

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
55th MEETING**

12-13 November 2003

**IFRC Headquarters, Geneva
Auditorium (Basement)**

IASC TF on Natural Disasters: Background Note

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Background

The IASC WG work plan for 2003 identified improved preparedness and response measures to cyclical natural disasters as a priority task. On 9 July, the IASC Working Group agreed to establish a Task Force for Natural Disasters (TFND), under the joint chairmanship of OCHA and IFRC.

The IASC WG was concerned to note the increased levels of human suffering and material destruction caused by the growing numbers of natural disasters. It subsequently requested the TFND to: “1) work on the follow up to the recommendations of the 2000 Report of the IASC Reference Group on Natural Disasters, with prioritization and recommendations, and, 2) examine other proposals put forward by IFRC in the background document for the session and agree on follow up as required”. Further, “the IASC encouraged the Task Force to focus on development of humanitarian systems for improved preparedness and response to natural disasters, involving both slow-onset and sudden disasters.”¹.

The TFND comprises: IFRC, ISDR, OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, FAO, WHO and IOM. Since its inception, the TFND has met three times and has planned a one day Workshop session in November/December 2003. The Task Force was requested to provide a progress report to the IASC Working Group at its meeting on 12-13 November 2003.

2003 Objectives and Achievement:

The Task Force determined its immediate objectives as follows:

1. Based on the broad mandate given to the Task Force by the IASC WG, further elaborate and refine the Task Force’s TORs and develop an Action Plan with a corresponding time-frame.

Accomplished. TORs – see Annex I
Action Plan – see Annex II.

¹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group 53rd Meeting, 8-9 July 2003, Summary Record and Action Point, 7 August 2003, under “Natural Disasters”.

2. Review the status of implementation of the 2000 recommendations and prioritize the outstanding recommendations.

Ongoing. To be finalized at a one-day Workshop organized by the TFND in November/December

3. Develop a list of most disaster-prone countries.

Ongoing. Identification of criteria and consolidation of a list initiated. To be finalized at a one-day Workshop organized by the TFND in November/December 2003.

4. Develop a methodology for conducting a Pilot Project as described in the Action Plan, i.e: map IASC agencies capacities in the area on disaster response, compose a list of IASC agencies' actions with regard to natural disasters measures and identify a selected group of most vulnerable countries for the purpose of the Pilot Project.

To be accomplished at a one-day Workshop in November/December 2003.

Workplan 2004

1. Implementation of a Pilot Project to review IASC members' capacities and tools for disaster response and response preparedness
2. Based on the Pilot Project, conduct a critical evaluation of the status of preparedness of the IASC system. Put forward recommendations, with clearly defined areas of responsibility and time-frame for implementation.

Annex I

Task Force on Natural Disasters - Terms of Reference

Objectives:

Identify actions and propose mechanisms to be taken within the inter-agency framework to ensure effective, timely and dependable response to natural disasters, considering the recommendations made by the IASC Reference Group in May 2000 as well as the proposals made by IFRC in the IASC background paper circulated 25 June 2003, and other supporting material.

Priority tasks:

Review/develop an initial framework for evaluating the state of preparedness to natural disaster situations as a basis for further definition of capacity building measures. Agree on a Plan of Action focused on a practical approach to the readiness and capacities of existing IASC mechanisms. Implement a Pilot Project to evaluate existing response and response preparedness mechanisms.

Working method:

Focus on field level, inter-agency preparedness and response to natural disasters, with a view to enhancing inter-agency as well as national capacities. Consider the effectiveness of existing tools, such as Disaster Management Teams. Collaborate with other IASC Task Forces, in particular the Task Force on Preparedness and Contingency Planning.

Expected outcomes:

Identify and demonstrate practical measures which will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the UN's response to natural disasters in an effort to improve field-level and headquarters preparedness and response to natural disasters.

Timeframe:

The Task Force estimates that the necessary timeframe for the implementation of the above Action Plan should be set at the end of October 2004. The Task Force will present its final report to the November 2004 IASC WG meeting.

Annex II

Task Force on Natural Disasters - Action Plan 2003/2004

1. Review conclusions and recommendations of the IASC Reference Group on Natural Disasters of May 2000. Identification of achievements and remaining priorities.
2. Identify Priority Countries - based on mutually agreed upon criteria and sources, compose a list of countries most vulnerable to sudden onset natural disasters.
3. Conduct Pilot Project to review IASC members' capacities and tools for disaster response and response preparedness:
 - Identify a selected group of most vulnerable countries and conduct a survey of disaster preparedness and response measures in those selected disaster prone countries.
 - Map all individual IASC agencies' capacities, mechanisms and readiness in the area of disaster response/preparedness, relevant to their ability to support the national emergency management authorities and civil society.
 - Based on the above, compose a list of actions/SOPs with regard to natural disasters response and preparedness measures, which need to be put in place by IASC members at country level in disaster-prone countries.
4. Critically evaluate existing response and response preparedness mechanisms within the IASC, and recommend measures of support necessary to further develop/enhance capacities of IASC mechanisms to respond to natural disasters, at headquarters, regional and national levels. Suggest concrete methods of implementation of recommended actions by with clearly defined areas of responsibility and corresponding timeframes.