

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE – WORKING GROUP
48th MEETING**

13-14 March 2002

at

**WFP Headquarters, Rome
Green Tower, Room 6G19**

Afghanistan: Background Note

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Linkages between humanitarian operations and the Interim Authority of Afghanistan

During the previous weeks, interaction between the Interim Authority (AIA) and the humanitarian community has primarily taken place within the framework of the Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan (ITAP). In the course of these discussions the IA has made clear that (1) it would like urgent humanitarian operations to proceed without delay and (2) it wishes to review proposed recovery and reconstruction projects for cost-effectiveness, capacity-building component, accountability and consistency with IA priorities.

At present, there appears to be a general awareness and understanding that all external aid activities should be carried out in consultation with the IA, but longer-term projects will be subjected to closer scrutiny than immediate relief aid. The Working Group may wish to consider how this dialogue can best be conducted, presumably through UNAMA Pillar II which will have a close working relationship with the IA both at the strategic and sectoral levels.

Linkages between humanitarian operations and the multinational force

This item has two very different dimensions, namely relations with the Coalition, which is engaged in offensive military actions; and relations with ISAF, a UN mandated security maintenance force restricted, so far, to Kabul.

On the former, coordination arrangements have worked relatively well in terms of avoiding accidental bombing of aid convoys and exchanging basic information of relevance to the humanitarian community. However, the United States' deployment of weapons-carrying "civil affairs" officers dressed in civilian garb and doing small-scale humanitarian projects has introduced a serious irritant in relations with the aid community. The Working Group could consider how this and other stress-points in the relationship can best be addressed.

NGOs' interface with UNAMA

In planning for the incorporation of UNCO and UNOCHA into UNAMA, the United Nations has fully recognized the importance of NGO activity in Afghanistan and resolved to strengthen the NGO liaison function through Pillar II. NGOs should anticipate that United Nations assistance activities will be more fully integrated under the umbrella of UNAMA than in previous missions, without UNAMA actually incorporating the different operational agencies. UNAMA will not have a military component, and its political wing will be mainly concerned with judiciary, governance and human rights issues. In view of the need to further establish and maintain strong and manageable links between the increasingly large NGO community on the one hand and the IA and UNAMA on the other, the Working Group may wish to stress the need for thorough and immediate consultations in this regard between all concerned in order to define the preferred modalities in this respect.

Humanitarian crisis in remote regions

Humanitarian conditions remain critical both in isolated regions, due to difficult access, and more generally because of the continuing drought. The Working Group could do a quick stock-taking of the nature of the problem and how programmes should be adapted to address it, particularly in the light of the recent Sue Lautze/USAID report. Recurrent, dramatically worded, headlines as well as ongoing discussions between various humanitarian actors on this matter, underscore the need for the humanitarian community, concerned agencies in particular, to assume a pro-active stance in this respect and reach an enhanced common understanding on this important matter.

Gap between relief and development

The ITAP attempts to bridge the gap between relief and development by incorporating immediate recovery projects identified by the Preliminary Needs Assessment. The Working Group could analyze how well this has been done; whether there are gaps in the gap; and how donor response is affecting the situation.

Additional measures to ensure adequate staff security

The overall security situation in Afghanistan is fragile at best and it is expected that the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan will continue to be closely linked to the security situation throughout 2002.

The United Nations staff security system is being retooled to accommodate the return of international staff to Afghanistan in much greater numbers than pre-September 11, but still under these precarious security conditions. The Working Group can consider what weaknesses remain in the system and how they might be addressed.