INTER–AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
**PRINCIPALS MEETING**

11 December 2003
Palais des Nations, Geneva

**<u>Future of Humanitarian Action</u>**
**<u>Discussion Paper for the Principals-only Luncheon</u>**

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**<u>Summary Findings and Recommendations</u>**

<u>Of the Inter-agency discussion at the
Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue on 11 November 2003, as well as at the
12-13 November IASC WG meeting</u>


The meeting on the Future of Humanitarian Action at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue on 11 November 2003 was chaired by Mr. Ross Mountain, and included representatives of IASC agencies and resource persons from the Watson Institute at Brown University and the Overseas Development Initiative. A representative of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue participated as an observer.

The discussion focussed on three key themes: 1) Perception, 2) Integration, and 3) Political and Risk Analysis. This discussion followed a series of recent meetings that had been discussing the future of humanitarian action. This matter was also discussed at the IASC Working Group meeting on 12-13 November 2003. Below are the main conclusions and recommendations stemming from these discussions. Also attached is a summary note of the salient issues raised during the discussions.

- <u>New Paradigm</u>: Agencies did not agree that there was a new humanitarian paradigm; the occupying power situation concerned only Iraq and occupied Palestinian territory. There was an agreement that more focus needed to be given to defining the relationship with the occupying power in general. **OCHA was requested to prepare a paper on the relationship with occupying powers**.

- <u>Relationship between political and humanitarian</u>: The politicisation of humanitarian action is a real concern, and one that affects directly how humanitarians are perceived. There is a need for better **guidance to ensure mission clarity at the onset. There should be systematic interaction with the Security Council in designing the missions**. A review mechanism should be established to ensure that the application of the guidance is on track and to take into consideration possible changes in the orientation of the mission. This would mean being clear about the role of the UN agencies, as well as clear instructions on how to engage with external political and military presence.

- <u>Integrated approach:</u> There was a need to **review current practise and models of integrated missions** and their applicability to a variety of situations. Also there might be a need to distinguish between the role of the HC in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. Sudan and Liberia were noted as specific cases for us to monitor closely. The review should help us to establish benchmarks for deciding when integrated approach is possible and useful.

- <u>Security:</u> We need to manage the risk better, inherent in humanitarian work, by addressing our modus operandi and how that could change and minimise the risk to international and national staff, our national counterparts, and the beneficiaries themselves. The meeting called for a **review of the security system and underlined the importance of humanitarian agencies being more assertive in voicing their views in the wider security review process**. It might be necessary to provide some support to DOs to insulate them from repercussions of tough security decisions. It is important that the humanitarian voice is included in the high-level discussions on security. We should take advantage of the comprehensive review of the security system to feed in the views of humanitarian agencies.

- <u>Risk analysis:</u> There was a **need for political and security risk analysis**. This should draw on the experience and knowledge of the humanitarian community as well as involve practical analysis, protection and security staff. A framework will be required to establish the appropriate analysis and long-term information requirements. It will be important to ensure that the focus should be on using analysis to improve security and predictability and distinguish this from intelligence. The analysis should also include the impact on the population as a whole. The focus of the analysis should be at the field level. We require dedicated capacity for the analysis. The question is how and where this should best be done. There are different options: 1) strengthening the analysis capacity of individual agencies, 2) creating an inter-agency hub for information sharing and analysis, and 3) exploring the possibility of outsourcing this capacity to an academic institution or think tank – this will need to be further discussed. **The essential component is, however, the need to strengthen analysis capacity at the field level**, by establishing a "Humanitarian Analysis Centre" for example. In the first instance we should also consider training of FSAOs.

- <u>Perceptions:</u> We need better and more **systematic analysis on how we are perceived in a range of situations**. In some situations humanitarian workers are not welcome. We need to deal with the perception of humanitarian response being too western. Humanitarian principles, and their value and relevance, are not clearly understood by political actors, the Security Council, the public, as well as ourselves.

- <u>Advocacy:</u> We need to be clearer in establishing a common basic platform and **sending common messages on the nature of humanitarian action, especially at the country level**. We need a clearer definition of humanitarian action and the application of humanitarian principles emphasizing the unequivocal acceptance by all parties and respect for independence of humanitarian actors. This issue will be developed further in a form of a paper

emphasizing the positive practical benefits of adherence to humanitarian principles. The meeting also agreed on the **need for common efforts for effective public information campaign/communication and advocacy strategy at various levels** that enhances humanitarian identity and clarifies the distinction between humanitarian, political and military action. The target audiences to be reached include external actors, Security Council, country-level action reaching out to the public, and our own staff within our organizations.

- Dialogue: We are finding ourselves in a new situation with extreme cases (Afghanistan, Iraq) where we are not able to establish dialogue with those engaged in perpetrating violent actions against humanitarians or to identify their motivations. **We need to identify interlocutors at various levels** to get a better understanding and recognition.

- Financing: We need to diversify sources of funding. The narrow donor base is problematic and has direct effects on the perception of humanitarian assistance. While we have made solid progress with traditional donors as part of the good humanitarian donorship initiative, we have to engage the donors more systematically in discussion on their responsibilities and obligation to uphold humanitarian principles. **Donors should be discouraged from seeking implementation of programmes that are not in line with adopted principles. We also need to have a discussion on good receivership** i.e. not many agencies have turned down funding for Iraq, for example, which could raise questions about impartiality.

- There was a **need to engage with the "Eminent Persons' Group" and their research arm, in particular, to develop these ideas further**. **OCHA and UNICEF were requested to do this on behalf of the IASC members and to provide feedback to the IASC.**

<u>**Summary Record**</u>

<u>Inter-agency discussion at the</u>
<u>Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue on 11 November 2003, as well as at</u>
<u>the 12-13 November IASC WG meeting</u>

Below is a record of the issues that were raised during the discussion at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue on 11 November, as well as during the IASC Working Group meeting held on 12-13 November:

Events in Iraq and Afghanistan have triggered renewed debate within the Humanitarian community over the seeming increased politicisation of humanitarian assistance and the resulting consequences for humanitarian access and the security of humanitarian workers. While it was recognised that the politicisation of assistance has been a matter of longstanding debate, there was general concern that in the case of Iraq, the humanitarian response was perceived as serving a political agenda. The "competition" for humanitarian space by both military and commercially contracted organisations was a major feature in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Humanitarian action is largely seen as a Western enterprise, given the way it is financed and staffed. The war on terrorism, with claims of "you are either with us or against us" further shrinks the humanitarian space. This raised the question of whether we were dealing with a new paradigm, which affected our capacity to maintain the neutrality of humanitarian action and sustain the important perception of the independence of humanitarian organisations? In turn this raises concerns that the loss of the protection inherent in humanitarian emblems such as the Red Cross and the UN flag is a consequence of the politicisation of humanitarianism. The attack on the UN compound however is seen by some as an attack on the UN's political role, not on the humanitarian response, and the attack on the ICRC as an attack on humanitarianism. However, the lack of dialogue with those responsible for attacks makes it difficult to make any substantive judgement. Some agencies' belief that you could work in such scenarios as Iraq, if not neutrally, then at least impartially, has major repercussions. How good has our advocacy been to explain our presence, and our relations with political and military actors?

An element of the changing humanitarian context was the issue of the "new – new" wars? These are the new wars that increasingly use the techniques of terrorism and counter terrorism. The dangers of this evolving warfare is that both wars of terrorism and counter terrorism reject or ignore the responsibilities to adhere to international norms which are perceived by some as irrelevant or an obstruction to and that the ends justified the need. We need to look not only at the system, but the underlying context for the interventions. Humanitarian response has become more imbedded in the past decade with political processes. The term "humanitarian" has been hijacked by political and military players, affecting the perception of the humanitarians. There have been dangerous linkages made between hearts and minds campaigns and humanitarian response. The question arises as to whether the humanitarian community has responded to these changes as they have been slow to define how humanitarian objectives link to political processes. On the ground, few distinctions are made between the political and the humanitarian roles of the UN. More needs to be done to explain the differences to the host populations. We also need to do more on

advocacy, and to do more training. There is a need for a stronger humanitarian coalition covering the whole humanitarian community and a common humanitarian message. There is also a need for a more structured dialogue with donors on upholding humanitarian principles.

The inability to address the political crises in the Middle East has a major impact on humanitarian perceptions in a broader area of the world, potentially from Afghanistan to Indonesia. The situation in OPT and asymmetric warfare in general are at the core of much of the problems in the Middle East. It raises concerns over the double standards in the application of principles and further entrenched the view that humanitarian assistance is subservient to a Western dominated political agenda. How do we address the double standards? How do we redress the perception that most humanitarians are western? Images and perceptions are critical to the security question. Some elements of perceptions can be modified, while others are anchored in conviction or in military strategy, and cannot be changed. In the latter scenario, the only choice would be to scale down. Most of humanitarian response is dictated or at least influenced by financing, over which we have little control. The reality is also that most donors of humanitarian assistance are western. We also need to look at our own behaviour and cultural values of the humanitarian machinery instead of simply trying to change the behaviour of others. We need to broaden the base and the complexion of humanitarian action.

These issues bring us back to some of the fundamental issues. In this new environment we need to determine how we can best ensure that we are perceived as impartial and neutral. Should we work on a more narrow (back to basics) definition of humanitarianism? This is at the core of the issue of the perception. Humanitarian principles dictate our work and should also guide the development of military principles, but they need to be separated. In Iraq, the absence of an interlocutor with whom to engage is a real concern. We need to think of innovative ways to dialogue. We also need to be clearer on the relationship with the occupying power and its role and responsibilities.

There are also significant risks to an integrated approach to crisis management. Is the current UN model of integrated missions correct? Should the current structures of integration be adjusted? We should define situations in which integrated approach can be applicable. There are useful examples of integrated missions where humanitarian principles are upheld, especially in the post-conflict stage. While integrated missions have downsides, we need to recognise that there will be linkages with political and military partners in many lingering crises, and that they might have some useful benefits. The issue is what is the appropriate distance or independence of the humanitarian component in such integrated missions. We need to recognise, though, that sometimes the political agenda is not the same as the humanitarian agenda. Sudan might be an example of how an integrated approach could work. We are seeing a two tier humanitarian system, where politics rule supreme in high profile crises, while in lower profile cases humanitarian principles are more fully applied. Have the humanitarian efforts expanded too far into areas of development and peace building, further blurring humanitarian boundaries and creating confusion about the definition of humanitarian action? What is the humanitarian role within the larger political agenda in the case of Iraq? We need to differentiate between certain types of integrated missions, and determine what works and what doesn't.

Was our perception of a humanitarian crisis in Iraq wrong? If so, how did that happen and what does that mean for our current analysis? The UN did not get the proper intelligence it needed, nor did it have a good sense of how it was perceived. The humanitarians have an ability to do situational analysis much more so than our ability to do security analysis. This would be one way of increasing our acceptability if we understood better what people wanted. This would require dedicated resources.

There is a clear need for a political analysis within a larger humanitarian security framework. Risk analysis is difficult to do, and in and of itself, it is not the answer. What is the framework into which to feed our analysis? What are the benchmarks? When do we say no? Institutionally we are loath to say no, which undermines the point of having benchmarks. Professional security and political risk analysis is needed by the UN but the sharing of information should be wider than just the UN system.

When we talk about political risk analysis and professionalising our security capacity, who would do this? Several Member States resisted earlier calls for other Member States to provide such intelligence to the UN. There is a growing understanding in UNSECOORD that nowadays there are no safe countries, only soft targets. But this may create confusion between what was the security needed for humanitarian interventions, versus the security required for the broader UN system. The UN's concept of security analysis is quite narrow, compared to what commercial companies do. We should have country specific predictive analysis, as well as thematic analysis. The field level should be given the primacy of doing risk analysis. It is important to recognise the considerable cost aspect of improving security.

Finally, there is a need for more clarity of the UN identity and in particular humanitarian identity within integrated missions. The situation in Iraq highlighted the ambiguity of mission's role and purpose. Even when the mandates may be clear, imprecise guidance is given to country teams. Mission instructions need to provide clear guidance on the nature and form of the relationship, specifically with external parties, such as occupying power, ISAFs, and other external political/military presence.