

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP  
60th MEETING**

**21-22 March 2005  
WFP Rome**

**UK Proposals for Reform of the United Nations Humanitarian System**

**Update**

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**Background:**

The UK Secretary of State for Overseas Development – Hilary Benn has made a series of proposals for reform of the humanitarian system. These proposals arose out of his visit to Darfur in late 2004. In summary the proposals are as follows:

- The Secretary-General should provide Humanitarian Coordinators with emergency powers to direct the UN agencies in the most severe crises.
- Donor relief funds should in part be channeled through the Humanitarian Coordinator to strengthen HC's capacity to provide strategic management.
- There needs to be established benchmarks for the scale and speed of the humanitarian response that is required. These standards need to be established to make agencies more accountable.
- The establishment of a substantial new humanitarian fund of \$1 billion under the control of the Secretary-General and administered by the Emergency Relief Coordinator. The purpose of the fund is to ensure a speedy and effective response that is not delayed by current funding mechanisms and to help address the imbalances in resources between different country appeals.
- Donors should set aside a proportion of funds in response to natural disaster appeals to cover preparedness and risk reduction activities.

The UK proposals were a unilateral initiative and were developed without prior consultation with other donors. However since the proposals were announced, the UK has initiated consultation with both other interested donors and UN agencies. Hilary Benn visited New York in February where he discussed his proposals with a number of the UN agency principles and the ERC.

**Current status of Proposals:**

The UK proposals have met with a mixed reception from donors and agencies alike. Some donors are sympathetic to the idea that there needs to be more flexible and untied funding available as was envisaged in the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. A number of donors are however concerned that these proposals would reduce the level of accountability that they require and do not favour the fund

proposals. The UK recognises that these proposals need further elaboration and also assess the feasibility of establishing a large humanitarian fund within the UN secretariat. The UK is holding a meeting with other donors involved in the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative to specifically look at establishing more flexible humanitarian financing mechanisms and to discuss the other elements of the UK proposals on the 10 - 11 March at which other options may emerge. At the meeting in New York attended by Hilary Benn it was agreed that further discussions should take place with UN agencies and DFID at the working level. These will take place before the end of March.

**Proposed Actions by the IASC WG members:**

- Take note of the UK Proposals for Reform of the United Nations Humanitarian System
- Request OCHA to follow this issue

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