

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

**A Strategy and Plan of Action for Strengthening the  
Humanitarian Coordination System:  
A Proposal to the IASC**

21-22 November 2005  
Hosted by ICVA, International Council of Voluntary Agencies  
ECOGIA, Versoix (Geneva)

Circulated 17 November 2005

## **I Summary**

In order to address the specific recommendations from the Humanitarian Response Review regarding the humanitarian coordinators ( Ch III.:3) and broader concerns about the overall role of the humanitarian coordinators and their real possibility to meet the expectations placed on them by a broad based constituency, UNDG and OCHA have jointly analysed how the current resident coordinator system, on which the current system is largely based, can be strengthen in regard to selection, training, support and employment conditions that would contribute to making the HC system more suitable to the current challenges. Informal consultations with representatives of major NGOs have been initiated to gauge a better understanding of mutual expectations as well as commitment to the humanitarian coordinator system. Specific training of resident coordinators for their possible humanitarian coordination tasks have been intensified and improved.

1. In order to achieve more immediate impact and results, it is proposed that we establish a roster of “pre-certified” 20 HC candidates, who are existing or upcoming RCs and thus readily deployable.
2. In addition we are proposing an pool of 10 pre-certified candidates for deputy humanitarian coordinators, who increasingly may be the most immediately deployed reinforcement in an acute emergency.
3. Furthermore, OCHA will engage to broaden and strengthen its pool of very senior Heads of OCHA offices.
4. Moreover, it is proposed to further develop coordination support tools and training modules and opportunities for potential and current humanitarian coordinators.

5. Finally, it is recommended to more frequently consider the deployment of humanitarian envoys in particularly complex situations.

## **II Background**

The HC/RC system is 'owned' by the humanitarian system as a whole, indeed a large part of the function is to link the many disparate parts of the system together. Thus, naturally, strengthening the function will require a number of different actions by many different actors in the system, including the UN secretariat, UN agencies, donors and NGOs.

It is noted that the challenges identified by practitioners and the HRR, and the recent progress in implementation of the cluster system agreed by the IASC Principals last September will very urgently require strengthened support to the humanitarian coordination system. Confidence and trust in the system needs to be nurtured and fostered through a mutually agreed understanding about what the humanitarian coordination must deliver in general and in specific operational settings.

Strengthening the performance of the HC function will require multiple actions over the coming years. Most central among these is the strengthening of the pool from which HCs are drawn through improving the selection process, committing to training and induction, and improving support for the HC both in the administrative, operational and political aspects. Finally a commitment by all partners and stakeholders to the humanitarian coordination system will be required to consistently improve the functionality and performance of the system.

Informal consultations started with individual NGOs to explore more in depth the nature of the humanitarian coordination issues and needs at field level and will have to continue on key strategic and operational issues. It is important to agree on a common set of parameters for coordination in practice.

Governments have high expectations on the strengthening of the humanitarian coordination. In particular, at the country level host governments expect a strengthening of the local coordination mechanisms as well as of the national government's capacity to mobilise resources, and to coordinate and provide direction to the international and national actors. As multilateral or bilateral donors, governments expect a strengthening of the information management and analysis tools and of HCs' operational leadership.

## **III Actions Taken**

In mid-2005 UNDG appointed a working group under the leadership of Kathleen Cravero, Director BCPR, to agree how the RC system can be strengthened and how the widening of the pool of RCs can be achieved. The review also included the HC aspects of the RC role.

The group concluded and recommends to the Principals that, the humanitarian principles and objectives as reflected in the legal framework provided by IHL must be

integrated into the job description of the RC, and that the system must be designed to immediately change an RC who finds him/herself in a disaster situation and expected to perform tasks of which he or she has no previous experience. The system must be 'non punishing'. System must consistently seek to engage NGOs, bilateral partners as well as ensure that the UN system itself provides career incentives to agency staff who are ready to do RC/HC service for a number of years. Finally, to reinforce the competence of the OCHA offices to support the HC system was identified as a key ingredient in success.

OCHA has conducted two RC humanitarian coordination training workshops. These have turned out to be much in demand by RCs. The purpose is to offer training and exposure on key humanitarian coordination challenges to the existing pool of serving RCs. The training gives priority to known disaster prone countries. The curricula and the resource person base is under development. One workshop will take place in December and at least three are planned for 2006. More training opportunities will be necessary upon establishment of the roster.

OCHA is developing a specific Humanitarian Coordination website to service the humanitarian coordinators with humanitarian coordination tools, information and documental base, contact details, fora for peer discussions, and other amenities. It will be linked to other relevant sites. As the first model is ready for testing, access will be shared and further improved with the assistance of humanitarian coordinators and other stakeholders.

While it is expected that agencies and organisations will contribute in supporting the system, a proposal will be submitted to donors for financing of training, development of tools, and sustaining the pool in order to establish the system.

#### **IV Conclusions**

If the proposal to create a pool ( as a stand by arrangement) of 20 HC, 10 Deputy HCs is acceptable, the IASC members are invited to propose candidates for the pool to OCHA and, as relevant, to UNDP for serving RC/HCs with recommendations and supporting documentation and with a written commitment that the person, if subsequently included in the roster, shall be immediately released for service when called upon. In the case of serving RCs this process must include also UNDP as the employer. The same commitment is required for Deputy Humanitarian coordinator candidates. The Deputy HC does not required a RCA, however should be a very senior P5 or D1 level or corresponding if non UN. The status of the roster will need to be determined between the ERC and the Chair of the UNDG. The roster will be presented to IASC for endorsement. The roster should be established by 1 February 2006 and tested during the year for functionality and responsiveness.

Training and induction to the HC role and the humanitarian coordination environment will be further developed based on the experience of the recently started training as well as the yearly HC Retreats held by the ERC. Agencies and NGOs, as well as

Governments will be expected to participate in the design as well as the conduct of the workshops.

Finally, there is wide and positive support to make the system work better and a need to further define the differing expectations on the humanitarian coordination systems, and hence the HC.

## **V Proposed Actions by the IASC Working Group**

1. Endorsement of the establishment of a stand by pool according to the outline above.
2. Establishment of a working group representing IASC to work on the selection of the pool and designing the training .
3. Endorsement that OCHA with the IASC Secretariat will be the Secretariat for this process and work closely with UNDG and UNDP as the employers and the support system of the RC system.

Prepared by OCHA – November 05