

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
ROME, 17 OCTOBER 1997**

**Item 2.1 DPRK: Current Situation and Future of UN Activities in the Democratic
People's Republic of Korea**

1. Background: The humanitarian crisis that the DPRK faces today started with floods in the fall of 1995 which led to the first appeal for international assistance ever to be launched by the DPRK Government. Since then, the country has been further devastated by repeated floods followed by drought, with a significant deterioration in the food supply situation as confirmed by various WFP/FAO assessments. Food aid and other humanitarian assistance were provided aimed at meeting the most immediate needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population. This assistance has helped in bridging the gaps. However, the various assessment missions and international organizations present on the ground confirm that the emergency in the DPRK is complex and a humanitarian disaster affecting the entire population could be unfolding. Structural problems call for a longer-term and more comprehensive response by the international community. These include major interventions to stabilize food production. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates short-term immediate needs and medium and long-term rehabilitation needs is needed.

2. Current situation. The UN system faces a number of constraints in providing assistance to the DPRK which need to be addressed before a viable and common strategy can be developed for responding to the humanitarian situation. In order for the international organizations to continue working in the DPRK, there needs to be a coherent strategy for response and a common approach in dealing with our counterparts. This paper aims at identifying the most immediate of these constraints and proposes a course of action for the IASC-WG to consider.

3. The constraints. Some of these constraints result from Government regulations, while others are brought about by the international community. The IASC-WG needs to establish a common position on what it is willing to accept with respect to Government restrictions and agree on how to avoid those constraints which are self-imposed. The immediate constraints identified are the following:

Government :

- I. lack of transparency
- II. tight control on the movement of UN, NGO, EU staff, the provision/duration of visas;
- III. increased control on the use of communication equipment;
- IV. reluctance/delays to accept minimal staffing levels which are deemed essential by the UN, and a reluctance/delay in acceptance qualified staff to fill even those positions that have already been agreed to;
- V. very limited access to line ministries who would be natural counterparts to un/ngo programmes and operations.
- VI. unwillingness to allow random nutrition surveys and random monitoring;
- VII. unreasonable limitations on duration of staff deployment (i.e. two month visas for regular core staff);
- VIII. reluctance to acknowledge that the humanitarian crisis is caused by anything other than natural disasters thereby impeding discussions on a suitable response strategy;

- IX. lack of capacity in counterpart agency (FORC) leading bottlenecks and serious operational inefficiencies.

International Community:

- X. proliferation of NGOs and donors in the DPRK without a coordinated strategy;
- XI. the lack of a defined humanitarian strategy for responding to the crisis - both by Government and by the international community;
- XII. the lack of defined coordination arrangements allowing the Government to “play one agency/donor against the other”;
- XIII. the absence of a common approach in relating to the Government thereby reducing our influence;
- XIV. poor or non-existent definition (or adherence to) of commonly acceptable standards of monitoring and accountability in international relief operations.

4. For consideration by the IASC-WG.

In light of the current humanitarian crisis and the constraints above, the IASC-WG is invited to consider the following course of action:

- XV. establish a common position on the limits of what the organizations operating in the DPRK are willing to accept with respect to the Government restrictions listed above;
- XVI. determine how to maintain and build on the good-will established with the Government thus far without compromising on the basic principles of humanitarian intervention;
- XVII. determine and establish coordination arrangements; consider terms of engagement/code of conduct for all international agencies and NGOs in the DPRK
- XVIII. agree to the development of a short and medium-term strategy for humanitarian intervention that involves those organizations and donors working in the DPRK under the leadership of the coordinating mechanism (to be identified), including modalities;
- XIX. identify the mechanisms for information sharing between UN, NGO, and bilateral donors (e.g. information on commercial imports/food donations); and information sharing on basic data between agencies and government in order to reach agreed figures the international community can work with.
- XX. all operational agencies in the DPRK, whether resident or not, should agree that no journalists will enter under false pretences and, by adhering to this standard, build government confidence (with a view to eventually bringing in media teams under our own auspices).
- XXI. resident agencies should seek to carry out joint assessment missions (especially to locations where access is difficult) to strengthen cooperation and accountability with government.