

62nd IASC WORKING GROUP

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Strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) System: *Strengthening of the RC/HC System-Background Note*

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Background

The Secretary-General's report 'In Larger Freedom' recognized that there are immediate actions that can be taken to strengthen the humanitarian system. Apart from the importance of strengthening humanitarian response capacity and humanitarian financing, the report recognized that immediate actions can be taken to improve the coordination of the United Nations "system presence and performance at the country level". The report underlined the importance of ensuring that Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators have the authority and resources to carry out their tasks. The Secretary-General also reiterated the importance of having stronger humanitarian coordination structures; in particular by ensuring that UN country teams are well prepared and equipped to carry out their humanitarian tasks under the leadership of the Humanitarian coordinator.

Strengthening coordination at the field level is therefore a key element of the humanitarian reform package. As such increased efforts will be undertaken to ensure that the qualities of prospective RC/HCs are augmented in such a way so as to strengthen the UN's coordination efforts as envisaged by the UN reform. To ensure that effective leadership is provided and that RC/HCs are prepared and equipped to do so, it is important to focus on three key areas: (a) increasing the pool of readily available humanitarian coordinators; (b) improving the current RC/HC selection procedures with a view to ensuring that appropriate candidates are nominated, and; (c) strengthening the existing base of RC/HCs through improved training.

Increasing the HC Pool:

The functions of the Humanitarian Coordinator must reflect the concerns and interests of the larger humanitarian community. Strengthening the performance of the HC system will require that different actions be undertaken by the UN as well non-UN partners including NGOs and the Red Cross- Red Crescent movement. Together they should

contribute to broadening and deepening the pool of candidates from which HCs are drawn. By doing so, it is envisaged that the long-term performance of the function will improve. Broadening the HC pool would entail including more people from outside the UN system. Deepening the pool would necessitate undertaking actions to improve the overall quality of available candidates. Since most HCs will also be RCs, it is important to ensure that candidates drawn from the RC pool have the appropriate skills and experience to work in crises countries as well as in developing countries that may be vulnerable to disasters.

To broaden the pool, the UN will need to ensure that appropriate incentives are put in place to encourage good candidates from the UN as well as from non-UN sources to be considered. To help promote non-UN participation, it is suggested that a target be established to include a certain number of non-UN personnel in the HC pool. UNDG and OCHA should undertake consultations with NGOs in order to obtain their views on how best to include NGO candidates in the HC selection process. For its part, OCHA is willing to sponsor two NGO candidates to participate in the RCAC and it encourages other agencies to consider doing the same.

Apart from having a higher number of candidates, efforts must be undertaken to deepen the pool by ensuring that the competency exercises established for the RC/HC functions are made broader and more demanding to ensure that individuals have the wide range of skills and experience that an RC/HC post would require. It would also be crucial to ensure that the skills of candidates are not predominantly humanitarian or developmental. The UN would need to develop a long-term UN wide staff development strategy to address this issue. OCHA will contribute to this effort by introducing a training module that focuses on humanitarian coordination issues in order to strengthen the humanitarian profile of potential RC/HCs,

Improving Selection Procedures:

The selection process for RC/HCs has improved considerably since the introduction and subsequent adjustments of the RCAC; however, there are further improvements that could be made. The RC/HC selection criteria needs to be adjusted to include the differing competencies needed in countries where most of the UN's work is humanitarian. In this regard, the role the IAAP process plays in the selection of RC/HCs would need to be reviewed to ensure that due attention is given to operational and substantive priorities at the field level when selecting candidates. Although the role of human resource representatives from agencies is crucial, it is important to ensure that agency decision making fully takes into account specific country situations. In particular, the UNDP Administrator should consider designating specific country appointments as posts where the selection emphasis will be on candidates with appropriate humanitarian backgrounds and skills. In line with the SG's reform proposal the overall objective of the IAAP selection process should ensure that the style of leadership currently demanded of the HC/RC function prevails.

Improving Training for existing RC/HCs:

Recognizing the importance of improving the quality of existing RC/HCs, OCHA and DGO will collaborate to institute regular training for Humanitarian Coordinators. This should include 2-3 days specific HC training, which was piloted during the last HC retreat. The existing RC/HC induction should also be modified in order to extend humanitarian related training from the one-half day currently in effect to one-and-a-half days of the 10 day training.

Proposed Actions by the IASC-WG:

- Support efforts to broaden the pool of RC/HCs by including candidates from non-UN partners.
- Promote long-term staff development strategy to ensure that individuals have the wider range of experience needed to perform RC/HC functions.
- Consider designating specific country appointments for candidates with appropriate humanitarian experience.
- Modify existing RC/HC induction by expanding the humanitarian training element.

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