

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
WEEKLY MEETING

Summary Notes

25 January 2006
Geneva

I The IASC Early Warning - Early Action Report

By *Everett Ressler (UNICEF), Global Focal Point for Early Warning and Preparedness, Office of Emergency Programme (EMOPS) and Co-chair of the IASC SWG on Preparedness and Contingency Planning*

Mr. Ressler provided some background on the quarterly IASC Early Warning – Early Action Report. The objective of his presentation was to introduce the report, and to set the stage for the first more in-depth country discussion at the IASC Weekly Meeting on 1 February 2006, which will concentrate on Eastern Africa – a region classified as ‘high-risk’ in the report.

On the history of the IASC Early Warning – Early Action Report, Mr. Ressler explained that it was the outcome of several lessons learned. Firstly, agencies recognized early on that their existing early warning systems were not good enough, and not systematically leading to early action. Secondly, no single system can cover all aspects of early warning in detail. Thus, specialized stand-alone systems are necessary (such as those FAO, WFP etc.). Yet, these need to feed into a tool that provides a global consolidated picture. Thirdly, it is not necessarily the lack of extensive information that prevents early action, but the lack of strategic and concise information facilitating management decisions. On the basis of these insights the IASC Early Warning – Early Action Report has been developed several years ago and is constantly refined.

Mr. Ressler emphasized that the report is based on extensive and in-depth information processing, inter-agency analysis and review. Yet, because the final product is intended for emergency managers, its language is action-orientated and the information is reduced to the most necessary. In order to facilitate decision-making and prioritisation of action at HQ and in the field, the latest report also identifies Minimum Preparedness Actions for each of the countries / regions of concern. The overarching goal is always to translate early warning into early action.

In conclusion, Mr. Ressler urged participants to use and promote the IASC Early Warning – Early Action Report as a decision-making tool. No other publication provides a better global consolidated picture of potential emergencies in a three month time span.

The latest Early Warning – Early Action Report is available to IASC agencies at:

<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/ewea>

II Update on EU Decisions on Crisis and Emergency Management

By *Sergio Piazzi (OCHA), Chief, Advocacy and External Relations Section*

Mr. Piazzi briefed on recent developments in EU crisis and emergency management as well as relations between the EU and the UN, including the issue of EU visibility in aid delivery.

The Austrian EU Presidency is moving ahead on the establishment of a new crisis and emergency coordination body between 1) The Office of the Secretary General / High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy; 2) The EU Commission; and 3) The EU Council / Member States. The new body, which is to be operational from June 2006 will in the case of a major emergency (including natural disasters) both on EU territory and elsewhere convene and provide a coordination platform for all assets within the European Community, including those of the individual member states. The body will be called EU Crisis Steering Group, and will be managed by the revolving presidency in cooperation with various EU institutions. It is seen as member states' attempt to gain more control over matters that are now managed by the EU Commission on behalf of member states.

Parallel to this, the Commission – through its Civil Protection Group – is seeking to redefine and strengthen their authority to manage assets of the EU member states in a coordinated manner. Mr. Piazzi informed that the EU has agreed to the “de facto” establishment of equivalents to UN emergency response mechanisms such as the UNDAC and the OSOCC. This development, as Mr. Piazzi pointed out, could easily mean increased competition for resources with the UN. However, the EU Council has decided that in major emergencies outside the EU, the UN will take the lead and the EU will support. Mr. Piazzi emphasised that it has been agreed to have coordinating meetings in case of emergencies between the EU coordinators and the relevant UN counterparts as well as to use a common methodology especially for needs assessments. The EU approach will be multi-sectoral and provided for on average 30 days after the onset of an emergency. Mr. Piazzi stressed the importance and the implications of these developments for all actors in the field including NGOs and the Red Cross Movement. DfID, which initiated the developments, will soon draft a more detailed policy paper on the new EU approach. The ERC is planning to address the Civil Protection Group to insure adequate inter-operability between the EU and the UN.

The question of EU visibility in aid delivery has been raised at the highest levels between the UN and the EU. It is an issue with high political connotations and obligates all actors who are receiving contributions from the EU. A UN Inter-Agency Task Force on EU Visibility led by UNICEF (Bruxelles) and the UN Regional Information Office in Bruxelles was established a few months ago. The TF has produced a report and is now working on common guidelines. The draft guidelines should be ready by the 2nd week of February, when the co-chairs of the TF will present it to the ERC and the UNDP Administrator for further transmittal to the Deputy SG.

Lastly Mr. Piazzi informed that the EU is preparing a major complex emergency response on-the-paper exercise in a fictive African country. UN-agencies will, as opposed to previous years, be invited not just to observe, but to participate actively.

The discussion following the briefing focussed on inter-operability and compliance between EU and UN actions and policies regarding emergency and crisis management. On a specific question on NGOs, Mr. Piazzi informed that he would shortly be meeting with the European NGO Consortium VOICE and reaffirmed his commitment to come back regularly to the brief the IASC Weekly meeting on relevant developments in the EU.

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