

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
PRINCIPALS MEETING**

9 December 2004

9.30 – 13.00 hrs

Room I, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Expanding Humanitarian Dialogue and Strengthening Partnerships

Circulated: 2 December 2004

I. Building Partnerships to address today's humanitarian challenges

In a context of war against terror, the Baghdad bombing and the blurring of the lines between civil and military operations, humanitarian actors, charities and Governments in the Middle East share the same perception challenge. Key issues include access, the preservation of the humanitarian space and integrated missions, respect for established humanitarian principles, review of *modus operandi* of humanitarian assistance, as well as transparency, accountability and professionalism.

In this context, it is important for the humanitarian agencies to strengthen partnerships with Middle Eastern countries and charities. Establishing partnerships should aim at strengthening dialogue and cooperation, and should be based on respect, equality and common understanding of principles guiding humanitarian action. Better reporting and acknowledgement of the relief work carried out by Islamic charities and Middle Eastern Government is needed, while Governments in the region should be seen as donors and long-term stakeholders in international humanitarian efforts. More needs to be done to redress the widely held negative opinion of the UN by promoting its humanitarian face and working at the community level with scholars to help communities better appreciate UN humanitarian activities.

II. Plan of Action

In order to enhance the dialogue and partnerships through a smooth process, a three tracks approach is proposed:

1. To enhance the dialogue with Governments: the United Nations should engage in a dialogue on humanitarian issues and activities with Governments in the Middle East region as equal partners;
2. To support and recognize the humanitarian work of Islamic humanitarian NGOs: the United Nations and partners will try to assist Islamic NGOs address misperceptions about their work, build trust with the various partners, and assist in capacity-building and operational partnerships;
3. And to work with Muslim scholars and clergy on humanitarian values and principles and Islam, as part of the greater dialogue among people with different cultures and religions.

In the broader context of protecting the humanitarian space, the following issues should be addressed as part of this initiative: nature and typology of humanitarian assistance provided by Islamic NGOs and assistance provided by Middle Eastern States; how to better acknowledge the important humanitarian contribution of Islamic states and NGOs; the impact of the global war on terror on the ability of NGOs in Islamic countries to function (including issues of legislation); shared and differing ideological/theological bases for humanitarian action; issues of accountability; and capacity building.

The partners for this initiative will be IASC members, donors, international and Islamic humanitarian NGOs, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Universities and research institutes, Governments from the Middle East region and regional organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The initiative was recently discussed at the IASC WG, where the IASC members agreed to work together at the policy and operational levels. For this purpose, an ad hoc consultative group will be established to exchange information on various on-going activities and ensure individual initiatives are linked and coordinated. The consultative group will also explore possibilities for participation in the Cairo conference with Islamic Relief and ensure that UN views and inputs for the conference are coordinated. It was recognised that the initiative will require a long-term effort by the humanitarian actors, and agencies were encouraged to continue their individual initiatives and ensuring exchange of information between the agencies.

Prepared by: OCHA, November 2004