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Humanitarian affairs segment

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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 15 July 2013, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Khan (Vice-President) (Pakistan)

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

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

The President stated that the humanitarian affairs segment was a unique occasion for think about the approaches best suited to the new challenges that climate change, environmental degradation, urbanization and demographic growth were imposing on humanitarian action.

Preliminary statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Ms. Amos (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) presenting the report of the Secretary General entitled “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations” (A/68/84-E/2013/77), stressed that the past year had been deeply marked by the humanitarian crisis in Syria, to the point where she had launched the largest humanitarian appeal ever launched, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the Director-General of the World Health Organization. The humanitarian agencies actually needed an additional US\$ 3.1 billion to cover needs for the rest of 2013 in the Syrian zone and neighbouring countries alone. Ms. Amos thanked countries that had already responded to that appeal, but wanted also to reiterate that, first and foremost, the Syrian people needed a political solution; and that could only be reached through the Security Council and the international community at large. Humanitarian emergencies had also occurred in the Myanmar, Yemen, Sudan and South Sudan, in the Central African Republic, in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in Mali. Each case involved difficult and complex environments where relief workers had often been subject to attack or threat, in violation of international humanitarian law.

In 2012, over 300 natural disasters had been recorded, affecting some 106 million people. The measures taken prior to the arrival of Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines had nonetheless shown that early warning systems, preventive evacuations, and the pre-positioning of essential stocks and intervention personnel had made it possible to save numerous lives. In view of that, the United Nations had made reviewing

the concept of resilience one of its priorities; and it was working with its partners to improve the effectiveness and accountability of the humanitarian system, by implementing the Transformative Agenda of the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC). The improvement, seen on the ground, of national and regional capacities to prepare for crises and respond to them, in conjunction with the development of new technologies, provided a good opportunity to enable humanitarian agencies to channel aid more rapidly and more effectively.

The interactive dialogue would be a chance to better define the agenda of the World Humanitarian Summit to be held in 2015, and to contribute to the preparation of the post-2015 programme of humanitarian action. Active participation by all States, along with civil society, technical experts and all other partners, was therefore essential.

Interactive dialogue

Ms. Chan (Observer from Fiji), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, noted that all new initiatives or proposals needed to be fully consistent with General Assembly resolution 46/182. Special attention needed to be paid to the principle of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity of the States, and hence to the unique role of the State concerned in organizing, coordinating and implementing humanitarian aid. The topics chosen for the dialogue on humanitarian affairs and the parallel expert debates were highly judicious in view of the number and complexity of humanitarian emergency situations around the world. The mid-term review of the Hyogo Framework of Action showed that progress was too slow, particularly in terms of reducing risks. It was necessary to implement ambitious, flexible and predictable financial mechanisms, and to diversify sources of financing. Humanitarian aid also needed to be better integrated with development actions, because preparations for weather events could also help reduce risks, particularly in small low-lying island States. The Group of 77 and China considered that draft resolution E/2013/L.20 (Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations’), should be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Palauskas (Observer from Lithuania), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, along with Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia,

Albania, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, noted that even in times of crisis, the European States jointly remained the leading donor. He reaffirmed their support for the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the United Nations system as a whole. It was necessary to continue improving international humanitarian system, by applying the Transformative Agenda, which would require more effective coordination of needs assessment. Decision-making had to be based on reliable data.

The discussions that would be held ahead of the 2015 summit should provide the opportunity to involve all the stakeholders in thinking about the future of the system, by engaging in the open discussions that the European Union had launched on the modernization of its own humanitarian aid. One of the European Union's priorities in that area was to consolidate the progress made in including resilience as a common objective of development assistance and humanitarian assistance — process that needed to be completed harmoniously. Based on its experiences such as SHARE and AGIR, the European Union had recently adopted conclusions on resilience and drawn up a plan of action to guarantee good collaboration from governments and donors on the ground. The work to be done in the post-Hyogo Framework of Action would be essential for strengthening natural-disaster resilience.

Nonetheless, the most worrying humanitarian situation was not the consequence of a natural disaster, but the conflict that was tearing Syria apart. The European Union appealed to all parties in conflicts, in Syria, but also in Sudan, Mali, or in Afghanistan, to guarantee that humanitarian workers had unfettered access to populations. It noted that any arbitrary denial of access was a violation of international humanitarian law, and strongly condemned the attacks that continued to be perpetrated on humanitarian workers and health professionals.

Ms. Ellis (New Zealand) welcomed the fact that preparedness measures were making it possible to reduce the number of deaths from natural disasters and that the new technologies were helping to make humanitarian aid more effective. The situation of humanitarian workers operating in complex environments led her to make a number of comments. Firstly, all humanitarian assistance personnel, whether static or non-static, had to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Secondly, humanitarian workers had to be able to

freely and promptly access populations in need, which unfortunately was not always the case: attacks against medical personnel were actually on the increase. Thirdly, the most vulnerable population categories were those that suffered most in emergency situations. On that point, New Zealand welcomed efforts made to improve the compilation and analysis of data with a gender, age and handicap breakdown. Fourthly, the strengthening of the resilience capacities of local communities should form an integral part of the efforts. Fifthly, it was important to jointly find ways of making the most of technological advances to improve information exchange and risk analysis. Lastly, New Zealand fully supported the proposal by the Secretary-General to hold a World Humanitarian Summit in 2015, and welcomed the idea of participating in the preparations for that meeting.

Mr. Alimov (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation approved of the main orientations of the Transformative Agenda being implemented by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). With regard to the World Humanitarian Summit, the Russian Federation wanted to know more about the organization of the meeting, the modalities of participation, the agenda, and the results that were expected. General Assembly resolution [46/182](#) should remain the legal framework for humanitarian action; and the main pronouncements of that resolution and those of the Council should be strictly adhered to. It was important to take account of the sovereignty of the countries involved and the preponderant role of national authorities in the aid initiative, and thereafter in the organization, coordination and implementation of relief efforts. Accordingly, the competent institutions of the United Nations system needed to strengthen their cooperation with national authorities. It was also necessary to reinforce mechanisms for compiling and analysing data on disasters, in conjunction with the initiatives taken in that sphere at the national and regional levels. Humanitarian assistance, conceived of as a purely civil activity, should remain civil, which meant that military means should be used only as a last resort. In 2012 and 2013, the Russian Federation had allocated over US\$ 80 million to humanitarian assistance.

Ms. Golberg (Canada) said that it was necessary to ensure that the international humanitarian assistance mechanism was well adapted to the context in question. States could make their contributions in that

domain, by bridging the gap between humanitarian principles and practice, to implement effective humanitarian action. Canada supported the initiative of the Emergency Assistance Coordinator eliminate useless bureaucratic obstacles to relief operations. The United Nations agencies should be employed to strengthen protection for civilians, particularly the most exposed among them, such as women, young girls and boys mainly. In dealing with disasters, whether natural or otherwise, only greater capacity to reduce the risks and alleviate the vulnerabilities, supported by concerted and sustained action, could be expected to produce lasting results.

Ms. Robl (United States) stressed that it was essential to allow humanitarian workers to operate in a context of independence, neutrality and impartiality, and to ensure that local populations perceived that to be the case. The United States particularly welcomed progress made in strengthening the Humanitarian Affairs Department, and encouraged the President of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to reinforce the resident coordinator system on which the humanitarian coordinator system was based. To overcome obstacles in terms of access to populations and the lack of resources and capacities, it was essential to implement new modes of communication and forge a new type of partnership. In relation to information, the United States unreservedly supported efforts undertaken by OCHA to prepare an integrated information management system that made use of current technologies. Lastly, it welcomed the importance attached to protection, particularly for displaced persons, and the entry into force of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

Mr. Canchola (Mexico) said that his country supported the 13 recommendations presented in the report of the Secretary General. The main issues to be reviewed in the framework of international cooperation and dialogue were: ways of enhancing the effectiveness of measures to protect human lives and relieve suffering in cases of humanitarian disaster; the advantages of applying new technologies to planning and preparation activities; a reassessment of coordination mechanisms with a view to adapting them to the humanitarian context; and the improvement of coordination efforts in periods of crisis, peace-making or post-crisis reconstruction.

Mr. Eriza (Indonesia) said that his country supported the statement made by the representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The Interagency Standing Committee should target its efforts on four areas: the framework and capacities for preparing humanitarian policies at the level of United Nations system; a clear distribution of responsibilities for the various aspects of humanitarian assistance; the establishment of a common ethical framework for all humanitarian activities; and the promotion of common humanitarian principles with external partners. Moreover, governments, humanitarian organizations and development assistance organizations needed to jointly identify the various risks that could lead to a humanitarian crisis. In that regard, the role of regional organizations in reviewing common risks and promoting cooperation and coordination between member countries should not be neglected.

Mr. Bessler (Observer from Switzerland) said that the time had come to implement the recommendations made in the Transformative Agenda on the ground. Disaster and crisis prevention, planning and preparation were still insufficient, as were the resources available particularly at the local level. In terms of internal organization, Switzerland supported the OCHA initiative to bring together a number of existing humanitarian mechanisms on the same platform, which should make it easier for them to participate and strengthen their potential influence in other mechanisms such as the General Assembly, the Interagency Standing Committee or the Council.

Ms. Chartres (Observer from Australia) noted that the Syrian conflict had caused a major breakdown of basic services in that country. The Syrian government had systematically deployed bureaucratic obstacles to deny, delay or block access to populations in the context of humanitarian assistance. The conflict had also had political and humanitarian effects on neighbouring countries. More generally, the classic forms of humanitarian assistance were seldom appropriate when the security of the beneficiaries was not assured. Thus, Australia strongly encouraged humanitarian organizations and Member States to do more to prevent sexual and sexist violence and protect the most vulnerable population groups at times of crisis. As for the Transformative Agenda, it particularly welcomed the five commitments made by the Interagency Standing Committee concerning responsibilities towards the populations involved.

Nonetheless, it would like the data on risks held by humanitarian organizations to be less general and more accessible.

Mr. Demiralp (Turkey) said that Turkey was sheltering over 200,000 Syrian refugees in some 40 camps, and more than 400,000 altogether including those who were in the towns. The Turkish government was meeting all needs and was keeping its border with Syria open. Given the increasing difficulty of actions in the north of the country, Turkey had also undertaken to provide its assistance directly on the border.

Ms. Chakrabarti (India) commented that, in the globalization era, every country had capacities, resources, experience and knowledge that could be implemented in conjunction with all other countries and the international community for the good of all. Mechanisms for exploiting those possibilities and for disseminating benchmark practices and knowledge should therefore be prioritized by the United Nations. India had always been willing to provide assistance in a spirit of solidarity between the countries of the South. Since 2009, it had regularly contributed to the Central Emergency Response Fund.

Ms. Adhikari (Nepal) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The least developed countries (LDCs), which included Nepal, were particularly exposed to natural disasters and often did not have adequate human instructional resources to respond to them effectively. Given the increasing frequency of crises, the international community should strengthen coordination and improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action, taking account of humanitarian principles of solidarity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, enshrined in the Hyogo Framework of Action for 2005-2015 and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. In 2011, the Nepalese government had formed a consortium to reduce risks and had adopted an integrated approach for reducing disaster risk at the regional level. With a view to strengthening institutional capacities, the public authorities had set up many disaster emergency funds, including the Fund for Natural Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Operations. As part of the National Disaster Risk Management Strategy, all districts had to create a reserve fund of 100,000 Nepalese rupees for disaster situations, but there was still a need for support from the international community in the areas of preparation, emergency action and relief.

Mr. Okada (Japan) stressed the importance that his country attached to the Transformative Agenda and the strengthening of the humanitarian system, which it saw as involving better collaboration between States, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. To prepare more effectively for disasters and strengthen the resilience of populations, countries should put in place disaster-risk reduction strategies after relief and reconstruction work. In 2015, the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction would be held at Sendai, providing an opportunity to define objectives for the second strand of the Hyogo Framework of Action. The chronic crisis in the Sahel had revealed two fundamental points: the importance of collaboration between actors in the humanitarian and development system, and the need to prepare lasting solutions when planning the initial intervention. The Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, held in June 2013 at Yokohama, had brought together development institutions and humanitarian institutions, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR). Japan considered that disaster mobilization should also be based on the use of innovative techniques and that participation by women and vulnerable groups in decision-making was essential at all stages. Concerned at the humanitarian situation in Syria, Japan intended to continue working with neighbouring countries that took in refugees; and it supported peace efforts in other conflict zones, such as South Sudan or Myanmar. Lastly, it welcomed the initiative of the Secretary General to organize a World Humanitarian Summit, and it intended to participate in the preparations for it.

Mr. Örnevs (Sweden) noted that the global humanitarian landscape was in a process of change and that humanitarian needs continued to grow as a result of the scale of recent disasters, while resources continued to shrink. To address that situation and make humanitarian action more effective, all actors should learn to cooperate better and adapt to new realities. To that end, Sweden was assisting humanitarian institutions and supported bilateral assistance through the Consolidated Appeal Process. It was now more important than ever to give a new impulse to the humanitarian system; and the time had come to improve the system and take account of the needs of local populations in all interventions, thanks to independent needs assessments and data sharing, to highlight strategic priorities and promote transparency.

Ms. Fernandez Palacios (Cuba) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Cuba reiterated that any humanitarian intervention should respect the United Nations Charter and should not interfere with principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the domestic affairs of States. Ms. Fernandez Palacios again stressed the need to strengthen the capacities of humanitarian institutions on the ground, and to give them greater access to new technologies. In keeping with the Hyogo Framework for Action, Cuba was working to strengthen regulatory and institutional frameworks to reduce disaster risks and fine-tune its early-warning and risk-evaluation systems. She called on the international community to continue implementing the International Strategy for Disaster Prevention and, in doing so, honour its commitments in terms of official development assistance (ODA)).

Mr. Nimitchinow (France) said that in recent years, the number and seriousness of crises had continuously increased, and the lack of access for humanitarian workers to populations in need remained a major obstacle, as shown by the fate of civilians in the town of Homs in Syria. Faced with that type of challenge, the international community needed to concentrate on three priorities: firstly, humanitarian action should be strengthened through closer coordination between humanitarian actors at all stages, particularly in data collection and the planning of interventions. That involved participation by all stakeholders, including national and local NGOs. Secondly, the strengthening of the humanitarian system required closer cooperation between the actors of the humanitarian development system, to evaluate the risks and promote development once the crisis had passed. Thirdly, the accent should be placed on the transparency and accountability of the system, in view of budgetary constraints and the proliferation of crises. The system should also be adapted to current trends by displaying greater flexibility. Lastly, to respond to growing needs, the number of donors contributing to BCAH financing also needed to be increased.

Mr. Seleka (South Africa) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It invited the international community to show solidarity with population groups affected by flooding in the Indian province of Uttarakhand. South Africa advocated a

humanitarian approach based on the transfer of skills from developed to developing countries; and it invited developed countries to continue providing the financial assistance needed for that purpose. Stressing how important it was to respect the fundamental principles of humanitarian action, Mr. Seleka called on the international community to support the resolution entitled “Health care in danger” adopted by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2011. South Africa was making a financial and material contribution to relief activities following human disasters and called for better coordination between actors and for the opinion of women in managing disaster risks to be taken more into account.

Ms. Diaz (Spain) said that the humanitarian system was going through a period characterized by several major issues, including the security of humanitarian workers, the protection of civilians and the widening gap between resources and needs, of which the crisis in Syria was a very clear example. The crisis in Mali posed other challenges to the international community, such as strengthening the resilience of populations, forging consensus between military and humanitarian actors and reducing the risks to which humanitarian workers were exposed. Spain supported the measures taken under the Transformative Agenda and considered that the implementation of a system based on the accountability of actors would encourage the predictable mobilization of the necessary resources. Emphasis should also be placed on countries’ preparedness for emergency situations and the strengthening of national and civil society mechanisms. In 2013, Spain would be contributing around €5 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund, representing 1.2 per cent of the fund’s total resources.

Mr. Hanniffy (Ireland) reaffirmed his country’s support for the activities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and applauded the efforts made in implementing the Transformative Agenda. During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Ireland had advocated better coordination between community institutions and Member States, with a view to making humanitarian aid more effective. It was more essential than ever to strengthen the resilience of communities affected by recurrent crises and improve their disaster management capabilities at the national and regional levels. That required a better understanding of the causes of vulnerability, to be able

to propose lasting solutions, and to implement early-warning and social-protection systems linked to subsistence programs. The increasing complexity of crises could not eclipse the importance of the fundamental principles of humanitarian actions, which should be among the key priorities of the World Humanitarian Summit scheduled for 2015.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.