

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
50th MEETING**

18-19 September 2002

Conference Room 9, United Nations Headquarters New York

Strengthening the effectiveness of the IASC

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Background

In April 2000 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Plenary adopted the IASC Working Group Recommendations for Strengthening of the IASC Mechanism and Process. Since the 2000 IASC discussion, the IASC has reaffirmed its position as a mechanism and a process that are much more than the mere holding of meetings. Inter-agency coordination is clearly recognized as one of the corner stones of the humanitarian response. The informal exchange among the IASC members has also increased.

The 2000 recommendations adopted by the IASC identified the following four elements as part of the IASC structure:

- ❖ Field coordination arrangements and the full engagement of the UN Country Teams under the RC/HC,
- ❖ IASC-WG and subsidiary bodies (task forces, reference groups, sub-working groups, weekly meetings),
- ❖ ERC and the IASC Heads of Agencies (including direct consultations on numerous issues in a continuing basis, and
- ❖ ECOSOC Humanitarian Segment.

The adopted recommendations of 2000 focused particularly on the 1) Functioning of the IASC and IASC-WG, 2) Relationship of the Humanitarian Coordinators and the IASC-WG, and 3) Organization of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Segment.

Many of the recommendations have been implemented and followed through during the past two years while some have remained without operationalization into concrete action and procedures. As a result a number of the IASC members have expressed their wish to re-examine the operating procedures of the IASC with the objective of enhancing the effectiveness of this collective mechanism. At the same time a number of interested donor governments have also carried out informal consultations in Geneva regarding the structure and function of the IASC. The motives for these consultations have been the ten years of existence of the 46/182 as well as some concerns felt by the donors and expressed by the IASC members regarding the functioning of the IASC. While some concerns have been expressed there is no questioning of the existence of the coordination mechanism as such.

Some concerns

Below are examples of some of the concerns raised by IASC members and governments regarding the functioning of the IASC.

Field involvement: Field involvement in the IASC remain limited. The discussions in the IASC are not adequately guided by the field and action points and decisions are not effectively shared with the field by the IASC members.

Follow-up to decisions/recommendations: Follow-up to the decisions/action points by the IASC Secretariat and by the IASC members need to be strengthened.

IASC plenary: Lack of substantive discussion. Tendency to devote too much time for procedural matters such as endorsement of issues that have been well prepared by the IASC-WG and could be endorsed through other means.

Lack of results/decision orientation: IASC-WG meetings have become increasingly an information sharing forum deviating from their original objective. More focus is needed for decision and policy making as well as standard setting as appropriate.

Agenda setting: Lack of transparency in the agenda setting. Every member wishes to have their own item on the agenda leading to unmanageable agendas. The question of country/situation specific agenda items versus policy issues need to be addressed.

Management of the meetings and participation by the IASC members: Too many inactive participants resulting in the lack of debate and difficulties in achieving results.

Background documentation: Background documentation is often too late resulting in inadequate time for substantive preparation by the IASC members. Quality of the background documentation leaves room for improvement.

Information sharing and dialogue with interested governments on the IASC: Information sharing with the interested governments on issues discussed by the IASC need to be further improved.

Proposed action/decision by the IASC WG:

The IASC-WG is requested to identify issues that need to be addressed in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the IASC and to propose a way forward to address them. Options to consider include:

- a) Establishment of a small task force to identify the issues and propose ways for operationalizing solutions;
- b) Requesting the IASC secretariat to carry out consultations on the basis of which an operational plan of action for strengthening the effectiveness of the IASC can be prepared for review and discussion at the November IASC-WG meeting.