

**Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group (IASCWG) on
Emergency Conditions in the New Independent Countries (NIS)**

**Thursday, 14 January 1993 at 10:00 am
Palais des Nations, Room X**

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ch. Lamunière, Director and Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs. The agenda and list of participants are attached (Annex I and Annex II).

In opening the meeting, the Chairman welcomed the participants and noted that the meeting was intended to help prepare the agenda for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Meeting of 3 February 1993, one item of which would be the situation in NIS countries and how the UN might best respond to the humanitarian needs developing therein. The present meeting was to focus on structural issues rather than activities. The Chairman then outlined some of the main issues at stake, as seen by DHA. (DHA paper attached as Annex III.)

FAO Representative, Mr. Purcell, remarked that the Tokyo Conference on Assistance to the NIS had created a Coordinating Mechanism in New York with which there should be no overlapping.

The Chairman asked that the discussion concentrate on United Nations (UN) humanitarian intervention.

WFP Representative, Mr. Szynaiski, requested that the UN should determine its position regarding humanitarian assistance in the NIS as compared to that in other countries. General policy guidelines are needed from DHA as to why and when emergency assistance should be recommended, and what should be the trigger factors. Criteria such as the standard of living or level of social distress might be applied.

IFRC Representative, Mr. Davey, queried whether it would be useful to think in NIS-wide terms. In many respects this is useful e.g. as regards the situation of drug availability. Other situations are country-specific. These include the refugee emergencies.

UNDP Representative, Mr. Olesen, suggested that the IASCWG concentrate on emergency issues. UNDP helps establish unified UN offices in NIS on request of the Secretary-General. He stressed the necessity for the UN to concentrate on areas where we have comparative advantages. There is only limited interest from the World Bank, the European Bank and EC to allocate funds for development in NIS.

UNHCR Representative, Mr. Morris, noted that UNHCR's mandate is a very clear one based on effective displacements. UNHCR intends to do short-term interventions hoping that other agencies can then take over. The root causes, however, need to be addressed and this requires a concerted UN policy involving the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peace Keeping Operations. Humanitarian relief cannot be a substitute for political actions. Referring to the Chairman's statement, Mr. Morris said that UNHCR does not yet have a position regarding an inter-agency task force or similar arrangements to deal systematically with NIS issues, but will consider this idea.

Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response Representative, Mr. Rossborough, said that even though a lot of aid had been channeled through NGOs to the NIS, an enormous gap still exists between needs and available resources. It is therefore essential to define priorities. He mentioned that the NGO opinion is that the

prevalence in NIS of conflicts with numerous human rights issues made the UNHCR well qualified to be a lead agency. Other sources of trouble were industrial and nuclear pollution and general poverty, the effects of which are critical every winter. He also stressed the importance of identifying national partners for the relief work to avoid being bogged down by the large-scale need for interventions. External assistance is required to give technical advice on how to identify those most in need.

UNICEF representative, Mr. Mohan, said that each NIS had its own characteristics. UNICEF, which led missions a year ago to 14 NIS, found that 7 countries needed assistance based on the same criteria as used in other parts of the world. The share of UNICEF resources for NIS is very small - only approaching one percent of the total resources used globally. UNICEF, which has noted an increased interest for NIS among donors, feels that they have to intervene in more countries and wishes to do so jointly with other agencies.

ICRC representative, Mr. Bornet, pointed out that his organization's mandate is clear (conflict victims), which has allowed it to enter the NIS much more readily. It, however, faces the same constraints: a lack of past experience, complicated security situations and the breakdown of the Soviet logistical systems. He stressed that in view of the above, it was extremely difficult to set up an alternative operational base in many of the NIS countries.

The Representative of DHA, New York, Mr. Robson, described the Secretary-General's recognition of the need for humanitarian assistance in parallel with the peace making efforts in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, but had strongly suggested, initially, that the humanitarian assistance be provided by regional organizations, such as the CSCE and EC. This regional assistance, however, never materialized, and the UN therefore had to reconsider its position. Provision of fuel is a major problem in several complex emergencies like Tajikistan and Armenia but he wondered whether fuel can be a humanitarian concern. .

The Chairman remarked that if donors had not responded bilaterally or via their regional organizations, why would they respond via the UN system? This point had to be clarified through consultation. He called for the focus to be on acute crises and the need for integrated, well planned intervention. The definition of indicators for intervention will need additional consideration and he invited the participants to comment on this issue. Moreover, in several countries, urgent intervention in the form of "prevention" assistance was required to help such countries avoid slipping into acute crisis.

WFP Representative, Mr. Szynaiski, referred to Mr. Robson's query on whether fuel is a humanitarian problem and reminded the meeting that the UN does provide fuel in northern Iraq and therefore could not see any principal problem in providing fuel in the NIS. As regards indicators for intervention he mentioned that in the case of Armenia WFP had found that one such indicator could be based on the level of economic stress among vulnerable groups which have experienced drastic price increases not accompanied by simultaneous increases in pensions or other family resources. Another indicator could be to establish the general level of poverty among different groups. The establishment of such criteria would be a task for DHA. He further enquired whether the CERF had been utilized for activities in the NIS.

The Chairman replied that the CERF had so far not been used in NIS as such funds could only be used in relation to consolidated appeals and the first appeals for NIS had only recently been launched.

IFRC Representative, Mr. Davey, agreed on the fact that there were still many difficulties encountered in establishing delegations but added that it was not an argument against intervention, He foresaw the necessity

for growing involvement. The fact that we are dealing with new types of emergencies calls for a new set of criteria and modalities for assistance, but some work has been done by UNICEF, and others, through their missions which can be built upon. He queried whether the response should be donor-driven and speculated on the possibility that the donor relief authorities were not yet structured to deal with emergencies in the NIS. Proper information by the UN for donors could however help provide better responses.

UNDP Representative, Mr. Olesen, underlined that the country offices were not headed by UNDP or UN-DPI but by UN Representatives and could therefore assist in humanitarian relief operations.

UNICEF Deputy Director of Emergencies, Dr. Bassani, was of the opinion that the question of UN presence is fundamental. Due to the independence of institutions such as the World Bank it is important to emphasize integration and the pooling of information.

WFP Representative, Mr. Szynalski, disagreed. UN offices were not required to assess the needs. Depending on the decisions to go in with assistance the necessary structure of UN presence would follow.

The UNICEF Representatives highlighted that it will be difficult to carry out assessment missions without some local implantation. Furthermore, it was noted that it would reassure the donors to know that a structure was already in place to effectively utilize their contributions.

The Chairman, on the issue of assessments and the basis for intervention, suggested that DHA would initiate consultations with agencies to pursue this further. He stressed that the pooling of information and development of strategic thinking should take place immediately and in parallel.

WFP Representative, Mr. Szynalski, added **that**, if the UN devised good modalities for comparing emergency situations of different types and in different areas, donors could more readily allocate resources. He remarked that, whether we liked it or not, we were resource driven to a considerable degree, and have to make strong cases for emergencies like that in Tajikistan showing that this situation is at least as serious as in other countries where we intervene.

UNHCR Representative, Mr. Morris, remarked that defining criteria should be done jointly by the agencies. In doing so, however, we should not forget that decisive political action by the UN at an early stage would help reduce the fire brigade type of humanitarian aid.

UNDP Representative, Mr. Olesen, reminded that the UN has a mandate to be in the NIS. The fundamental criteria for the agencies with mandates in humanitarian assistance is to intervene where conflicts occur. The wider problems should be left to other bodies.

The Chairman stressed the need for systematic information gathering and dissemination in the NIS. We have to find ways to seek and process data.

Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response Representative, Mr. Rossborough, said that a fair deal of information has already been gathered. The NGOs are willing to make further information available.

IOM Representative, Mr. Wittiesey, remarked on the importance for his agency of being involved in the DHA discussions, and in the interest of IOM in participating in assessment missions.

The Chairman then raised the issue of UN regional approaches for transport, coordination and other activities which could benefit from such approaches for efficiency and resource saving reasons.

WFP Representative, Mr. Szynalski, narrowed the discussion on the regional approaches to the Caucasus region where the most important factor is not high transport costs, but agreement for transit/access. Movement of food there remains less costly than in other emergency areas like in Southern Sudan. Tajikistan presents a security problem for access.

Mr. Robson reminded the group of the USG's concern of the overall responsibility for support to displaced persons which i.a. is a very pertinent problem in the Caucasus.

WFP Representative, Mr. Szynalski, emphasized the need to go from the present general discussion to the preparation of an agenda and a position paper for the IASC. The position paper should present options for the Heads of Agencies to decide on. Mr. Szynalski suggested that DHA provide a first draft which could then be referred to the agencies for further elaboration. The Chairman agreed.

The Chairman added under the "other business" item, that he was still expecting comments from certain agencies on the report of the Inter-Agency Technical Consultations which took place in Geneva in November. He also informed that DHA had further developed WFP's paper on the question of security of access for humanitarian agencies in situations of conflict. The next step was to identify a consultant to work out a document on the matter for the IASC. He finally reminded the group of the long standing issue that agencies have to take responsibility for assisting internally displaced persons. It would be coming to the fore very soon.

The Chairman then closed the meeting.

Annex III

DHA PAPER

6th Inter-agency Standing Committee Working Group Meeting on Humanitarian Needs in the New Independent States (NIS) and a possible United Nations Response Thereto

Thank you for the excellent papers that you have prepared for this meeting. Their overall message is clear: the international community wants to see a coherent response to the grave humanitarian crises facing at least four of the fifteen New Independent States.

Today's meeting should focus upon the major issues that you have raised in your submissions -- not to provide definitive answers -- but to agree on ways to address them which we can recommend to our respective agency heads.

As we all agree, the NIS present us with a set of challenges that most striking are the "unknowns". First of all, there is little or no past UN field experience in these countries. Many of us, when we compare our knowledge about south-east Asia or various parts of Africa, are not familiar with standards of living or the nature of poverty in most of the NIS. As a result, we are not clear as to what we could call a relief "norm and approach" for this part of the world.

Secondly, we are not clear about the attitude of the international community and more specifically that of potential donors towards major UN humanitarian involvement in these countries. This is an "unknown" to which we must seek answers promptly.

Thirdly, the NIS presents us with the unusual situation of having to deal with countries that are not inherently poor, overpopulated or devoid of significant natural resources. Except for Tajikistan and a few other Central Asian Countries, the remainder of the NIS can be regarded as relatively developed, economically speaking, when compared to most of the countries which we normally assist.

As mentioned above, one of the main challenges posed by the NIS is that throughout most of the region, a UN structure is virtually non-existent. Some agencies and programmes have begun to establish a presence in some of these most of what might be regarded as the "disaster-prone" world, the UN's current "bridgeheads" in the NIS is slim at best. The facts impacts upon what we know about, as well as what we can do throughout the region.

So far, I have referred to the NIS as a defined entity. However, in terms of humanitarian assistance and indeed development requirements, it is evident that there are significant differences amongst them and that the problems of each country must be approached separately, even though the NIS share a number of very important constraints, notably that no effective economic transition has affected the different states in different ways, it has resulted throughout most of the NIS in a process of pauperization that has generated extreme hardship. Moreover, as we are well aware, the breakdown in centralized political control has led to a resurgence of ethnic and religious rivalries that have put the lives of hundreds of thousands in direct jeopardy, and more often than not has compounded the crises generated by plummeting economies.

From the point of view of a United Nations response to these humanitarian requirements, the conditions that are creating these crises are the very ones that are or will inhibit the provision of humanitarian relief, hence, that directly affect the operations of DHA and the UN agencies, ICRC and NGO representatives gathered here today.

We cannot deal with all the crises facing the NIS, but we can focus our attention, expertise and relative advantages on those areas where we have a clear role and mandate. In broad terms, in the context of this meeting, this response appears to have to broad dimensions:

Looking first at the medium term, it is clear that in most instances, the answer to the difficulties facing the NIS will result from a concerted effort to enhance the economics of the NIS. It is encouraging that UNDP, along with the Bretton Woods institution, the EC and various OECD countries, have already embarked upon this course of action.

While it seems, at this stage, that few of us can have little direct impact upon the economic development of the NIS, we should play a clear

advocacy role to promote the importance and urgency of development initiatives throughout the region. This advocacy would correspond to a vital form of "disaster prevention", since if there is not a clear response to the economic needs of most of the individual states, the greater will be likelihood that each may eventually present the international community with a serious and costly emergency.

Turning to the immediate concern of responding to existing emergencies which is the main concern of this meeting, it seems clear that the UN response should be adaptive, i.e. commensurate with the type and complexity of the crisis at hand.

I believe that for serve conflict-driven humanitarian crises, DHA should work closely with the agencies concerned, as well as consult, as required, with the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peace-Keeping to ensure that the full weight of the United Nations system is exerted not only to facilitate access to those in need, but also to help deal with the root causes of such crises. On the other hand, small scale or mono-sectoral emergencies should be handled directly by the agencies concerned or by inter-governmental or bilateral donors interested in providing support.

Yet, whatever steps we take, we must confront the unknowns. We must rapidly build up our knowledge and our data base. We can only do this if once again we act in concert. Therefore, I would propose we should consider the viability of establishing as soon as possible, an inter-agency Task Force or similar body, that would meet regularly and have the following broad functions:

- the pooling of information on developments in the NIS, as well as on activities, resources and personnel that are presently available to respond to the crises at hand;
- based on the above, carry out a crises monitoring role in order to help us anticipate trends in present as well as future crises in the region;
- serve as a forum for planning activities relating to the above. Such planning activities would necessarily have to incorporated decisions about assessment missions, types of appeals as well as resource mobilization and monitoring activities.

To facilitate the efforts of this proposed Task Force, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs could set up a small-scale support unit within DHA-Geneva, as in the case of DESA and SEPHA. The unit could also serve as a secretariat to the Task Force.

The situation that faces the international community in the New Independent States is fraught with uncertainty; the UN's determination to promote a coherent and collaborative response to the crises that may face the peoples of the NIS should not. I have tried to outline some of the broad operational options that we could consider today. These as well as your own proposals should be reviewed to form the basis of recommendations

that, once implemented, will underscore the UN's firm humanitarian commitment to the New Independent States.