

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING-GROUP  
XXXX MEETING**

**Rome ~ 17-18 February 2000**

**HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

1. Background

- 1.1. Following the Secretary-General's Reform Programme of 1997, which proposed, *inter alia*, that human rights be integrated into major activities of the UN<sup>1</sup>, the issue of human rights and humanitarian action gained impetus among relevant UN actors, who decided to further examine the matter.
- 1.2. In June 1998, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) prepared two working papers on "Humanitarian Action and Human Rights" for review by the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).
- 1.3. Based on this review, the IASC Working Group established a *Reference- or Sub-Working Group on Humanitarian Action and Human Rights*, composed of ICRC, ICVA, OCHA, OHCHR, UNICEF and UNHCR<sup>2</sup>, which was tasked to design projects that would enhance the integration of human rights into humanitarian action.

2. Activities

- 2.1. The Reference Group held its first consultative meeting on an Action Plan in Geneva on 25 June 1998, and has subsequently convened four times as follows:  
  
27 January 1999 (Geneva);  
5 April 1999 (New York);  
19 October 1999 (New York); and  
15 February 2000 (Geneva).
- 2.2. A number of projects have been designed by the Reference Group, which are aimed at assisting humanitarian personnel to operate effectively in environments where civilians are subjected to breaches of International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law<sup>3</sup>. When these projects have been completed (end of 2000), the Reference Group will be dissolved.

<sup>1</sup> Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform (A/51/950), Part I, Section B, Paragraphs 78-79.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR joined the Reference Group in January 1999.

<sup>3</sup> The Reference Group commissioned an external consultant to prepare a paper on the relation between International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law. However, the consultant unexpectedly cancelled his consultancy in March 1999. In view of the extensive existing material on the subject, the Reference Group agreed in its meeting in April, 1999, not to further pursue this project.

- **Production of training modules on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law for Relief Personnel.**
- 2.3. This project has been completed; OHCHR has produced a handbook on human rights for UN staff, which is being issued by OHCHR together with the Turin Staff College. The handbook will be used as a part of the training package for humanitarian personnel.
- **Development of Field Practices in International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law.**
- 2.4. A major project of the Reference Group on Humanitarian Action and Human Rights is the "Development of Field Practices in International Humanitarian, Human Rights and Refugee Law for use by humanitarian personnel". OCHA and UNICEF are currently working with an external consultant, visiting Kosovo, the FRY (completed), Sierra Leone (completed), Afghanistan (March) and Sudan (April) for this purpose. The first draft is expected to be completed by mid-2000.
- **Follow-Up to relevant recommendations in the Secretary-General's Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (S/1999/957) of 8 September 1999.**
- 2.5. In December 1999, the *ad hoc* Working Group on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict referred to the Reference Group - as the most appropriate existing mechanism - a set of recommendations of the SG's report relating to Accountability for War Crimes and Gaps in International Law, including<sup>4</sup>:
- Ratification of the ICC Statute (#1);
  - Compliance with requests of the two ad-hoc tribunals (#3);
  - Development of mechanisms to prosecute war-criminals at national level (#5);
  - Promotion of national legislation (#6);
  - Promotion of the IDP Guiding Principles (#7),
  - Support the proposal to raise the minimum age for recruitment to 18 (8);
  - Compliance by non-state actors (#9); and
  - Ratification of the 1994 Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel (#10).
- 2.6. The Reference Group is expected to report on progress made to the *ad hoc* Working Group in March in the form of inputs to the SG's speech to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in April, 2000, and later in the year in the form of contributions to a formal report of the SG to the Security Council.
3. Recommendation
- 3.1. The IASC WG is asked to take note of this report and approve the continuation of the Reference Group until the end of 2000.

New York - 3 February 2000

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<sup>4</sup> The referral of these recommendations to the Reference Group was endorsed by ECHA on 1 February, 2000.