

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE-WORKING GROUP  
51st MEETING**

**25-26 November 2002**

**WHO Headquarters, Geneva  
Room M505**

**Agenda Item: Review of the Work of the IASC Subsidiary Bodies: Reference Group  
on Humanitarian Action and Human Rights**

**Circulated: 13 November 2002**

**2002 Progress Report & 2003 Work Plan**

**IASC Reference Group on Humanitarian Action and Human Rights**

**Introduction**

The Reference Group comprises OCHA, OHCHR (Chair), UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, ICVA and, as standing invitee, the ICRC. It meets on a quarterly basis through video-conference between Geneva, New York and Rome. The Reference Group operates under the overall guidance of the IASC, on the development of strategies and initiatives to enhance the integration of human rights into humanitarian action. While the members of the Reference Group have consistently focused on producing specific outputs, the members also feel that the Group serves as a useful and unique inter-agency forum for information sharing and doctrine development on these issues.

**Activities in 2002**

**Protecting Human Rights through Humanitarian Action - *Growing the Sheltering Tree***

In 2002 a compendium of field-practices on the promotion and protection of human rights through humanitarian action entitled *Growing the Sheltering Tree* was published in both hard-copy and CD-Rom versions (the text is also available on the internet – see

section below on Human Rights Training for Humanitarian Workers). It is hoped that the compendium will be a major contribution towards assisting humanitarian field workers in undertaking human rights related activities. A dissemination strategy was also developed and implemented. It is expected that further dissemination activities will be ongoing for some time in 2003.

#### Frequently Asked Questions - FAQs - on International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law

The Group finalised its work on a document entitled “Frequently Asked Questions on International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law”, which is intended to respond to questions on the legal framework and to complement the compendium on protection of human rights through humanitarian action. The FAQ is intended primarily for humanitarian workers in the field.

- The text is before the IASC Working Group for approval.

#### Human Rights Training for Humanitarian Workers – Workshop and Web-site

The Reference Group has assembled a large collection already available training materials for humanitarian workers on international human rights and humanitarian principles. In November 2001 the Reference Group organised an expert workshop in Geneva to review this material. The participants comprised representatives from UN, NGO as well as other humanitarian organizations.

Upon the proposal of the workshop participants, the Reference Group set up a web-site entitled “Protecting Rights Through Humanitarian Action” (<http://www.icva.ch/cgi-bin/browse.pl?doc=HRHA>). The goal of this web site is to serve as an on-line resource for all concerned with humanitarian action. The pages share information about training programmes, modules and manuals, practice guidelines, and other materials related to the interface between human rights and humanitarian action in an effort to help organizations avoid "reinventing the wheel" and to encourage creative new solutions. The web site also contains the publications of the Reference Group, including *Growing the Sheltering Tree*.

#### **Work Plan 2003 – Before the IASC Working Group for approval**

##### I. Specific outputs:

##### • Guidelines on human rights and humanitarian action for humanitarian coordinators.

In 2002 the Group was requested to develop these guidelines, which would be field-oriented and serve as a practical tool for humanitarian coordinators, and also complement the FAQs and the *Growing the Sheltering Tree*. It has not been possible for the Group to complete its work on the guidelines during 2002, and the Group thus plans to finalise a draft during 2003.

• Collection of information on agencies policies and initiatives on mainstreaming human rights into their humanitarian work. More than five years have passed since the Secretary-General initiated the reform programme of the United Nations, which, inter alia, conceptualized human rights as cutting across all the activities of the United Nations. The Group considers it appropriate to collect information on how the humanitarian agencies and offices of the United Nations have sought to implement this with the view to facilitating their work.

• Dilemmas of humanitarian work- publication

As a complementary product to the FAQs and the *Growing the Sheltering Tree* publications, that Reference Group would prepare a study of dilemmas with regard to human rights, which humanitarian workers often face in their fieldwork.

• Rights-based approach to humanitarian action – Publication and Workshop

During the workshop on training organised by the Reference Group in November 2002 the need for a clear understanding of the concept of rights-based approach to humanitarian work became apparent once again. The Group would organise a follow-up expert seminar, which would serve to discuss the issue. A publication would subsequently be issued.

## II. Ongoing activities

Continued promotion and dissemination of the *Growing the Sheltering Tree* with the emphasis on the promotion of the integration of human rights into humanitarian action.

Continue to share information about human rights training materials and expand the web-site. Financial support of the web-site has to be obtained in order to maintain and operate it.

Engage in a dialogue with the Sphere Project on the revision of the handbook – Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response - and the efforts to ensure that protection and human rights are incorporated throughout the Minimum Standards, as well as engagement in strengthening the linkages between the Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards.

Seek to integrate the work of the Reference Group with the UN's *protection of civilians in armed conflict* agenda.

Seek to assist a coordination among UN humanitarian agencies in their work and policies vis-à-vis the UN human rights machinery (e.g. treaty bodies and Commission on Human Rights).

Geneva 12 November 2002

**The Reference Group is seeking the Working Group's endorsement of:**

- The Work Plan for 2003, and
- The text of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.