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**SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE: SPECIAL PROGRAMMES
OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE**

Emergency assistance to Democratic Yemen

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1989/1 of 10 May 1989, the Economic and Social Council, deeply concerned at the extensive and unprecedented damage and devastation in Democratic Yemen caused by torrential rain and floods in March and April 1989, expressed its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts to mobilize humanitarian assistance; expressed its gratitude to the States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that had rendered support and assistance to the Government of Democratic Yemen; called upon all States to contribute generously and respond effectively to meet the urgent needs of relief operations, rehabilitation and reconstruction; and requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

I. BACKGROUND

2. The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, with an area of 333,000 square kilometres, has a population of approximately 2.3 million people and a per capita gross national product of about \$420. The topography is characterized by barren plains and a series of mountain ranges in the interior punctuated by valleys and river beds. Average annual rainfall is less than 75 millimetres. This harsh, arid climate severely limits the arable land, which is scattered over a few dry river beds (wadis) in the western and central parts of the country. The most cultivated areas are Wadi Abyan (in Abyan Governorate), Wadi Tuban (in Lahij Governorate) and Wadi Hadramawt (in Hadramawt Governorate). Out of 70,000 hectares of cultivated land, approximately 75 per cent is spate-irrigated and the rest irrigated from ground water.

3. Democratic Yemen had suffered heavy damage as a result of floods in March 1982 and earlier in March and September 1981. The 1982 floods were considered the worst for many years, with estimated damage and losses totalling \$957 million.

II. RESPONSE

A. Emergency relief

4. Following heavy rains, which started on 19 March 1989 and lasted for more than one week, causing severe floods in central and eastern regions (Hadramawt, Shabwa and Mahra), the Government of Democratic Yemen on 26 March asked the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) to launch an appeal for international assistance. On that date, UNDRO issued the first of five situation reports alerting the international community to the disaster situation and urging donor countries to extend emergency assistance, as damage and losses were reaching a level comparable to the 1982 flood disaster. On 29 March, on behalf of the Yemeni Red Crescent Society, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies issued an appeal to its member societies for their assistance. The UNDRO situation report issued on 25 July gave updated casualty and damage figures. There were 25 dead, 80,000 homeless and 260,000 affected. Crop losses alone reached \$5.8 million. In addition, at the request of the Government, UNDRO called for assistance needed for the rehabilitation phase, whose cost was estimated at \$72 million.

5. Immediately following the flood disaster, the Government set up a high commission to combat the rain and flood damage. It consisted of representatives from several ministries and the Yemeni Red Crescent Society, and was entrusted with the responsibility of co-ordinating and supervising relief efforts. Despite its limited resources and the ongoing emergency situation, the Government, through the High Commission, brought relief assistance and supplies to the victims and homeless with speed and efficiency. The UNDP Resident Representative assisted the Government in its local and international relief co-ordination efforts. The provision of food and temporary shelter came from bilateral and multilateral sources, with especially generous contributions emanating from neighbouring Arab States and Europe. Medical assistance was ensured by a cash contribution from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a contribution of medicines and vaccines from the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on 27 March 1989 provided \$50,000 from its special programme resources for short-term relief through local food purchases.

6. In response to the appeal made by the Government of Democratic Yemen, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) sent a mission to hold discussions on possible relief efforts with government authorities and the UNDP Resident Representative. The mission's findings were submitted to the sixth session of the ESCWA Technical Committee and, in view of the grave consequences of the disaster, ESCWA reactivated resolution 107 (IX), entitled "International assistance to the flood-stricken areas of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen", adopted by ESCWA after the 1982 flood disaster.

7. As at 31 August 1989, the UNDRO mobilization effort had helped to secure contributions amounting to \$2,889,377 (those reported to UNDRO with values) from Governments, intergovernmental organizations, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, other non-governmental organizations, private firms and individuals, and United Nations agencies. In addition to facilitating international co-ordination of relief activities by issuing situation reports, UNDRO was directly instrumental in arranging financial assistance of more than \$500,000 from four donors in order to meet the emergency needs of the affected people.

B. Rehabilitation and reconstruction

8. The Government's primary objective was to ensure that all affected areas return to normal as quickly as possible. To this end government authorities requested that a rehabilitation programme be designed to restore productive capacity and essential economic infrastructure. Bringing the agricultural sector back to its previous level of productivity and the repair of houses were considered the most important activities.

9. Soon after the disaster, the World Food Programme (WFP) approved a quick action project entitled "PDRY 4042 Rehabilitation of flood victims" valued at \$1,035,000. This project was in the form of a three-month food for work programme.

10. Responding to the rehabilitation appeal, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics supplied cement, timber, iron, glass, pipes, pumps, tractors and trucks. An anonymous private donor from the United States of America contacted through UNDRO provided construction equipment valued at \$250,000.

11. UNDP, recognizing the acute need for a longer-term programme in the education sector, on 30 August 1989 approved additional funding of \$1.1 million for a technical assistance project to supervise the reconstruction of 25 priority schools in Hadramawt and Abyan and provide educational equipment and materials to refurbish the schools upon completion of repairs. The International Development Association (IDA) will co-operate with UNDP in making available \$2 million for construction materials. The Government will make in-kind input to this project. A joint World Bank/UNDP mission is currently discussing the formulation of a detailed project with the Government.

12. Responding to a request from the Government, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) decided to field a mission in June 1989 to evaluate the damage caused by the floods and to propose appropriate national and international prevention and rehabilitation projects in the agricultural sector. As a result, four short-term and two long-term project proposals were formulated for consideration by donors for funding.

13. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) dispatched a team to disaster-affected areas in order to investigate damage to educational facilities and the cultural heritage.

14. UNICEF assessed the rehabilitation needs of health units, primary schools and potable water systems and incorporated the findings into the new proposal for the programme of co-operation. The UNICEF Executive Board will take this item up in April 1990.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

15. Rehabilitation and reconstruction activities have just begun, following the emergency assistance described above. Further assistance in this area would ensure full recovery from the impact of the disaster.

16. It is necessary to highlight the need to undertake reconstruction efforts within the framework of a comprehensive disaster mitigation plan for the areas most prone to disasters. The severe impact of floods and other natural disasters can indeed be mitigated if appropriate measures are taken.
