

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
55th MEETING**

12-13 November 2003

**IFRC Headquarters, Geneva
Auditorium (Basement)**

**Review of the Work of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies: Draft Report of the
Workshop of Chairpersons of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies, 14 October 2003**

Circulated: 5 November 2003

The chairpersons of all IASC Subsidiary Bodies met for the second time on 14 October 2003 to: (a) discuss the IASC review and, (b) contribute to the IASC Workplan 2004. Specifically, the meeting had aimed for the following objectives:

- Identify recommendations to improve management of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies
- Identify synergies between the work of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies and the IASC Workplan 2004
- Foster the linkages between different subsidiary bodies
- Reach a common understanding on the next steps in terms of reporting to the annual session of the IASC-WG to be held 12-13 November 2003.

The half-day meeting took place in the Environmental House in Geneva and was chaired by Ross Mountain, Chair of the IASC-WG and Kirsi Madi, Chief of the IASC Secretariat.

The chairpersons provided a brief update on progress made in their respective Task Forces. In 2003, the IASC has 12 Subsidiary Bodies focusing on various humanitarian issues: Consolidated Appeal Process, Training, Sanctions, HIV/AIDS in Emergency Settings, Humanitarian Action and Human Rights, Gender and Humanitarian Assistance, Emergency Telecommunications, Preparedness and Contingency Planning, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crisis, Natural Disasters, Field Information Management, and Humanitarian Financing.

Following the reporting on progress made, the preliminary findings of the IASC Review was briefly highlighted. The IASC Review, which has been underway for the last six months by external consultants, aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses of the IASC mechanism and to propose measures to strengthen the IASC processes. The report, which was being finalized by the consultants at that time, included also observations on the management of IASC subsidiary bodies. Specifically, the review recommended the following related to the subsidiary bodies among others:

- Immediate closure of some subsidiary bodies
- Maximum deadline of one-year for existence of newly-created subsidiary bodies
- Establishment of “guidelines” of management of subsidiary bodies
- Linkage with outside expertise “outreach”

The participants discussed the role and management of subsidiary bodies in line with the recommendations of the preliminary results of the IASC Review. The discussion centered around following issues:

- Roles and Functions of the Subsidiary Bodies: The participants discussed the roles and mandates of different subsidiary bodies. By definition some Subsidiary Bodies are more task/product-oriented while others are more process-oriented, focusing on filling functional gaps within the system. A clear example of this would be for example the Task Force on Preparedness and Contingency Planning. Accordingly, it should be recognized that different subsidiary bodies have different roles and functions within the IASC system. In this regard, the rather mechanistic recommendations of the IASC review should be revisited. Specifically, a recommendation on automatic closure of some of the subsidiary bodies on the basis of “outputs” needed to be reviewed.
- Strategic Role of Subsidiary Bodies: In addition to providing technical and operational expertise, the subsidiary bodies have a role to play in bringing up strategic issues of concern to the attention of the IASC-WG. To this end, the annual reporting of subsidiary bodies to IASC Working Group should be better utilized by the Subsidiary Bodies as forum to highlight strategic and critical issues, instead of mechanistic progress reporting. Also special sessions in the IASC-WG meetings can be devoted to the topics covered by the Subsidiary Bodies for issues requiring decision or immediate action.
- Field Linkage: The importance of strengthened link between the work of subsidiary bodies and the operations in the field was underlined, emphasizing the need to facilitate interaction between the headquarter-based subsidiary bodies members and field staff. To this end, systematic involvement and feedback from the field on the work of subsidiary bodies should be sought. The Subsidiary Bodies should determine themselves the best modalities for this interaction. The link with field would contribute to better understanding of the work of subsidiary bodies, which will eventually lead to acceptance and application of the products developed by the Subsidiary Bodies.
- Timely and systematic dissemination and application of policies and guidelines: The dissemination of the policies and publications of the subsidiary bodies should be as wide and systematic as possible. Various information dissemination forum including --HC Retreat, IASC Website, individual agencies website, IASC Newsletter and agency newsletters--should be utilized to inform the relevant audience on the development of policies and publication. In addition to effective dissemination, the importance of ensuring operationalization and application of the guidelines and policies was highlighted. The participants highlighted that the commitment from the IASC members is a prerequisite for the effective application of the guidelines and policies. The Subsidiary Bodies should develop as part of their standard Terms of Reference a dissemination strategy and training plans as appropriate.
- Resource constraints: Many subsidiary bodies face a serious lack of resources—both in terms of financial and human resources. This poses a major challenge in implementing the work outlined in the terms of reference. The

meeting made a collective call to the IASC WG members for their increased support to ensure that the necessary financial and human resources are made available. The meeting also reminded all the chairpersons and the IASC members of their responsibility to ensure that the work undertaken in the Subsidiary Bodies is appropriately reflected and resources in the workplans of the individuals chairing/participating in the Subsidiary Bodies.

- “Network Concept”: It was recognized that as most of the Task Forces have accomplished their tasks and are closed down, it is necessary in some cases to establish a follow-up structure. It was suggested that a network of agency focal persons could be established. Such “network” would be able to raise issues to the attention of the IASC-WG as necessary, but the linkage of the IASC-WG with the network would not be formalised.

The second part of the meeting focussed on the ongoing process of developing the 2004 IASC Workplan. Based on earlier consultations with the IASC agencies, the broad categories and topics identified for the 2004 workplan were presented. The importance of ensuring synergy between the work of subsidiary bodies and the strategic direction of the IASC mechanism was emphasized.

The participants observed the broad scope of the workplan, noting that the plan would require a timeframe of two to three years for the implementation. There is a need to recognize this as part of planning and present realistic plan for 2004 that could be achieved in the coming 12 months.

Other key issues discussed included:

- **Structure of the Workplan:** In terms of structure of the Workplan, the third broad category "Improving Humanitarian Access" was suggested to be combined with the first category which could be retitled as "Policy Issues". The second category "Improving performance and accountability" was suggested to be retitled as "Strengthening operational capacity and improving performance and accountability".
- **Future of Humanitarian Action:** The participants expressed that the proposed topic on the future of humanitarian action is timely. One discussant raised that this topic should be closely linked with the ongoing Secretary-General's Agenda on fighting terrorism. The proposed IASC Workshop on Future of Humanitarian Action, scheduled on 11 November, will help identify specific activities covered under this topic.
- **The relationship between OCHA and IASC:** Some participants queried on the exact nature of relationship between OCHA and IASC, raising the question on the extent OCHA's coordination tools should be part of IASC processes. It was recognized that OCHA is tasked with *coordination* and thus OCHA's workplan and actions should reflect the priorities of the broader humanitarian community.
- **IASC Visibility:** In general, the visibility of the IASC is low among non-IASC colleagues, requiring renewed efforts to enhance IASC's visibility and the visibility of the products developed by the IASC and the Subsidiary Bodies. The development of an "IASC logo" could be a starting point for such efforts.

Many felt however that the issue was not about enhancing the IASC visibility but about enhancing visibility of critical humanitarian issues and principles addressed in the IASC.

In conclusion, the meeting agreed that a regular meeting bringing together the chairpersons of all Subsidiary Bodies was useful. A suggestion was made to organize the meeting twice a year in the future. The IASC Secretariat committed itself to establish more systematic information sharing with all the chairpersons ensuring that all key documents and information is systematically shared with the chairpersons of the Subsidiary Bodies.

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