INTER–AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
PRINCIPALS MEETING

7 April 2005
9:30 – 13:00 hrs
Room I, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Humanitarian Common Services (HCS)

Circulated: 1 April 2005

"A Humanitarian Common Service is a support function to facilitate efforts of IASC organizations and the larger humanitarian community, administered by one or more organizations and authorized by an established inter-agency process, and in each specific situation requested by the HC/Country Team" (definition endorsed by the 59th IASC WG meeting, November 2004).

As requested by the 56th meeting of the IASC WG in February 2004, the five HCS - UNJLC (UN Joint Logistics Cell), UNHAS (UN Humanitarian Air Service), UN-CMCoord (UN Civil-Military Coordination), HIC (Humanitarian Information Centres) and IAET (Inter-Agency Emergency Telecommunications) - convened two workshops in 2004. The discussion on future cooperation and the development of the HCS concept revealed a number of ways to advance cooperation in the areas of awareness raising, inter-operability and inter-action, overall management and performance monitoring, in order to improve trigger and reporting mechanisms, avoid overlaps and ensure complementarity, seek inter-agency uniformity, develop mindsets of execution / performance / accomplishment, and so on.

The 59th IASC WG agreed that the HCS Group would report to the IASC WG each year at the November session, starting in 2005. It also endorsed the proposal for the HC to maintain strategic leadership over HCS, and for the service provider(s) to maintain operational management, in full consultation with the Country Team. It further agreed to include HCS projects under a distinct section under the coordination chapter of the CAPs and CHAPs. A work plan for 2005 was established, constituting a set of recommendations on how to enhance and improve operational coordination in the field among the HCS. This process is also seen as having the potential to contribute to the preservation of humanitarian space, in the context of ongoing discussions on "Integrated Missions".

The HCS providers remain an informal group, without constituting an IASC subsidiary body or an official secretariat. In order to keep the momentum of this informal process and to ensure that potentially emerging policy matters are brought to the IASC, OCHA recommends that the joint consultation process, co-chaired by OCHA (Mr. Gerhard Putman-Cramer) and WFP (Mr. David Kaatrud), continue, starting with an extraordinary meeting to determine specific ways forward. A progress report will be made to the next IASC WG meeting in November and to the IASC Principals' meeting in December 2005, as necessary.

The need for defining HCS in the current context of humanitarian action in multi-faceted UN operations was put to test in the Indian Ocean Earthquake-Tsunami emergency. Activities by the various HCS included:

UNJLC: UNJLC deployed to Sri Lanka and Indonesia as a part of the UNOCHA UNDAC teams, before independently activated on 31 December. It stationed liaison officers with the Combined Support Force at U-Tapao, and with US Pacific Command in Hawaii. Together with UNHAS the UNJLC operated a strategic air hub at Subang in Malaysia. The team in Sri Lanka grew to include customs, GIS, field logistics and reports staff, road engineers and transport experts. The UNJLC in Indonesia reached over 40 international and10 national staff. The UNJLC had offices in Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Medan, Meulaboh and intermittent presence in Calang and Lamno.

UNHAS: UNHAS chartered cargo aircraft on behalf of agencies and dispatched two IL-76 to the region, together with an aviation safety expert. As military helicopters withdrew from Aceh, seven helicopters were provided or funded by donors and managed by UNHAS. Two Twin-Otter passenger aircraft were used in the Aceh area. A third one is being contracted to provide support for the islands affected by the most recent earthquake. A user group was set up to determine requirements and priorities, chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator.

UN-CMCoord: A UN-CMCoord network was established at the headquarters, regional and field levels, with 5 OCHA/MCDU staff and 8 UN-CMCoord trained officers (provided from OCHA's PDSB, Switzerland, UNAMA, DPKO and EU Military Staff) in U-Tapao, Bangkok, Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Meulaboh, Medan and Colombo. The UN-CMCoord network coordinated contributions from some 35 countries of military assets in support of the humanitarian community, with a peak of some 153 helicopters, 84 fixed wing aircraft, 62 sea based assets and over 30,000 supporting international military personnel delivering a daily average of 68 mt of food, 70 mt of water and 20 mt of medical goods.

HIC: Humanitarian Information Centres are not normally deployed in response to natural disasters, however, given the complex coordination environment caused by the scale of the tsunami, it was decided that the HIC mechanism would be appropriate in this instance. HICs have been operational in Sumatra and in Sri Lanka since the beginning of January and in all over 20 staff have been deployed. The HICs have contributed to coordination and decision making through the provision of information products, including who, what, where information, IDP mapping and other services.

IAET: The IAET service was implemented in Indonesia (no requirements for Sri Lanka), with funding provided by the Netherlands. The project consists of (1) Inter-agency coordination with a dedicated Telecommunications Coordinating Officer; (2) Common Minimum Security Telecommunications Infrastructure, with established network in Banda Aceh, Meulaboh, Medan, Calang and Lamno; and (3) Common Internet / Data Connectivity with established infrastructure in Banda Aceh, Meulaboh and Medan.

Prepared by: OCHA, April 2005