

**INTER AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
XLIII MEETING**

Geneva, 14-15 November 2000

Discussion Paper on the ECOSOC Humanitarian Segment for the IASC-WG

Background:

The Secretary-General's annual report to the GA on the strengthening of coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations is rooted in GA/RES/46/182 (1991), which, apart from establishing the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), also requested the SG to report annually to the GA on humanitarian assistance. These reports have been submitted to the GA through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Until 1997 ECOSOC considered these reports under its coordination segment. In 1998, as a consequence of the SG's reform report, a separate "humanitarian segment" was introduced, lasting for two days. The first two humanitarian segments, in 1998 in New York, and 1999 in Geneva, set a trend of two unrelated sets of activities: (1) panel discussions and speeches by delegations in plenary, and (2) negotiations on "Agreed Conclusions", based on inputs submitted by member states, sometimes with only tenuous connection either to the report of the SG or the theme of the segment.

In 1999 the negotiations over the Agreed Conclusions were long and difficult, mainly owing to differences between the EU and the G77 over issues loosely related to "sovereignty", such as the role of host governments in initiating or approving requests for humanitarian assistance.

The 2000 Session:

In 2000, the problems began to appear as early as the stage in which the theme was formulated. It was evident that the inclusion of the issue of "displaced persons" as part of the theme, as advocated by the donor group, was agreed to despite vigorous resistance from G-77 members, who had advocated for a focus on natural disasters. The difficulties inherent in the theme's formulation were to emerge during the negotiations of the agreed conclusions, where some G-77 members reminded the donors that, since they had insisted on including the IDP issue, problems related to the agreed conclusions were inevitable.

The selection of the theme also served to re-ignite the larger debate on sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, stimulated by the SG's speech to the GA in September 1999, as some G-77 members sought to condition the provision of humanitarian assistance on the sovereign will of the state. The wide division between member states was illustrated

by the fact that despite the continuous extension of the time foreseen for the informal consultations, the great majority of the paragraphs contained in the draft text were never agreed upon.

The IASC policy on IDPs and the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement” were both sources of contention by G-77, some of whom contended that IASC policies should be submitted to the GA for prior approval, and that the Guiding Principles should have been endorsed by an intergovernmental body before being disseminated.

The 2001 Segment:

The format

The present format of the plenary (one day of panels with RCs, HCs and experts from agency HQs, and one day of general debate) seems to be widely appreciated. There have been no serious calls for change. It is recommended that member states be encouraged to leave this aspect of the segment unchanged. In addition, the organisation of informal briefings prior to, and during, the segment itself was widely appreciated. Such briefings could begin early in the new year.

The theme

It has been suggested by some that the theme for the 2001 humanitarian segment deal with the issue of women in armed conflict. However, recent experience suggests that there may be difficulties in reaching agreement on this. The Third Committee in November 2000 was not able to reach a consensus on a resolution entitled “working towards the elimination of crimes against women committed in the name of honour”. The main reason for this was apparently the presentation of a film on the subject introduced by the Netherlands, which some member states believed associated crimes against women with Islam.

The issue of children in armed conflict has also been discussed informally as a possible theme for the 2001 segment. However, this issue is already being covered by various other intergovernmental forums during 2000.

It may be worth suggesting to member states that the designation of a theme for the segment is in fact unnecessary. Resolution 46/182 required the ERC to report annually on behalf of the SG. The report is expected to focus on the coordination aspects of humanitarian affairs, including the work of OCHA, as well as system-wide policy issues and the work of the IASC. Therefore, as long as the report covers those activities aimed at strengthening humanitarian assistance, and contains recommendations, the focus of the agreed conclusions, if any, should be on the report’s recommendations.

The agreed conclusions

Having said this, consideration could also be given to the idea that ECOSOC does not need to reach agreed conclusions every year on the issue of the coordination of humanitarian assistance. There is a strong body of legislation guiding us already, and no strong pressures to amend it. In this case, the segment could be concluded with the issuance of a Chairman's Summary, which would not need to be agreed by member states.