

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

**Weekly Meeting
Summary Notes**

7 December 2005
Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room F.3

I Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi)

Dr. Bernard Pecoul (DNDi), General Director

DNDi is a not-for-profit drug development organisation established in 2003 by governmental institutions, World Bank, UN-agencies and MSF to improve the quality of life and health of people suffering from neglected diseases, most of which fall outside the existing systems and market mechanisms for research and development of drugs.

As an example of a neglected disease, Dr. Pecoul mentioned sleeping sickness – a fatal disease if untreated, which has about 300.000 infected and another 55 million at risk in Sub-Saharan Africa, and which, with existing drugs, can only be treated with old toxic drugs like arsenic or an anti-cancer drug, which is expensive and difficult to use. Another example is HIV/AIDS, which Dr. Pecoul argued is in 95% of the cases still a highly neglected disease with treatments being either inadequate and / or inaccessible.

DNDi has launched a number of projects for alternative drug development addressing both the discovery, pre-clinical and clinical aspects of the process. An agreement has been reached between DNDi and Sanofi-Aventis on the development of a patent-free, affordable and easy-to-use Malaria drug, which will be available in 2006.

Dr. Pecoul underlined that even though spending on drug development globally has increased in recent years, only about 1% of new drugs are for neglected diseases. The reasons are two-fold: 1) The pharmaceutical industry sees no profit in developing drugs for diseases mainly affecting developing countries, and 2) public policies fails to redress this imbalance. Dr. Pecoul underlined the crucial role of governments in terms of: a) taking leadership and setting the international agenda (WHO has an important role to play in this regards); b) providing sustainable funding and; c) addressing regulatory aspects of drugs development and distribution such as the TRIPS.

The discussion following the briefing focused on the need for increased focus on and funding for neglected diseases. Dr. Pecoul mentioned the next World Health Assembly (May 2006) as an important event, where the research and development will be on the agenda. More information on DNDi is available on www.dndi.org.

II International Disaster Response Laws (IDRL) Programme

Mr. David Fisher, Legal Research Officer, (IFRC)

Mr. Fisher briefed on IFRC's IDRL programme as well as a new IDRL survey.

The IDRL programme is looking at the legal issues that arise in international disaster relief operations, identifying existing norms in the area as well as gaps that need to be addressed. This includes, for instance, difficulties obtaining visas, customs problems with goods and equipment, operating issues for internationals in a country as well as accountability of international actors.

In 2003 IFRC was given the formal mandate by an international conference of the Red Cross / Red Crescent to look at the area of IDRL and has since then gathered a database of existing international conventions, bi- and multilateral treaties and other texts relevant for inter-state and international disaster response. A collection of these texts are available on CD-ROM and a book on IDRL principles and practices has also been published. By the end of December this year all the material will be available on the IDRL website in an easily accessible and searchable format. Relevant national laws will also be added to this resource base.

Lastly, Mr. Fisher introduced a series of questionnaires that IFRC intends to circulate in December to Field Offices of international organizations and international NGOs as part of survey to get a better sense of the priority areas for different sectors involved in disaster relief, including governments, IGOs, NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent and private companies. In this regard, Mr. Fisher urged participants to provide him with feedback on the drafts of the questionnaires (which can be viewed on IASC Website: <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/documents/docsdetails.asp?meetID=633>). For additional information on IDRL and the survey see: the IDRL website: <http://www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/idrl/about.asp>

The discussion following the briefing focused on the future of the IDRL programme and its role vis-à-vis governments. Mr. Fisher stressed that even though it is the prerogative of governments to decide from whom and under which regulations they want assistance, the IDRL programme aims to facilitate agreements and solutions regarding entry of international actors in disaster areas. UNICEF specifically expressed wishes to work with the IFRC on the training and advocacy aspects of the IDRL programme.

III Participants

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