

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
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Follow-up to the 2004 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment

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Summary

The importance of reinforcing humanitarian principles in complex emergencies and the need to build local capacity in natural disaster preparedness and response emerged as key themes during the discussion of the 2004 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment on *Strengthening of the coordination of the United Nations humanitarian assistance: present and future challenges*.

The formal segment, which took place from 12-14 July 2004 in New York, was, in general, well-received. More than 40 delegations participated in the open debate and exhibited a keen understanding of humanitarian policy issues in their statements.

Unlike the formal segment, the informal negotiations around the resolution were more problematic. After more than 100 hours of discussions that took place during the course of three weeks, a resolution was agreed by delegations on the evening of 20 July. The discussions were more fragmented than in previous years, due largely to the break-up of the G-77 as a traditional negotiating block. As a result of this dynamic, interests became factionalised and extreme positions on state sovereignty dominated the discussions.

Key Humanitarian Issues

The following themes were of particular concern to ECOSOC members and reflect some of the key concerns of Governments about humanitarian action. For more detail, please find attached the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment resolution as endorsed by ECOSOC on 21 July 2004 (ANNEX A).

Integrated missions

There was broad recognition among ECOSOC members that there are potential benefits to a more unified and multidimensional UN response to some crises. However, Member States recognised that while such “integrated missions” create opportunities for more coherent and effective action, it is equally important that the distinct roles and responsibilities of the different parts of the UN system are clearly defined and differentiated, particularly so as to avoid any misperceptions about the role of humanitarian organisations and how they conduct their work. There was therefore a collective call in the resolution to reaffirm humanitarian principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality, and to consider the independence of humanitarian action and objectives both in the design and in the implementation of integrated missions.

ECOSOC members also reaffirmed the primary role of civilian organisations in providing humanitarian assistance, and emphasised the need to ensure that when military assets and services are needed to support humanitarian activities, they are used in conformity with clearly elaborated guidelines. Within this context, there was broad and explicit support for the use of both the 2003 IASC “Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies” and the 1994 “Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets in Disaster Relief.” However Member States emphasised the need to further study and provide advice on the particular impact of integrated missions on the perception and acceptance of the United Nations humanitarian organisations (by local populations as well as humanitarian actors outside the UN), and on the ability of humanitarian organisations to effectively operate in the context of an international military presence.

Transition

Member States emphasised the need for better coherence of planning and fundraising tools for countries in transition from both conflict and natural disasters.

In particular, they supported transition planning efforts, such as the so-called “4Rs” (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction) programme, and welcomed collaborative efforts among UN agencies and between the UN and the World Bank to develop and implement post-emergency needs assessments, programming tools and fundraising mechanisms.

However, Member States expressed concern over the internal nature of the UN’s work on transitions to date and urged more dialogue with and participation from States undergoing transition so that they are involved in the process from the outset.

Several disaster-prone countries urged the UN to expand transition efforts beyond peace-building scenarios to include post-disaster recovery. Failing to do so, they argued, was squandering an important opportunity to improve development practices and ultimately reduce disaster risk.

Natural disasters

Member States’ assessment of humanitarian assistance to natural disasters was mixed. While ECOSOC members welcomed and encouraged efforts to strengthen the effectiveness and coordination of international response teams, certain countries, particularly those prone to natural disasters, thought that the UN had fallen short on its efforts to build local and national capacity and to improve efforts to reduce overall risk.

The resolution, therefore, focused on the need to build robust national, local and community response mechanisms, to build more effective partnerships with and among institutions and populations in disaster-prone areas and to channel increased resources for capacity building activities in disaster-prone areas.

ECOSOC members also emphasised the importance of incorporating risk reduction as an effective means of saving lives. The resolution, consequently, invites states to integrate disaster risk reduction strategies into all relevant policy and planning instruments in order to address the social economic and environmental dimensions that influence vulnerability to natural disasters.

Other issues

Other issues that came out of the segment included the need for a new approach to staff security that includes both symbolic and physical measures, more active analysis and action in mainstreaming gender concerns in humanitarian action and a stronger, more pragmatic approach to IDPs. The resolution failed, unfortunately, to adequately address the complex and critical issues of protection against sexual exploitation and internal displacement, which still remain contentious and require further debate and action.

Proposed Actions by the IASC-WG members:

Protection of Civilians

* Requests the IASC to work with OCHA and Member States to hold country-specific and regional workshops to develop protection strategies (resolution, para. 5)

Strengthening Humanitarian Coordination

* Ensure participation and perspective of those affected by humanitarian situations in the design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian assistance. (resolution para. 36)

Safety and Security on Humanitarian Personnel

* Ensure that humanitarian personnel are sensitive to local customs and traditions and respect the national laws of the countries of operation; (resolution, para.15)

* Encourage collaboration on safety and security issues, through implementation of the 1991 Security Guidelines and through collaboration on the reporting of all attacks against humanitarian staff.(resolution para. 13, 14)

Internally Displaced Persons

* Work with national governments in the countries where they are presence to strengthen the legal frameworks and encourage the development of national plans and initiatives. (resoluton para. 40)

Sexual Violence and Exploitation

* Continue to report incidents of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse in the field. (resolution resolution para. 38)

* Continue to develop an appropriate basis for maintaining standards of conduct and accountability in the field. (resolution para. 39)

Natural Disasters

* Work with states to integrate risk reduction strategies into preparedness, response and development policies and programmes. (resolution para. 27)

HIV/AIDS

* Integrate HIV/AIDS responses into planning, programming and implementation of humanitarian action; particularly through promoting use of the IASC guidelines. (resolution para. 31)

Gender

- * Encourage gender mainstreaming through integration of planning and programming, particularly the CAP; (resolution para. 33)
- * Report to ECOSOC on the review of the 1999 IASC Guidelines. (resolution para. 33)

Transition

- * Promote a more inclusive dialogue with states on transition and contribute to a report to the GA on transition issues. (resolution para. 44)
- * Include national institutions and national perspectives in transition planning, particularly for recovery and transitions from natural disasters. (resolution para. 44)

Humanitarian Financing

- * Support the continued work on the GHD initiative, particularly on common needs assessments and prioritisation including the CAP assessment framework. (resolution paras 41-43)