

**IASC-WG Meeting
15-16 November 1999**

Note on Colombia

In pursuant to the IASC-WG Colombia recommendations of September 17 1999, please find attached a note on follow-up.

The note is being presented to the IASC-WG for approval.

OCHA
8.11.99

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1. Upon request of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and as suggested by the Inter Agency Standing Committee Working Group, the Senior Advisor on IDPs of OCHA conducted consultations in Bogota/Colombia from October 19 to 23 in order to determine the further course of action in response to the IASC-WG recommendations of September 17, 1999. The consultations included the Resident Coordinator (RC) and the UN Country Team (CT), the ICRC, the Colombian Red Cross and NGOs as well as selected donor representatives.
2. Overall the consultations confirmed that humanitarian coordination in Colombia, with a focus on the problem of internal displacement, should indeed be strengthened without delay. However there was general consensus that the focus on IDPs should not lead to ignoring the need to enhance coordination on wider humanitarian concerns.

A- It was felt that, in order to move humanitarian coordination to a strategic level, as recommended by the IASC-WG, it will be necessary to create wider alliances primarily around issues such as: (a) consolidated information management (database/assessment/monitoring/evaluation), and, (b) linking relief programs with activities aimed at sustainable rehabilitation.

3. Due to the fact that humanitarian work in Colombia often runs the risk of acquiring political dimensions, an added effort must be made to differentiate between the humanitarian and the political spheres. On the one hand, this implies a strengthening of links within the humanitarian community in order to ensure that humanitarian principles are maintained and reinforced. On the other hand, however, this means that ambiguities with regard to the UN's political position in Colombia should be avoided.
4. With regard to possible mechanisms for coordination, a few voices outside the UN System (UNS) spoke in favour of appointing a strong Humanitarian Coordinator, with powers of command and control. This suggests that pressure may build up for establishing separate and vertical structures, should the UN fail to effectively reinforce horizontal links of coordination.

B - However, the large majority of interlocutors warned against establishing unnecessary layers for coordination.

5. The consultations confirmed the importance all UN agencies attach to enhanced coordination on internal displacement. As the humanitarian situation of IDPs is a matter of rising concern, heightened international attention is leading to an increase of

activities on behalf of IDPs. Hence, there is a marked risk of duplication and of an over-emphasis on short-term emergency assistance.

C- During the mission, the following were highlighted as priority functions for co-ordination on internal displacement: (a) enhancing mechanisms within the UNS in Colombia with a view to adopting a unified stance concerning the Government's responsibility for protecting and assisting IDPs, (b) creating links within the UN-CT for concerted programming within an integrated approach from protection to solutions, and, (c) creating links with the larger humanitarian community (ICRC/Colombian Red Cross, NGOs, donors), with a particular focus on ensuring that programs addressing IDP needs remain complementary as they expand.

6. The UNHCR in Bogota enjoys a high degree of credibility within the UNS and beyond. While retaining the overall coordination role, the RC, on the basis of UNHCR's recognised expertise on IDPs, requested UNHCR in Bogota to facilitate coordination on internal displacement. This coordination arrangement, which has been in place for over a year, has been praised by all interlocutors as highly satisfactory, despite constraints due to lack of resources fully dedicated to this role.
7. The consultations on the ground resulted in a broad consensus that high priority should be given to strengthening UNHCR's coordination capacities. It is reasonable to assume that in order to do so effectively, UNHCR will require additional professional staff fully dedicated to facilitating coordination. Accordingly, OCHA has offered its support in seeking funding for, and recruiting, two coordination officers to work in the UNHCR office in Bogota under the responsibility of the Head of UNHCR-Colombia. OCHA's offer was generally welcomed in the consultations.

D – It is proposed that OCHA undertake the necessary steps to provide support to UNHCR in its co-ordination role on issues pertaining to internal displacement, by seeking funds and recruiting staff for two coordination posts.