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IASC TF on Preparedness and Contingency Planning: Background Note

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This Report provides a summary of the work conducted by the TF since March 2003 and proposes a plan of activities for 2004.

1. Strategic objective

The objective of the RG is to strengthen and mainstream preparedness and contingency planning processes and approaches across the UN system and to facilitate the development of other preparedness and early warning approaches and methods that can help enhance the ability of the UN and IASC partners to prepare and respond more effectively to humanitarian crises.

2. Main activities since March 2003

Contingency planning support

Iraq crisis

While phasing down its active role in support of planning, the TF has maintained a close working relationship with individual IASC members in Geneva, Rome and NY, and the UNCTs in the region, and has continued to provide advice and technical support on a when required basis.

The recent developments have highlighted the need for a closer examination of safety and security in overall contingency planning.

West Africa

The TF has been providing support to the preparation of a WAC Inter-agency contingency planning exercise. Initially planned for mid-2003, this exercise was put on hold by regional actors and is now scheduled to start end of November, to be implemented in phases through early 2004. The countries concerned include Guinea, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia as well as Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Mali.

Colombia and subregion

Further to contacts with field, support to interagency contingency planning for Colombia and the sub-region is also being scheduled to take place tentatively during January-February 2004.

Early warning and early response

- The TF organized a working level inter-agency consultation on *Early Warning - Early Action* in Geneva, at the Henri Dunant Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, in May 2003. The output report is under finalization and will be shared among IASC members.
- One of the outputs of the Geneva consultation has been an intensification of efforts by several agencies to share more consistently EW information, including internal reports or briefs, allowing a significant broadening of the space for discussion and analysis of current and emerging crises among TF members
- The consultation also allowed identifying different systems, mechanisms and tools that are in place or under development by individual IASC members, thus facilitating an initial identification of areas of common interest and future collaboration.

Training and capacity building

Efforts to strengthen and mainstream preparedness practice are on-going in some agencies as well as at the inter-agency level. Both DMTP and OCHA are now more systematically conducting training in inter-agency contingency planning. Contingency planning tools and approaches are also increasingly being used in regional meetings, and they are being internalised in CAP/CHAP processes. During the reporting period, OCHA NY facilitated the development/update of inter-agency CPs in Haiti, Guinea Bissau, Togo and CAR.

3. Activities Planned for 2004

In line with its mandate, the TF will continue to perform the following main functions during 2004:

- Continue to act as the IASC-WG focal point for inter-agency preparedness and contingency planning;
- Continue to provide technical assistance and advise, to support inter-agency preparedness planning processes through a range of initiatives, including support missions;
- Continue to foster and facilitate the mainstreaming of preparedness and contingency planning capacities among IASC partners;
- Strengthen the inter-agency contingency planning guidelines and supporting tools, including training materials;
- Explore innovative approaches to enhance the efficiency of the UN system and IASC partners in early warning, and facilitate the mainstreaming of new capacities including closer linkages between early warning and early action;
- Facilitate the harmonisation of calendars with regard to preparedness and contingency planning activities; and
- Continue technical discussions with other institutional actors and partners to facilitate the sharing of knowledge as well as the co-ordination and harmonisation of methods/plans.

More specifically, to further enhance the collective response capacities of IASC member agencies to emergencies, 3 sets of activities are proposed during 2004, some of which will be pursued through closer interaction with other TFs:

A. Monitoring/early warning

Enhancement of humanitarian early warning systems will be a priority in 2004, recognizing that monitoring and early warning are key to preparedness and early effective action. In 2003 the Task Force on Preparedness and Contingency Planning organized a first consultation on early warning-early action and followed this up with several TF members participating in an ISDR/German Gov sponsored International Conference on Early Warning. In brief, three observations stand out: a) most agencies have developed and established early warning systems some of which maybe in need of further refinement; b) as various specialized early warning systems exist, there may be an opportunity to enhance their complementarity and utility through better exchange and integration of services; c) within agencies and the IASC mechanism there still appears to be a weak linkage between early warning and dependable triggering mechanisms for preparedness action. Bearing these factors in mind, the following activities are proposed for 2004:

- Follow-up IASC consultations on early warning/early action will be organized to further enhance information sharing and systems development of agency specific early warning systems;
- Work toward the development of a common inter-agency platform for presenting/sharing early warning information;
- Propose/pilot a mechanism for IASC hot spots prioritization and enhanced decision making linking early warning with preparedness activities and with Emergency Response Managers from IASC member agencies.

B. Preparedness and contingency planning

The need to continue to enhance the capacity of IASC members in emergency preparedness and contingency planning both individually and at the inter-agency level is widely recognized. While noticeable progress has been achieved in the course of the last two years in strengthening links and coordination across agencies and IASC actors, approaches and levels of preparedness and capacities vary considerably between agencies. The TF will continue to lead efforts aimed at fostering the improvement of systems, standards as well as practice and normative guidance in support to the strengthening of overall IASC preparedness. In recognition that the final objective is to help ensure that country teams are prepared and able to respond to emergencies in a timely, effective, and coordinated way, it is proposed that the following activities be undertaken during 2004 with regard to preparedness and contingency planning:

- Continue to provide direct facilitation, support and technical assistance to priority Country Teams and regions facing the risk of acute crises, so to enhance their overall preparedness and response capacity;

- Review/refine IASC guidelines for inter-agency contingency planning; propose a mechanism to enhance their adoption and regular use by UNCTs;
- Explore ways to better integrate contingency planning in on-going planning processes (e.g. CAP/CHAP, CCA/UNDAF), as well as in on-going training/orientation processes (e.g. DMTP, OCHA training);
- Explore ways to further enhance links with the NY based FT mechanism as well as other actors;
- When required, foster or support regional approaches to emergency preparedness and contingency planning;
- Support development of better linkages in inter-agency preparedness and contingency planning with support structures/services (e.g. inter-agency common services, ie, UNJLC, HIC, UNHAS);
- Encourage the further institutional strengthening of emergency preparedness and response capacities both within agencies as well as at the collective IASC level.

C. Improved Early Response

Work on enhancing early response capacities will be closely linked to the above, and might include the following:

- Explore ways that will allow IASC partners to benefit from the establishment of a mechanism for IASC hot spots prioritization and enhanced decision making (see above);
- Consider ways to enhance funding for mitigation, preparedness and early response humanitarian activities, including funding to support the TF activities;
- Look into ways and opportunities to enhance the IASC collective capacity to respond to rapid onset natural disasters (lead TF on NatDis)
- Review and update of the NatDis inventory of mandates, roles and mechanisms for response (lead TF on NatDis)
- Look into ways to enhance links and early activation of interagency common services.