

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE – WORKING GROUP
48th MEETING**

13-14 March 2002

at

**WFP Headquarters, Rome
Green Tower, Room 6G19**

UNDAC: Background Paper from OCHA

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The IASC Working Group considered the issue of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system at its LXVIth meeting of 9-10 October 2001. This agenda item had been proposed by several agencies following an earlier briefing by consultants on two reports prepared for OCHA – one known as ‘the UNDAC review’, the other known as ‘the Gujarat study’.

OCHA provided a background paper for the debate in the IASC Working Group. As well as a wide-ranging debate among IASC member agencies, two consultants were asked to speak at the meeting at the request of UNICEF, WFP and WHO. The debate spread over days. It was:

- ◆ Agreed that comments from agencies on the UNDAC review would be sent to IASC Secretariat for collation;
- ◆ Noted that the UNDAC system needed to be more focused, and its operational niche, role and *modus operandi* clarified;
- ◆ Suggested that OCHA reaffirm its management responsibility for the UNDAC system;
- ◆ Agreed in principle that an Advisory Group should be established to broaden participation in the UNDAC system, which should link to the ERC and the IASC Working Group; and the criteria for membership in the Advisory Group be further discussed; and,
- ◆ Agreed in principle that UNDAC be discussed again by the IASC members, either at the next meeting of the Working Group or at an *ad hoc* meeting.

Despite these areas of agreement, the substance and tone of the debate revealed deeply felt differences among participants on several key issues, especially:

- ◆ UNDAC's role in complex emergencies;
- ◆ UNDAC's role in the assessment process;
- ◆ UNDAC's role in the appeals process;
- ◆ The participation of IASC agencies in UNDAC;
- ◆ The governance arrangements for the UNDAC system.

Following the October 2001 meeting, WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF submitted a six-page paper on 'the UNDAC system and the UNDAC review' in which representatives of those agencies made both general comments regarding the UNDAC system and comments on the UNDAC background paper, including its recommendations for action.

Since then, discussions have taken place among some of the concerned agencies, in an effort to find common ground.

On the basis of the foregoing, it is now proposed that the IASC Working Group consider the following draft recommendations for approval:

- ◆ General remarks: UNDAC is a part of OCHA, not an independent organization. Its main role is to provide technical services, under the leadership of the HC/RC, in support of the Country Team. Among the technical services that UNDAC provides, the principal ones are on-site coordination and information management.
- ◆ Complex emergencies: The response to complex emergencies is frequently politically sensitive, and close consultation within the United Nations family is called for. When UNDAC teams are deployed into such environments, it will normally be in the context of OCHA's surge capacity.
- ◆ Assessments: Substantive sectoral assessments will normally be made by the host government, UN agencies or qualified members of the IASC family. UNDAC's role will normally be limited to providing technical support to this process.
- ◆ Reporting and appeals process: UNDAC will not issue appeals, though it will continue to report on needs. UNDAC's reporting will focus not only on the material dimensions of a crisis, but also on the human dimension. Any United Nations appeal will be managed by the HC/RC and the Country Team.

- ◆ Agency participation in UNDAC: IASC agencies will seek to make available a number of staff for training and deployment on UNDAC teams.
- ◆ Governance arrangements: An UNDAC Advisory Board will be established. The Board will provide advice to the Emergency Relief Coordinator on the strategic direction of the UNDAC system. Participating Governments and IASC member agencies will be invited to join the Board, which shall be chaired by OCHA.