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Humanitarian affairs segment

Provisional summary record of the 35th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 18 July 2012, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Arias (Spain)

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Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

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In the absence of Mr. Koterec (Slovak Republic), Mr. Arias (Spain), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (E/2012/77-A/67/89, E/2012/85 and E/2012/L.11)

1. **The President**, opening the humanitarian affairs segment, said that humanitarian action and its coordination required the active engagement of Member States, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and other actors. In order to ensure coordinated action, needs must be identified comprehensively and the available resources must be delivered to people in need in a timely manner. He commended the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the affected States that coordinated the provision of humanitarian assistance to their people and the humanitarian aid workers who often risked their lives to help those in need.

2. **Ms. Amos** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Emergency Relief Coordinator), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations ((E/2012/77-A/67/89), said that the report had been made more focused and concise than in previous years. She was happy to see that most of the recommendations contained therein were included in the Council's draft resolution under the agenda item (E/2012/L.11).

3. Efforts to build the resilience of communities in support of country-led efforts were particularly important in countries and regions beset by recurring and slow-moving disasters, such as the Horn of Africa in 2011 and the Sahel region in 2012. Given that an effective humanitarian response required an optimal use of available resources, decision-making should be based on evidence obtained from reliable data. Information on the location and scale of essential services, such as functioning health centres or water resources, should be available ahead of time and updated regularly. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was introducing standardized reporting procedures in order to coordinate needs assessments within and outside the United Nations and

was expanding its collaboration with Governments and other partners in order to make sure that operational preparedness datasets were in place. The creation of one-stop-shop information-sharing websites would give humanitarian country teams a solid base of evidence for decision-making and would also be helpful to workers on the ground.

4. There had been continued growth in the number and diversity of people and organizations involved in humanitarian aid; for example, aid organizations from the Gulf States and Turkey had taken a leading role in response to the emergencies in Libya and Somalia, and Argentina and Saudi Arabia had joined the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system while Brazil was preparing to do so. The Office had signed memorandums of understanding with the League of Arab States, the African Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and was discussing joint operating procedures with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in order to ensure that regional and disaster responses were aligned and to enable Governments to understand what assistance was available. Efforts to deepen partnerships with the private sector were also under way.

5. **Mr. Benmehidi** (Observer for Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Secretary-General's focus, in his report (E/2012/77-A/67/89), on the need to further invest in building resilience and preparedness was especially welcome. The transformative agenda of the Inter-agency Standing Committee was a relatively new development in the field of humanitarian assistance. He therefore requested that the Emergency Relief Coordinator should further enhance dialogue and consultation with all Member States not only on that specific issue, but on the entire humanitarian reform agenda.

6. Humanitarian challenges resulting from complex emergencies and natural disasters continued to expand dramatically, especially in developing countries, and were exacerbated by climate change and the ongoing global crises; greater capacity-building efforts for all stakeholders were needed. He reiterated the Group's commitment to the guiding principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality, set out in paragraph 2 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, as the framework for the provision of United Nations humanitarian assistance. Particular attention should be paid to the need to respect the

sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, in the coordination of humanitarian assistance; in that regard, he emphasized the primary role of the concerned State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of assistance and the central, unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordinating international support.

7. While he acknowledged the efforts to improve humanitarian response, more could be done. The United Nations system and the international community should help developing countries to enhance their existing humanitarian capacities, knowledge and institutions, including through the transfer of technology, funding and expertise. At the same time, there was an urgent need to ensure predictable, flexible and adequate funding through enhanced partnerships and strengthened financial mechanisms. Member States should comply fully with their obligation to protect and assist civilians in occupied territories under international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949.

8. The provision of emergency assistance should not be seen as an isolated mechanism in the overall humanitarian response; it was important to ensure a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development. Humanitarian assistance should not, however, be seen as a replacement for international development cooperation.

9. **Mr. Emiliou** (Observer for Cyprus), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries Iceland and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and, in addition, Georgia, expressed support for continued reinforcement of the international humanitarian system and for the transformative agenda, which should be implemented in a timely manner. He noted the recent progress in strengthening the role of the humanitarian coordinators, the greater use of pooled funds and improvements in the cluster approach with respect to overall response capacity. However, there was still significant room for improvement.

10. Humanitarian leadership was central in ensuring a coordinated and principled humanitarian response, and the resident coordinators played an especially important role through their advocacy for humanitarian

principles. The upcoming quadrennial comprehensive policy review process would provide an opportunity for dialogue on how to enhance the resident coordinator system, and thus to ensure that United Nations operational activities in the field of humanitarian assistance continued to adapt to the changing global cooperation context. The resident coordinators, who were often humanitarian coordinators, should have the ability to lead on behalf of the entire United Nations system, contribute to the work of the country teams and promote change. He called on the United Nations and relevant stakeholders to devise an integrated strategy to support the resident and humanitarian coordinators and to facilitate the appointment, retention and empowerment of strong humanitarian leaders.

11. A solid shared understanding of humanitarian needs was essential to an effective and targeted response, and efforts to develop a framework for common needs assessments, including through the creation of reliable and timely baseline information systems to undergird evidence-based decision-making, should continue. Special emphasis should be placed on strengthening support for transition and early recovery in affected countries; priority should be given to the people at greatest risk and cyclical emergencies should be avoided.

12. National Governments, supported by international development and humanitarian partners, had the primary responsibility to strengthen the resilience of their countries through disaster risk reduction. It was therefore necessary to improve coherence and links between humanitarian and development aid. The European Union's 2012 Supporting Horn of Africa Resilience (SHARE) initiative provided major funding to help people recover from the recent drought and to better withstand future crises. Likewise, the Partnership for Resilience (AGIR Sahel) had recently been launched in Brussels by countries and organizations in the Sahel region and their international partners, notably the European Union, to complement wider efforts and initiatives. He encouraged the United Nations funds and programmes and other development actors to integrate resilience-based and disaster-risk-reduction strategies into their programming in cooperation with humanitarian actors, host Governments and regional organizations.

13. In light of the increasing frequency and growing intensity of natural disasters and the humanitarian

needs arising from armed conflicts, he welcomed the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to engage with new partners and work towards a broader donor base. However, while a growing number of humanitarian actors could create new possibilities for response, the established humanitarian practices must be preserved and the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and independence must be respected.

14. The European Union was gravely concerned at the outbreak of several new complex emergencies, the continuation of protracted conflicts, the continued displacement of millions of people, the escalating violence against humanitarian personnel and the looting of humanitarian supplies. He urged all parties to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law by ensuring that humanitarian personnel and supplies had rapid, unhindered access to populations in need and guaranteeing the safety and security of such personnel.

15. **Mr. Acharya** (Observer for Nepal), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that as a result of their capacity constraints, the least developed countries faced more of the downsides of globalization than other countries. They must grapple with violent conflicts, increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters, food insecurity and epidemics and most of them were unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. He therefore called for swift implementation of the disaster risk reduction component of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), “The future we want”, through strong follow-up measures; “delivering as one” should be a fundamental principle for humanitarian assistance.

16. The Hyogo Framework for Action for the period 2005 to 2015 provided a comprehensive roadmap for improving disaster preparedness and implementing risk reduction measures at multiple levels. In addition, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) had focused greater attention on national and local efforts to enhance preparedness and reduce disaster risks. Going forward, it was important that the decentralized responsibility of local authorities and capacity development in disaster-affected communities should be strengthened and that the nexus between disaster reduction, humanitarian assistance

and development should be reflected in the development agenda beyond 2015.

17. It was vital to strengthen early warning mechanisms through a multi-stakeholder approach and to put in place appropriate, well-resourced financing mechanisms. Harmonized, coordinated needs assessments should be conducted in a participatory manner and actions should be guided by the core humanitarian principles. The least developed countries faced a multitude of development hurdles, including a higher frequency of emergency humanitarian situations and disasters. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) document entitled “The Least Developed Countries 2010: Towards a New International Development Architecture for LDCs”, the least developed countries had accounted for 40 per cent of all casualties related to natural disasters during the period 2000-2010. Those problems, compounded by conflicts and other peace and security issues, posed a formidable obstacle to an effective humanitarian response in those countries. They should therefore be given priority in efforts to build resilience, reduce the impact of disasters and prepare comprehensive risk assessments.

18. The Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries prioritized those issues and the least developed countries had committed themselves to implementing it, including by raising public awareness and taking preparedness measures. The international community, for its part, should support the harmonization of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation policies and programmes and the integration of risk reduction strategies into national adaptation programmes of action and medium- and long-term development planning.

19. **Mr. Robles** (Spain) said that his country strongly supported neutral humanitarian action based on needs assessments carried out by the international humanitarian community under the overall coordination of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In connection with the transformative agenda, the role played by humanitarian coordinators at the field level was especially relevant as they were in charge of creating synergies among different agencies and actors, promoting the overall common vision of the humanitarian context beyond the clusters perspective, fostering collective accountability and allowing needs-based funding allocations. In order to adequately accomplish those tasks, people with

strong leadership skills, conflict management capabilities and field experience should be recruited through a selection process supported by each agency's headquarters.

20. In line with good humanitarian donorship principles, his country was making increased use of flexible financing mechanisms, both by signing specific legal frameworks with relevant agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and through contributions to humanitarian pooled funds and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs emergency relief funds. In order to improve the quality of the Government's multilateral funding, an external evaluation of the quality of funding proposals received from different United Nations agencies had been conducted. The evaluation had revealed a number of deficiencies in proposal justification, monitoring and evaluation systems and strategies. In order to correct those deficiencies, he proposed that minimum standards for project funding that took the needs of the proposing countries into account while allowing for more donor participation and greater transparency should be set.

21. Because climate change was increasing the number and intensity of natural disasters, particularly in Africa, humanitarian action in affected regions should be accompanied by other interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change and increasing food security in a sustainable way. For that reason, humanitarian and development actors in certain humanitarian-crisis-prone contexts should share their visions and instruments in order to promote risk prevention and resilience capacity-building. For example, while humanitarian actors could distribute nutritional supplements to children in order to reduce the impact of a crisis, development actors were better able to help Governments to develop risk reduction plans and information management systems. His Government was promoting the introduction of a risk prevention approach to every national policy and development sector pursuant to the Hyogo Framework for Action and was combining short-term humanitarian action with support for national and regional medium-term measures for combating hunger in the Sahel region.

22. Lastly, he stressed that humanitarian actors must remain neutral in conflict situations and that their safety must be ensured. In that connection, he called

for a debate on ways to promote respect for international humanitarian law.

23. **Mr. Ustinov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation had consistently promoted the principles of United Nations humanitarian assistance reflected in General Assembly and Council resolutions and considered the manipulation of humanitarian issues for political purposes, especially in situations involving armed conflict, to be wholly unacceptable.

24. With respect to the proposals made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator regarding the enhancement of humanitarian response, he agreed that measures should be taken in order to strengthen coordination, improve accountability and reinforce civil leadership. To that end, the Governments of affected countries should take the lead in initiating, organizing and providing humanitarian assistance within their national territories; the international community's role should consist primarily of complementing those efforts.

25. Medium- and long-term development planning should be included in United Nations emergency response operations, which, in providing humanitarian assistance, should strengthen the operational potential and capacities of Governments, promote accountability and prevent humanitarian dependence. Response capacity could be improved by strengthening humanitarian capacities at the national and local levels, including through preparedness and early warning mechanisms for emergency response to natural and man-made disasters.

26. Lastly, with military assets being used in many ongoing United Nations emergency response operations, the civilian nature of international humanitarian assistance should be preserved; military assets should be used only as a last resort, any military involvement should not violate the principle of national sovereignty and overall coordination should remain in the hands of national institutions and the United Nations, including, first and foremost, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

27. His Government had consistently called for and contributed to efforts to maintain the financial stability of the United Nations humanitarian sector, and it continued to regard the Consolidated Appeals Processes as the primary financial instrument for international humanitarian assistance. In 2011-2012, the Russian Federation had provided humanitarian

assistance, both on a bilateral basis and in response to United Nations appeals, to such countries as Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Namibia, Pakistan, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Yemen. In addition, it had recently decided to contribute US\$ 7.5 million, through the World Food Programme (WFP), to humanitarian projects in Cuba, Kyrgyzstan, Somalia and Tajikistan, as well as US\$ 4.5 million for humanitarian assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic.

28. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Observer for Morocco) said that the debate surrounding the issue of disaster reduction had been influenced by the changing nature of humanitarian crises, particularly where armed conflicts and political and social turmoil had been aggravated by recurring food crises caused by drought, as in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa. Lessons learned by the United Nations humanitarian system and other responders included the need for coordination among humanitarian relief workers, Governments, international organizations, civil society and donors. Building resilience required a long-term approach that focused on development, prevention, preparedness and timely assessment of vulnerabilities.

29. Effective humanitarian decision-making must be based on dependable information tailored to the needs of affected populations and reliable indicators integrated into long-term development strategies. Exchange of information between Member States and humanitarian actors improved humanitarian response by allowing for a more efficient allocation of available resources and for the adoption of common international humanitarian norms.

30. His delegation condemned the imposition of obstacles to the work of humanitarian personnel and manipulation of the suffering of vulnerable populations for political purposes. Humanitarian organizations should be permitted to act effectively in keeping with the fundamental principles of humanitarian response. The efforts of the Secretary-General to ensure greater transparency in the humanitarian system through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) were to be commended, as were the results obtained through the crisis-specific website, which allowed for ongoing contact between local authorities, humanitarian responders and development actors.

31. His country supported the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly with regard to the facilitation of unimpeded access to affected communities and to the provision of effective humanitarian assistance, based on the specific needs of those communities, in keeping with the fundamental principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

32. **Mr. Jensen** (Observer for Denmark) said that his country had long supported a coordinated, evidence-based and responsive humanitarian system. A great deal had been achieved within the framework of the transformative agenda and the Emergency Relief Coordinator's proactive leadership, including improvements in the management and performance of clusters and the use of consolidated appeals as a strategic planning instrument supported by efficient common funds. Further efforts were needed in several areas, however, including the mandate and role of the humanitarian coordinators, the ability of humanitarian response to incorporate long-term objectives and resilience and the need to build new partnerships.

33. It was important to ensure the timely deployment of resident and humanitarian coordinators with skills profiles that matched requirements on the ground. To that end, the Organization should further develop appropriate human resource development policies and incentive-based recruitment systems that covered the entire United Nations system and give the humanitarian coordinators a strong and comprehensive operational mandate with clear lines of authority. His delegation would raise the issue of support for the Emergency Relief Coordinator during the 2012 quadrennial comprehensive policy review and in other policy-related forums.

34. The continuing crises in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa clearly showed that there was an urgent need for more early warning, prevention and resilience-building measures. The challenge was to prevent vulnerabilities from developing in the first place by creating a framework for action that supported good governance and stability as the basis for growth and development. In addition, there was a pressing need to identify durable solutions for displaced persons; over 25 per cent of Somalia's population was currently displaced and 350,000 people had been forced to flee their homes in northern Mali. Their predicaments were a direct consequence of the development crises that had gripped their countries and the solution was not only a

humanitarian challenge, but a development one as well. The international community must accept the need to take far greater risks and to be more flexible in its response.

35. There was a need for new partnerships which recognized that real solutions could not be imposed from outside. Governments, civil society and regional organizations should support domestic capacities related to prevention, humanitarian response and resilience, while planning and coordination should be based on local, national and regional capacities and ownership in order to improve accountability, resilience and food security. The gap between relief and development must be bridged with a shared vision and a shared respect for the neutrality, impartiality and interdependence of humanitarian assistance; to do otherwise would block the access of humanitarian workers to the very people that they sought to help.

36. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that his delegation concurred with the Secretary-General's analysis of the challenges facing humanitarian action and welcomed the recommendations made in the transformative agenda, bearing in mind that, for the present, it was the responsibility of each agency to ensure that they were implemented in the field. It was essential to broaden partnerships, ensure access to victims of armed conflicts, build local resilience and take gender issues into account during humanitarian interventions.

37. The United Nations should promote greater inclusiveness, broader partnerships and greater cooperation within national, regional and local structures in order to enable affected States to prepare for disasters and crises and to assume their primary responsibility for providing assistance to their own people. The development of new partnerships with non-traditional donor countries, regional organizations, NGOs and the private sector would strengthen and complement the United Nations humanitarian system. Suitable mechanisms for cooperation should be developed within the framework of those partnerships and should be based on transparent information-sharing and adequate communication in order to ensure that all actors observed the same rules.

38. Each humanitarian actor had a comparative advantage based on its particular abilities, and that complementarily should be put to use in a spirit of trust, respect and solidarity. His Government, together with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs, ICRC and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), had launched an initiative aimed at strengthening partnerships in response to national disasters. In October 2011, they had held a productive dialogue between over 130 national, regional and international actors and affected States in Geneva.

39. In crises associated with armed conflicts, the primary responsibility for ensuring rapid and unhindered access to the victims lay with the affected States and there must be a clear distinction between humanitarian action and security operations. Together with its international partners, his Government was working to develop two instruments that would clarify the normative framework and provide practical information on humanitarian access. A series of regional workshops would be organized in order to test those documents directly with humanitarian workers in the field.

40. Breaking the cycle of dependence on emergency relief required that vulnerable communities strengthen their capacity to withstand natural disasters. At the same time, coordination between humanitarian and development actors should be improved and international support provided to national and local Governments, civil society and other relevant partners in their efforts to increase their resilience.

41. Lastly, he agreed with the Secretary-General that gender and age must be taken into account in order to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions. His country supported the Inter-Agency Standing Committee system for identifying activities that promoted gender equality and welcomed the increase in the number of projects that took gender into account.

42. **Ms. Anderson** (Ireland) said that while humanitarian partnerships had traditionally involved a range of actors, a number of potential new partners, including Arab and Muslim donors and NGOs, had emerged in recent years. The humanitarian community should engage with that new donor architecture while bearing in mind that its most important partners were the communities beset by crises; it was they who bore the brunt of recovery work and who, through their own initiative, rebuilt their communities following natural or man-made disasters. Ways should therefore be found to strengthen local capacity to prevent disasters and mitigate their impact. The institutional and risk

management capacities of national Governments should also be supported more intensively rather than creating new and parallel structures. Aid, while important, was not the only form of support and it was important to understand the local institutional context and to tailor humanitarian assistance accordingly.

43. Partnerships with the development sector should also be considered since uncoordinated, parallel planning and financing could result in competing objectives, contradictory priorities and strategic incoherence. Disasters were often the result of development failures, which increased vulnerabilities, and as the number of predictable crises increased, the need to plan for them as part of development assistance became more critical. She was therefore encouraged by the inclusion of disaster risk reduction in the Secretary-General's priorities for the next five-year period. Lastly, the need for a clear reaffirmation of the core humanitarian principles had never been more important. Her Government stood ready to play its part in collaborative efforts to meet the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in disaster-prone developing countries, including in its upcoming role as President of the European Union for the first half of 2013.

44. **Mr. Maza Martelli** (El Salvador) said that the countries of Central America were experiencing massive natural disasters with increasing frequency and seriousness and that scientific research had shown a link between such events and climate change. Rapid data collection and analysis were needed for evidence-based decision-making in the countries affected by natural disasters. Training for staff, capacity-building, a focus on the most vulnerable individuals and groups, the establishment of crisis centres with information dissemination capacity and the involvement of the public and of humanitarian agencies were needed. It was therefore essential to strengthen alliances between United Nations bodies, other national and international humanitarian actors and the authorities of affected countries in order to provide assistance to the victims and help them resume productive lives. Humanitarian action should be conducted with respect for human rights in order to have a greater impact on society and sustainable development, and funding for prevention, mitigation and response capacities was needed. Groups traditionally seen as vulnerable, such as young people, women, persons with disabilities and indigenous

peoples, were essential to national empowerment and response during humanitarian emergencies.

45. **Ms. Morgan** (Mexico) said that while her country recognized the leadership of the United Nations and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in coordinating humanitarian assistance, coordination between humanitarian assistance and development efforts could be further enhanced. Mexico had strengthened its relationship with the humanitarian pillar of the United Nations and with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and would work to promote a strong relationship between emergency response and development. Investment in prevention and preparedness; standardization of the databases that allowed countries to make decisions based on emergency humanitarian needs in the field; and the exchange of data and technology among Member States, the international humanitarian community and local teams were needed.

46. The problem of food security should be addressed from the emergency and structural perspectives as well as from that of the right to food and States should seek a comprehensive and lasting solution to the humanitarian needs of their people. In the Declaration adopted at the recent Group of 20 Leaders' Summit, held in Los Cabos on 18 and 19 June 2012, the participants had agreed to promote greater public and private investment in agriculture and to remove export restrictions and extraordinary taxes on food purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by WFP and had reiterated the important contribution of greater transparency to reducing food price volatility.

47. **Mr. Lyngroth** (Observer for Norway) said that the international community should strengthen the capacity of Governments and local actors by working more directly with the people in need since local communities were the first responders during in a crisis. Governments, which had the primary responsibility to assist and protect their people, increasingly had the capacity to do so. The international response should therefore shift from assistance to cooperation by ensuring that Governments had better preparedness and response mechanisms in place and should be increasingly understood as complementary to national efforts.

48. It was important to work more closely with NGOs and to build capacity in the field. In Haiti, a mere 1 per cent of all post-earthquake funding and only

8 per cent of cholera flash appeal funding had gone directly to local actors. Donors tended to favour international NGOs over local ones, primarily owing to a lack of capacity and accountability on the latter's part, and there were few examples of good practices such as coaching of local NGOs by their international counterparts and donor support for international NGOs whose exit strategies involved handing over responsibility to local actors.

49. In order for humanitarian efforts to be sustainable, roles and responsibilities must be transferred from international mechanisms to national and local structures; capacity-building was needed and the assistance offered must be more flexible in scale and nature. Building partnerships for more effective delivery of humanitarian assistance was crucial. In recent years, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Emergency Relief Coordinator had worked to enhance partnerships with States and actors not traditionally a part of the humanitarian community. However, the need for a more inclusive humanitarian system must be against the need to respect the key principles of good humanitarian donorship. Closer cooperation between international and regional actors and systems must be translated into tangible action on the ground, including joint evaluations, training and contingency planning. South-South cooperation, such as that demonstrated by Cuban medical teams during the cholera outbreak in Haiti, should be promoted and developing countries should become even more involved in global humanitarian affairs, particularly through the United Nations.

50. Lastly, she drew attention to the importance of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the Convention on Cluster Munitions in protecting the people of affected countries and preventing future harm; the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which had been signed by over 70 States, would be held in Oslo in September 2012.

51. **Ms. Cousens** (United States of America) said that in 2011, the United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies had entailed unprecedented costs and required new flexibility. The complexity of the food crisis in the Sahel had required a regional strategy, including the appointment of a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, and the famine in the Horn of Africa had

required context-specific solutions. Humanitarian crises driven by conflict and violence imposed their own complexities, particularly when, as was often the case, there were obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance. Too many civilians were caught in violence that they had had no part in creating and the number of attacks on humanitarian workers, especially local ones, was unacceptably high; they must have unconditional access to those who needed assistance.

52. The plan for the United Nations to deploy senior humanitarian leadership at the beginning of disasters was a major step forward, as was the transformative agenda, which must, however, remain focused on impact. Her Government was deepening its partnerships with regional actors, donors and countries at risk through joint planning and strengthened response coordination that drew on the unique capacity of all actors; for example, it had recently been involved in the establishment of the Global Alliance for Action for Drought Resilience and Growth in the Horn of Africa.

53. **Ms. Butijer** (Observer for Croatia) said that while the past two decades had been marked by extraordinary progress in the United Nations humanitarian system, environmental degradation, climate-related disasters, demographic shifts, market disturbances and instability within and among States were generating more severe and more complex humanitarian emergencies. The emblems and flags of humanitarian organizations no longer shielded those who worked under their auspices. An unacceptable lack of humanitarian access, primarily in crises driven by conflict and instability, was making it increasingly difficult to reach those in need. Trust must be rebuilt, both within the community of donors and humanitarian organizations and through dialogue and partnership with local actors. Full respect for the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence was the main guarantee of effective humanitarian assistance.

54. Another major concern was the need to make humanitarian assistance more effective and efficient. The Consolidated Appeals Process was an essential tool for joint planning, programming and coordination at country level and the main reference for Croatia's annual humanitarian budgeting. Efforts to develop initiatives and frameworks for effective common needs assessments, common reporting on and monitoring of

results, greater transparency and evidence-based decision-making must continue; relief, rehabilitation and development should be more closely linked from the early planning stages; and development and humanitarian actors must work together to reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience.

55. **Mr. León González** (Cuba) said that humanitarian assistance should be provided at the request and with the consent of recipient States and with full respect for the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Concepts that had not been agreed must not be used to justify violation of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

56. In addition to natural disasters, human disasters such as hunger and poverty affected thousands of millions of people worldwide as a direct result of the unjust international economic order. The best way to increase the capacity of developing countries to respond to natural disasters was for the developed countries to meet their official development assistance (ODA) commitments. Humanitarian agencies should also be provided with new technologies, increased funding and scientific and technical knowledge.

57. His Government had made significant progress towards some of the goals established in the Hyogo Framework for Action and its key role in the provision of humanitarian assistance to its people during natural disasters was widely known. For 50 years, Cuba's civil defence system had ensured compliance with the relevant international instruments to which the State was a party and a system was in place to protect the Cuban people and their natural resources. Local risk assessment and monitoring capacity had been strengthened, as had early warning systems, and risk reduction was included in school curriculums.

58. His Government had recently hosted a regional workshop on local disaster risk reduction efforts, at which Cuba's experience had served as a model. It stood ready to provide disinterested support to affected countries as a matter of ethics and principle, including through its Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specializing in Disaster Situations and Serious Epidemics. It had signed cooperation agreements with various countries and was involved in joint projects with other countries of the region.

59. **Ms. Rubiales de Chamorro** (Nicaragua) said that humanitarian assistance should be provided without conditions and should not jeopardize the sovereignty or territorial integrity of States or interfere in their internal affairs.

60. Nicaragua was extremely vulnerable to a broad range of natural disasters. Its disaster prevention and response system operated at the national, regional and local levels in cooperation with civil society organizations. The Centre for Humanitarian Assistance Coordination, established in late 2009, was activated whenever the President declared a state of emergency; the Government was also finalizing a national risk management policy. Nicaragua's national human development plan stressed a culture of prevention in all areas of development.

61. **Mr. Quinlan** (Australia) said that recurring crises, such as the famine in the Sahel region, served as a reminder that investment in risk reduction saved lives, livelihoods and assets and reduced the costs of disaster response and rebuilding. More diverse partnerships and reliance on comparative advantages were needed in order to find innovative solutions. Regional partnerships could play a particularly important role; he therefore welcomed the signing of the ASEAN-United Nations Strategic Plan of Cooperation on Disaster Management (2011-2015). In May 2012, his Government had provided support for a regional earthquake simulation exercise, hosted by the Government of Indonesia, in which more than 240 disaster response experts from 24 countries had participated. And because data-driven decision-making allowed for more effective humanitarian action, Australia and Indonesia were working together to collect the data needed to anticipate the impact of future disasters and inform contingency planning.

62. Fragmented and uncoordinated responses could no longer be accepted; in planning funding increases, his Government held agencies accountable for the way in which they had worked together to deliver system-wide results. Improved coordination between humanitarian and development strategies and implementation plans would require a shared analysis of the root causes of the crisis, an understanding of roles and responsibilities and the determination to act together coherently. Donors must be willing to break down budget silos and provide flexible financing, and the international system must improve its ability to adjust to the various capacities of affected States.

Where capacity existed, the international system should capitalize on it and make sure that it did not inadvertently undermine national strengths. Improved reporting on results was also needed. The core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence must be upheld and greater accountability to the affected populations was needed. Communities must be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian action and responses must meet the varied needs of the population, including women, children and persons with disabilities.

63. Over the next four years, his Government would increase its spending on humanitarian assistance and disaster risk reduction by a total of 2 billion Australian dollars, which would provide life-saving assistance for up to 30 million people and reduce vulnerability to disasters for many more. It understood that timely, predictable funding was critical and would also increase its funding through four-year agreements with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, WFP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ICRC, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Peacebuilding Fund and would continue to support regional organizations and national Governments, including through a new disaster risk reduction initiative funded in the amount of 100 million Australian dollars.

64. **Ms. Finskas** (Finland) said that her Government endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendations on data-driven decision-making and partnerships (E/2012/77-A/67/89, paras. 48-50) but would have preferred to see a greater focus on technical assistance, notwithstanding paragraphs 36 to 38 of the report.

65. There had been progress in implementing the transformative agenda, but much remained to be done, particularly by the cluster leads, which had an important role to play in rolling out the relevant elements of the agenda at field level. All levels of all relevant agencies must understand the added value of the agenda; United Nations performance in the field was measured on the basis not of individual agencies' achievements, but of collective results with joint accountability.

66. System-wide humanitarian issues having to do with effectiveness of response, coordination and

leadership were closely linked and should be addressed coherently in all relevant bodies, giving Member States a better understanding of the Organization's humanitarian architecture. Agencies' reporting practices must be harmonized so that collective results could be measured against joint strategic objectives and their governing bodies should support the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to achieve a more robust, effective and efficient humanitarian system.

67. **Ms. Wang Hongbo** (China) said that effective coordination of international resources and improved capacity of affected countries were the top priorities in humanitarian relief. Expanded and deepened partnerships were more important than ever before and the participation of a broad range of actors required more effective coordination. She therefore welcomed the closer cooperation between the United Nations, regional organizations and the private sector and hoped that that partnership would be further strengthened. The Governments of affected countries should play a leading role in disaster preparedness, relief and reconstruction and should have the primary responsibility for initiating, organizing, coordinating and carrying out humanitarian assistance. All international cooperation should comply with the fundamental principles of respect for the sovereignty and leadership of recipient countries and respect their Governments' wishes.

68. Information processing laid the groundwork for all humanitarian responses and underpinned capacity-building efforts. As the leading force in humanitarian assistance, affected countries should have their own information collection and analysis infrastructure and professionals. The international community should help developing countries to strengthen their capacity in that area through increased input, transfer of technologies and expertise, and infrastructure development and should take phased, targeted measures in various related fields.

69. As China was a developing country prone to natural disasters, her Government addressed prevention, relief and emergency assistance issues on a regular basis. It also placed great emphasis on cooperation in the area of international humanitarian assistance and had provided various forms of humanitarian assistance, including natural disaster

response training, to developing countries in a timely manner through multilateral and bilateral channels.

70. **Mr. Nofukuka** (Observer for South Africa) said that the affected State should play a primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance and that donor countries should provide predictable, flexible and adequate funding. He urged Member States to join his country in supporting the Central Emergency Response Fund, which depended on timely contributions from donor communities.

71. Millions were facing hunger and malnutrition in the Sahel region, climate change was adding to humanitarian challenges and rising food prices required rapid action. Humanitarian assistance should not end when emergency relief was discontinued in order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to development. A gender perspective must be mainstreamed into the provision of humanitarian relief and the needs of women and children must be taken into account; sexual and gender-based violence were serious concerns. Vulnerable groups, including people living in occupied territories, refugees and internally displaced persons, also required protection. The international community should support developing countries' efforts to build humanitarian capacity by transferring technology and expertise. Lastly, she emphasized the importance of investment in prevention and preparedness in order to strengthen communities, build resilience and mitigate property damage caused by natural disasters.

72. **Mr. Errázuriz** (Chile) stressed the need to build an inclusive humanitarian system and to increase resilience. The priorities of humanitarian assistance should be human security, human rights and respect for the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Rapid, unhindered access of humanitarian personnel and assistance to affected communities should be ensured.

73. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) had met in Panama City from 28 to 30 March 2012 to discuss international humanitarian assistance mechanisms and had adopted a plan of action. CELAC had become the region's most appropriate forum for improving coordination among the various humanitarian actors at the national, subregional, regional and global levels.

74. Following the tsunami of 27 February 2010, risk reduction and emergency response had become priorities in Chile. Risk reduction had been incorporated into a variety of policies, strategies and tools for reducing damage caused by disasters; a system of digital maps showing at-risk areas should be available throughout the country by 2013; and the establishment of a national civil protection agency was under discussion in Parliament. In September 2011, his Government and the resident coordinator for Chile had signed a memorandum of understanding on a national humanitarian support network that established protocols for coordination with the international community in the event of a humanitarian emergency.

75. **Ms. Davidovich** (Observer for Israel) said that Israel had a longstanding tradition of providing humanitarian assistance to nations in need. In 2012, her Government had donated funds for assistance to flood victims in Fiji, medical supplies for victims of the Comayagua prison fire in Honduras and burn treatment equipment following devastating explosions in Brazzaville and had contributed \$200,000 to WFP efforts in the Sahel region. Several Israeli NGOs were assisting the rebuilding efforts in Haiti and Japan.

76. Her Government took a comprehensive approach to humanitarian assistance. Preparedness was crucial to disaster response and investment in risk reduction was critical and cost-effective. Israel's Centre for International Cooperation (MASHAV) conducted courses in emergency and disaster medicine around the world and offered theoretical training and practical simulations relevant to the disaster scenarios likely to occur in particular countries or regions.

77. In United Nations humanitarian assistance efforts, each organization should perform according to its mandate. Israel's partnership with the UNDAC system had increased significantly in recent years; UNDAC had participated in an Israeli earthquake simulation security exercise and its Emergency Response Roster included four Israeli experts. Coordination between the public, private and non-profit sectors and at the national and international levels was vital in ensuring the most effective response to disasters.

78. **Mr. Hallgren** (Observer for Sweden) said that his delegation was a proponent of a credible common needs assessment and appreciated the Secretary-General's recommendation, in paragraph 49 of his report, that Member States and the humanitarian

community should work with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to develop, agree and adhere to common international standards for the exchange of data. Updated baseline information was the key to a better evidence base.

79. The United Nations humanitarian system was based on a broad consensus among Member States. The transformative agenda was a way to reform and refine the common international humanitarian response system and should be rolled out with clear plans for implementation and results measurement. While affected States had the primary responsibility to meet the humanitarian needs of their people, international humanitarian organizations also had a leadership role to play.

The meeting rose at 6.00 p.m.