humanitarian space were usually not accidental, but served the goals of one or more of the parties. It was important to distinguish between situations that were the result of banditry, which could usually be controlled by more effective law and order forces, and those that were caused by parties to the conflict, where constant active dialogue and negotiation with all parties was needed, stressing the distinction between the humanitarian and the political agendas and affirming the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. International and local humanitarian staff and local NGOs needed to be trained in such difficult negotiation and communication skills.

*Questions and answer session*

33.  **Ms. Stewart-David** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union, as a donor organization and participant in humanitarian operations, was greatly concerned by the shrinkage of humanitarian space in many conflict areas, which severely impeded the ability of humanitarian workers to operate effectively on the basis of neutrality,

impartiality and independence. Access to populations in need was crucial and required good negotiating skills and discretion in operations. Security was primarily the responsibility of the host authorities. An important factor in security was how humanitarian actors were perceived by armed groups, the authorities and the local population. Involvement with military forces, national or international, was delicate, as humanitarian aid often needed the logistical support and security that only the military could provide, but there was the real danger of compromising independence and impartiality. Interaction with the military and Government forces needed to be very carefully managed and guided by the principles of humanitarian law, the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief and the Oslo Guidelines. Civilian leadership and coordination had to be maintained. The One UN approach could also lead to a blurring of mandates, if missions became overly integrated.

34. With regard to the security of United Nations operations, she asked how much risk was acceptable and whether United Nations operations needed to maintain a higher security threshold than others. If so, that might put the United Nations in a position where it could not deliver assistance while others could. She also asked about recruitment and training for the particular attitude and skill set required of humanitarian workers, which combined professionalism with context sensitivity and awareness.

35. **Ms. Yarlett** (Australia) asked whether, given the changing nature of conflicts, any security risk management policy developed at Headquarters would be flexible enough to be practical in the field. She also requested more information on how best practices could be shared in a timely manner, particularly those of NGOs. Finally, she asked for some examples of capacity-building in local communities and NGOs.

36. **Mr. Al Seedi** (Iraq) said that the security situation in his country had indeed been difficult following the 2003 attack against the United Nations office, but there had since been slow and steady improvements. The International Committee of the Red Cross had stayed in the country and had accomplished much valuable work, particularly with internally displaced persons and migrants. It had also helped the Government to rebuild medical services, for which the Government had provided extensive logistical support. The role of the United Nations in Iraq in recent years, along with that of other international organizations and civil society, had also been extremely valuable, most recently during the elections. The security situation was very much improved in most areas, but Iraq still needed international assistance in that and other respects.

37. **Mr. Starr** (Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security) said that a new security policy had indeed been implemented, coordinating the work of both Headquarters and non-Headquarters security organizations and ensuring that the priority was set on enabling the United Nations to accomplish its mission. The amount of risk that was acceptable depended very much on the importance of the mission. Where the benefits were significant, higher risks had to be assumed. Risk aversion was a short-term human reaction but it tended to frustrate the humanitarian mission and must be guarded against.

38. **Mr. Stillhart** (Deputy Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) agreed that there was no absolute answer to the question of an acceptable level of risk. The International Committee of the Red Cross had re-evaluated the situation in Iraq after the August 2003 attack and had decided to stay in the country, given the enormous human needs. Slowly ICRC had rebuilt its presence there to the point where the Iraq operation was the third largest ICRC operation in the world, working in all zones without armed guards. In the end, the humanitarian needs had justified the risks.

39. **Mr. Mogwanja** (United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Pakistan) said that various practical and straightforward measures could be taken to ensure that best practices were documented and shared in a timely manner. His experience in that regard had been with the cluster system, which brought together various humanitarian actors from different organizations with different networks working as a thematic group documenting and sharing experiences. That same mechanism also served to build capacity by strengthening monitoring, reporting and needs assessment, and by providing a rich context for training.

40. **Mr. Da Silva** (Deputy Executive Director of External Relations, World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the new United Nations approach to security encouraged a culture of decentralized decision-making. Some organizations in the United Nations system were traditionally more decentralized and felt more

comfortable with that approach. He believed that management teams on the ground needed to take stock of situations and make decisions without waiting for feedback from Headquarters.

41. Humanitarian organizations needed to enhance their ability to engage with local communities and analyse the context in which they operated. That ability had enabled WFP and ICRC to successfully provide large-scale assistance in Darfur in 2004, and had initially led WFP to continue its operations in southern Somalia, including in areas controlled by Al-Shabab (even if, ultimately, the relationships with the local communities there had been misread). Humanitarian organizations had to remain engaged in high-risk contexts and the ability to do so was not learned in the classroom but on the ground. Given the extent of engagement and analysis required, longer staff assignments would be helpful.

42. Moreover, if humanitarian organizations and the military could re-engage in professional dialogue and gain a greater understanding of one another's roles in providing humanitarian assistance when impartiality and humanitarian principles were less at risk — for example, in response to natural disasters — it might help each of them to function more effectively in conflict situations.

43. **Mr. Stillhart** (Deputy Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that United Nations Headquarters should make safety and security a top priority and provide the necessary training and tools. At the same time, the knowledge of actors on the ground could be relied on to adapt to differing situations at the local level.

44. **Mr. Mawazini** (Executive Coordinator, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq) said that "acceptable risk" was determined by how well the risk was understood and analysed and whether operations were changed accordingly. When humanitarian organizations were directly targeted, as had happened in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, it was difficult to continue operations. When risk was widespread but the organizations were not directly targeted, it was possible to understand, analyse and prevent it. Staff in very high-risk environments should be experienced, used to working with armed groups and able to build acceptance within local communities; consequently, training was very important. Humanitarian organizations also needed to focus on building local staff capacity for risk analysis,

and on networking with local, religious and tribal leaders. In building capacity in a high-risk context, the first step was to provide information on the NGO, its humanitarian principles and its role in the rebuilding effort.

45. With regard to sharing security information, risks were being continuously assessed and shared between NGOs and with the United Nations field network in Iraq. The risk in Iraq was no longer as widespread as it had been in 2004 and local security analysis was needed.

46. **Mr. Starr** (Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security) affirmed that while a general security risk policy formulated at Headquarters might be suited to a local situation, most security-related decision-making happened on the ground. Tools were needed to understand threats, measure the criticality of operations, and determine whether to continue them. Once decisions had been made on the ground, they needed to be espoused at the highest levels of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. That kind of risk analysis and decision-making framework fostered an environment in which personnel on the ground felt supported in their decisions, even in the event of casualties.

47. **Mr. Mercado** (United States of America), citing an Overseas Development Institute finding that 78 per cent of security incidents involved national humanitarian workers, asked whether remote management utilizing national staff was an ethical alternative.

48. **Mr. Suárez** (Observer for Colombia) asked the panellists to offer recommendations on what Governments could do to enhance collaboration with humanitarian organizations on risk assessment, prevention and reduction; boost security; and implement security policies that would allow humanitarian organizations to operate effectively in high-risk situations.

49. **Mr. Tachie-Menson** (Ghana) asked how remote management strategies address a situation in which local actors and international humanitarian actors had different objectives. He also wondered how innovative technologies could be used in communities with insecure environments and insufficient infrastructure to ensure universal coverage.

50. **Mr. Mogwanja** (United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Pakistan) said that casualties were a concern regardless of whether national or international staff were affected. The approaches and institutional security mechanisms under discussion applied to staff in both categories. Local knowledge and continuous interaction with local communities helped to build the analysis capacity and relationships necessary to remain constantly informed of the varying nature, level and complexity of the security environment. Analysis was costly but necessary for determining whether alternative approaches could be taken to provide urgent, life-saving humanitarian aid in complex security situations. Some alternatives included relying on local partners, civil society organizations and greater use of national staff. Such decisions needed to be based on thorough analyses of the situation conducted on a regular basis. Using remote programming and transferring tasks to national partners when that did not reduce overall risk was unethical.

51. Regarding differences between the objectives of local and top-level actors, he said that when all actors accepted common humanitarian principles and addressed the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable populations, there was no difference in impact.

52. He agreed that the most complex security environments and difficult humanitarian situations were found in the world's poorest communities. Lack of access to modern technology and modern communication systems was a symptom of poverty. Increasing the availability of modern technology in those communities (for example, mobile data collection, collation and verification technology) could improve rapid assessment of needs after natural disasters.

53. **Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), moderator, highlighted the use of the Internet and mobile technology in Somalia by humanitarian aid workers, enabling them to work remotely and maintain a low profile, thereby reducing risk.

54. **Mr. Starr** (Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security) said that Governments were responsible for protecting United Nations and humanitarian organizations in their territories. However, they were sometimes overwhelmed and unable to protect themselves and their citizens, much less humanitarian organizations. United Nations humanitarian organizations needed to share security risk assessments with host country security forces and representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and seek their input and analysis. Countries could not be expected to engage and protect humanitarian organizations if there was no open sharing of information.

55. **Mr. Da Silva** (Deputy Executive Director of External Relations, World Food Programme (WFP)) said that one needs assessment technique triangulated information from multiple sources of information in order to pinpoint the truth. Engaging with local leaders provided access to a source of information other than the organization operating the programme. He gave examples of the innovative use of technology in Somalia to report diverted food assistance. In the context of natural disasters, it was important to contribute to the enhanced resilience of affected vulnerable populations. Investment in low-technology adaptations to that end was the best contingency and disaster mitigation approach. Drawing on lessons from the earthquake in Haiti, he said that contingency plans needed to focus more on how to operate in urban centres and target dense urban environments. When disaster struck, the resources necessary to implement existing contingency plans were not always available.

56. **Mr. Stillhart** (Deputy Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross) said that the emergence of local actors willing to carry out humanitarian work provided an opportunity for international organizations to improve the quality of humanitarian actions. ICRC welcomed the involvement of host Governments and local NGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. In extreme contexts such as Somalia, operating through the local Red Crescent Societies and networks of national staff offered the best way to respond to the challenges. Nonetheless, deployment of national staff was subject to the same risk analysis used to determine whether the exposure of international staff to risk was justified.

57. Open and transparent dialogue with the armed, security and police forces of host Governments would also help humanitarian organizations with security analysis. He encouraged Governments to ask their armed forces to engage with humanitarian organizations.

58. In remote management operations, it was vital to bridge gaps in objectives. In its work with the Afghan

Red Crescent Society, ICRC had found that it helped to put the vulnerability and resilience of the population at the centre of the humanitarian response, since not all actors had the same priorities.

59. **Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), moderator, said that national Governments could also make a real contribution by not objecting to the humanitarian response.

60. **Mr. Aleinikoff** (Deputy High Commissioner, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the use of technology in humanitarian work — for example, video equipment in the field of medicine, satellite technology, or statistical methods to estimate the number of internally displaced persons — might eventually make it possible to rely less on national staff.

61. **Ms. Eckey** (Norway) asked panellists to describe the kinds of local organizations involved and asked whether women's organizations had an advantage in delivering humanitarian assistance in complex situations. She also wished to know how humanitarian organizations should deal with armed groups and which political solutions were likely to win them over.

62. **Mr. Stillhart** (Deputy Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross) stressed the importance of maintaining a sustained dialogue in order to gain acceptance by all forces and groups on the ground, without which it was extremely difficult to reach those in need of assistance. Interrupting dialogue only to resume it years later was not effective. Dialogue was necessary not for the sake of dialogue, but in order to deliver assistance.

63. **Mr. Mogwanja** (United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Pakistan) said that local groups differed in competence, geographic coverage and commitment to humanitarian principles. Referring to the 2008 earthquake in Pakistan, she noted that while many organizations could deliver immediate assistance, not all of them were set up to provide humanitarian action over a period of months and years. The latter needed to be evaluated on the basis of their resources, commitment to humanitarian principles and ability to deploy qualified staff.

64. Women's organizations had an advantage in addressing the needs of women and girls in humanitarian crises. For example, those organizations were more sensitive to practices in conservative communities, where women's contacts with outsiders and with men were restricted, and were able to gain access more readily.

65. **Mr. Holmes** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), moderator, said that risks had become very high and varied. Humanitarian organizations needed to be aware of them, deal with them and not be too risk-averse. At the same time, they must constantly balance the security and safety of their own staff with the imperative of carrying out their mandates for humanitarian assistance.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*