

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
WEEKLY MEETING

**Summary Notes**

14 December 2005  
Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room H.3

## **I Ethiopia**

*By, Mr. Paul Hebert, Head of Office and Deputy to the Humanitarian Coordinator, OCHA Ethiopia*

Mr. Hebert briefed on the current humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, focusing on food insecurity and assistance, the political fallout of the recent elections and the humanitarian challenges in 2006. He also addressed the current border tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In 2005 the Government of Ethiopia initiated a multi-annual program, the Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) to address food insecurity. The PSNP transferred food and cash to 4.8 million chronically food insecure people during the year, but failed to do so in a timely manner. In addition, 3.8 million beneficiaries received emergency food assistance under the humanitarian appeal in 2005. Poor funding of the humanitarian appeal led to the launching of a flash appeal, which received good donor response. It also forced the Government of Ethiopia to move more quickly to implement the PSNP. Furthermore, 2-6 million people received assistance under non-food programs such as nutrition, health, water/sanitation and emergency agricultural. As a result of all these measures a major food crisis was avoided – a crisis, which Mr Hebert underlined, would have been largely manmade since there was no severe drought and the harvest was good with results being just slightly less than consumption.

In 2006 an even better harvest is expected. However, it is still anticipated that 8-9 million people will be in need of some kind of food assistance. The PNSP will cover 5-7 million of which. However, the implementation of the PSNP is likely to be problematic because of the internal political unrest following the latest elections and the border tensions with Eritrea. Donors have decided to discontinue direct budgetary support to the Government of Ethiopia (USD 200 million in 2005) and wish now to provide resources through other channels to better target the poorest and most vulnerable groups. This could mean more resources for the UN and NGOs.

A number of new strategies are proposed by the UN for 2006 including a multi-annual transition strategy for health, nutrition and water/sanitation, which is to link with government programmes over a 5-year period. This is a reaction to donor concerns that the annual humanitarian appeal combines both chronic and acute needs. Donors have also proposed to set-up a pooled funding mechanism with funds to be channelled through the Humanitarian Coordinator.

The second part of Mr Hebert's briefing focused on the border situation between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Tensions rose in late 2004 with heavy troop build-up and increased even further in

September 2005 when the Eritrean authorities placed restrictions on the activities of UNMEE. They reacted to a perceived UN and the Security Councils inability to force the Ethiopians to accept border demarcations. The Security Council then passed a resolution in November, which runs up next week, ordering the troops to move back from the region and lift restrictions on UNMEE activities. Non-compliance could lead to sanctions. Ethiopia has agreed to withdraw its troops this week, but their status is uncertain. Mr. Herbert emphasised, that even though the situation is tense, there is a consensus in the region that war is not likely to break out anytime soon, mainly because the large amount of troops on both sides of the border prevents either of them attacking.

The UNCT after consultations primarily between WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and OCHA has developed a response plan based on the resumption of full-scale conflict. Consultations have also been made with the regional authorities along the border. The plan covers 6 months at an estimated cost of about USD 29 million. This will cover the needs of up to 300,000 IDPs as well 16,000 refugees (6,000 refugees in addition to the 10,000 already present in a camp in northern Ethiopia). In the event of war, UNHCR has identified a relocation site for the refugees. It is not anticipated that IDPs will need camps but rather that local population will accommodate them. Support will then have to be provided to these communities. Food is already available for 6 months. The major gaps will be health care, nutrition and water supply. Joint crisis logistics and communication plans have also been developed between the 4 agencies.

The discussion following the briefing focused on the political situation in Ethiopia as well as the response plan of the UNCT. On a specific question from IFRC regarding the involvement of NGOs, Mr. Hebert replied that consultations have been held with all concerned NGOs who are already working or would be willing to work in the border areas. He also added that IOM and WHO are considering how they can be involved in responding to the situation.

## **II IASC Principals Meeting**

*By, Ms. Marilena Viviani, Chief, IASC Secretariat*

Ms. Viviani briefed participants on the proceedings and key outcomes of the IASC Principals meeting on 12 December.

The meeting had a very high participation (16 agencies) and representation (13 principals including the Emergency Relief Coordinator), as well as Mr. Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid. The meeting focused on the following objectives: a) to review progress made in implementing the humanitarian reforms; b) review outstanding issues and agree on actions required to fully establish and consolidate the humanitarian reform process and; c) review and endorse the IASC Work plan for 2006.

Regarding the clusters, the principals endorsed the Cluster Implementation Plans, recognizing that there was a need for a flexible approach and for more time to fully develop this concept, including engaging the NGO community as well as field testing. An initial implementation of the cluster approach in DRC, Uganda and Liberia was agreed upon. In terms of resource mobilization, the principals agreed that a further analysis of cluster costs and requirements was necessary, before approaching donors. It was agreed to organize a donor consultation to present requirements for implementation in DRC, Uganda and Liberia.

The Principals also agreed on the designation of lead role in situations of natural disasters: a) emergency shelter (IFRC) and b); camp coordination and management (IOM). Furthermore they endorsed the proposal for three protection-mandated agencies, UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR to take the role of Cluster Lead for protection in natural disasters. In addition the establishment of an additional sector for agriculture, led by FAO, was reaffirmed, in order to ensure continued support of livelihoods, similarly to education (UNICEF), food (WFP) and refugees (UNHCR).

Regarding the Humanitarian Coordinator system, the Principals agreed to create a pool of HCs inclusive of non-UN staff.

Finally, the Principals endorsed the IASC Work plan for 2006 and suggested items for the agenda of the next IASC Principals meeting: a discussion on IASC membership and role of NGOs, as well as a follow up to the humanitarian coordination proposal.

Following the briefing, there was a short discussion related to the dual role of Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator. Ms. Viviani mentioned that the UNDP position is to take a flexible approach on the issue, considering on an ad-hoc basis whether or not the two functions should be combined.

Furthermore Ms. Viviani mentioned that the upcoming IASC Weekly meeting on 21 December 2005 will look in more detail at the IASC Work Plan for 2006.

### III Participants

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