

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
63<sup>RD</sup> WORKING GROUP MEETING

**Humanitarian Common Services: Progress Report 2005  
(FOR INFORMATION ONLY)**

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## **I Origins / overall objective**

In 2004, IASC WG took the initiative to explore ways of improving operational coordination at field level by promoting cooperation between different IASC mechanisms and products, such as UNJLC, UNHAS, UN-CMCoord, the HIC and IAET. The 59<sup>th</sup> IASC meeting in November 2005 endorsed the concept and the definition of a Humanitarian Common Service (HCS). An HCS Plan of Action, proposing a number of concrete actions on how to take the HCS collaboration forward was adopted and its implementation was to be reported on to the IASC WG annually, each November.

## **II Progress to date/Constraints**

The process of implementation of the 2004 Plan of Action was to be an informal one, based on the joint decision not to create an IASC subsidiary body on HCS. The HCS providers pledged to cooperate in all areas of the Plan of Action in the margins of their core respective activities. However, the reality of the humanitarian business and a number of large-scale emergencies that followed, starting with the Indian Ocean Tsunami, prevented that collaboration from being as active as was originally envisaged. The HCS providers met twice during the course of 2005 to take stock of progress. Post-tsunami, it became evident that the original concept of adding joint activities onto agencies' existing work plans would not bear fruit in the current form. Most HCS staff had been heavily involved in the tsunami and overtaken by events and so the 2004 Plan of Action activities were put on hold. The providers, aware of the lack of progress with regard to the joint activities, decided that a more robust approach to strengthening HCS cooperation was needed. They consequently decided to establish a joint WFP/OCHA Liaison/Support function to facilitate the implementation of the 2004 Plan of Action, for an initial period of one year. The modalities of the establishment of the function in question are currently being worked out but this decision can be seen a commitment to the growing importance of the Humanitarian Common Service concept and practice development.

### **III Opportunities**

While limited progress with regard to the 2004 Plan of Action may be seen as regrettable, a number of events in the course of the current year have provided a useful opportunity to further the development of the HCS idea. These should be seen as a positive and important stepping-stones in the progress of HCS, providing an chance for further analysis and growth of the HCS idea and practice. For example:

Despite the fact that HCS definition, joint plans for development and recommended actions have not been widely promulgated and implemented as yet, it is evident that the HCS concept has already established itself in the humanitarian vocabulary and has been embraced by humanitarian actors, donors and partners. This in itself is symptomatic of the need and timeliness for HCS's concept and practice to be developed further, and of the growing expectations the humanitarian community at large vis-à-vis the Humanitarian Common Services.

The Humanitarian Response Review in 2005 confirmed the need to strengthen, expand, promote and build all HCS. The HRR recommendations in fact, reiterate the thinking behind the original HCS process i.e. the need to further improve general awareness of the HCSs, their inter-operability, overall management and performance monitoring. Also, the need to further explore preparedness, responsiveness and the need to develop benchmarks to measure results have also been identified as priority areas as a result of HRR. In fact, the HRR endorsement of the earlier HCS recommendations has given the HCS process legitimacy and authority to act on earlier commitments.

In addition, the extraordinary scale of a number of emergencies requiring HCS deployment in 2005 also provide useful Lessons Learned opportunities. The tsunami confirmed the need for further collective and individual development and cooperation of HCS. The early lessons emerging currently from the South Asia (Pakistan) Earthquake represent a rare opportunity of seeing policy decisions – the HRR - being tested in practice. The Cluster approach being implemented in Pakistan proves the need for a very close interaction between Clusters and Humanitarian Common Services and their clear interdependence. This confirms the need that a greater commitment to this process is now called for by HCS, their custodian agencies and the wider IASC constituency.

The level of interest in HCS is rising. There are signals from donors that they would like to be updated on progress. HCS have been approached by partners who ask to be associated with the HCS group and process. The Fleet Forum, a nascent inter-agency/NGO partnership, as well as MapAction network, are only two examples of other “common” services, which could be explored in the future, as well as a stronger partnership with the UNDAC network.

The immediate plans for HCS cooperation include a meeting in early 2006 to elaborate modalities of implementing jointly agreed-upon activities, including preparation of a common simulation exercise.