INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

PRINCIPALS MEETING

**Summary Record**

**6 December 2016**

**Co-host: UNHCR and UNICEF**

**Session 1: Operations: Opportunities and Challenges**

Discussion focused on the IASC’s role and relevance in an evolving, and increasingly complex operating environment. Building on an initial conversation during dinner on 5 December, Principals highlighted both the challenges and opportunities of this transitional time, marked by changes in the political landscape, new social dynamics, the continued rise in populism, xenophobia and violent extremism, increased fragility, growing humanitarian needs, attacks on aid workers and vital facilities and infrastructure, and constraints to access and delivery. Concurrently, with reduced financial resources, humanitarian actors face increased donor demands to see the value and impact of what they spend, as well as donor scrutiny on fulfillment of Grand Bargain commitments.

Principals reaffirmed the unique nature and added value of the IASC within the humanitarian ecosystem, as bringing together key humanitarian actors, based on shared values and principles, and as a platform for learning, advocating, supporting and inspiring individual and collective action. At the same time, while referencing the positive outcome of Humanitarian Reform (2006) and the Transformative Agenda (2010), the need for further change was emphasized, including to address persistent institutional factors, such as competition for resources, agency interests, policy incoherence. Proliferating and heavy structures at different levels were noted and, in this context, one Principal suggested rationalizing the cluster system. All of these factors impact on the IASC’s working practices and efficiency.

Principals reiterated the need, particularly following the World Humanitarian Summit and faced with growing frustration from some NGO partners, to reach out and engage differently with a wide array of actors, and across traditional silos. The IASC must balance the challenges of manageable membership, with enhanced inclusivity, and ensure that the IASC response is demand-driven, is proximate to and informed by the actual needs of vulnerable populations. It must strengthen its communication to and partnerships with, *inter alia*, the private sector, regional networks and Member States, connect with youth, faith-based communities, religious leaders as well as local and civil societies, and with specific groups most affected, including IDPs, women and girls.

Such engagement, and clarity on the values and principles of the IASC can also enable strategic dialogue with key stakeholders. Many participants underscored the need to ‘stand our ground on principled humanitarian action, common norms and laws’, and use advocacy and the collective power of the IASC on behalf of the people it serves to reaffirm their rights, reinforce IHL, and protect humanitarian staff in the field. This can mean difficult conversations with both donors and Member States, striking the right balance of courage, assertiveness and dialogue.

Principals requested that an IASC Principals ‘Retreat’ takes place, enabling frank discussion of key changes to be made, and testing propositions of how this might be achieved. They welcomed the potential to engage with the incoming Secretary-General on the role of the IASC, and to reinforce advocacy, operating space and delivery.

**The IASC Principals agreed to:**

* *Convene a Principals-only Retreat to explore propositions on how the IASC can ensure its continued relevance, including through refined working practice, enhanced advocacy and communication, increased engagement at regional, national and local levels and outreach to the diverse humanitarian eco-system.* ***Action by:******the Emergency Relief Coordinator, supported by the IASC secretariat, by end July 2017.***
* *Identify key thematic areas of collective advocacy at all IASC meetings as a standard practice.* ***Action by: Emergency Relief Coordinator and IASC Principals***
* *Continue engagement with the SG Designate on his support for IASC functionality, action and advocacy.* ***Action by: Emergency Relief Coordinator and IASC Principals***

**Session 2: Safety and Security: Creating an Enabling and Conducive Environment for Humanitarian Assistance**

In December 2015, Principals suggested further dialogue with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) on how to best ensure an enabling and conducive environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Leading the discussion, Under-Secretary-General UNDSS, Peter Drennan, outlined the increasingly hostile global security environment, multi-faceted security threats, and the challenges this poses to on-going efforts to create a ‘permissive security space’ within which humanitarian staff can effectively operate.

USG Drennan highlighted that, since 2010, attacks against the humanitarian community have risen exponentially, yet expectations of humanitarian presence, accountability and delivery remain high. He reinforced the strategic value of programme criticality exercises and enhanced risk analysis, and suggested that better security management should be regarded as an enabler of humanitarian operations, rather than an impediment, and the role of UNDSS in this regard. He called for security dimensions and costs to be better integrated throughout humanitarian programme conceptualization and planning.

Given this security environment, Principals agreed the need to improve analysis and strategic discussion, at global and country HCT level, of both risk and of the actual capacity to respond when humanitarians are under attack, particularly if this is limited. They called for enhanced communication, transparency and information-flow on security concerns and security management processes, within and between both UN and NGO humanitarian communities. Supporting this, Principals underscored the importance of appropriate UNDSS staff profiles in the field.

The benefit for increased outreach to other actors with more nuanced understanding of different contexts, whether from the UN (such as the Department of Political Affairs), or local actors on the ground, was also highlighted, and it was recognized that humanitarian actors must continue to explore a range of working modalities, including leveraging communication with of local communities and different actors, without transferring risk, and balancing between a security culture and delivery culture. Consideration needs also to be made on how to prioritize programmes to create permissive security space.

**The IASC Principals agreed to:**

* *UNDSS to ensure availability of the right UNDSS staff profiles, relevant to the context, and to clarify accountabilities and ensure performance management.* ***Action by: UNDSS***
* *Strengthen the analysis of risks and capacity to respond, including proactive sharing of information and engagement of relevant stakeholders in analysis, and to better integrate security dimensions in programme conceptualization and planning.* ***Action by: IASC Principals;***

**Session 3: El Niño/La Niña events: Perspectives for a new way of working**

In his introductory remarks, the Chair noted that El Niño/La Niña events had been an initial test to 'the New Way Working’, which was signed by many at the World Humanitarian Summit. He referenced the October 2016 Joint Workshop on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, co-organized by UNWGT and IASC Task Team on Strengthening the Humanitarian/Development Nexus with a focus on protracted contexts.

The presentation by Special Envoy for El Niño and Climate, Ms. Mary Robinson, of the work by the Special Envoy, including on a ‘Blueprint for Action’ in El Nino contexts, highlighted areas for continued support and advocacy on El Nino preparedness and response, as well as valuable lessons for the IASC in taking forward commitments on the ‘New Way of Working’, recognizing that its application must be context-specific[[1]](#footnote-1).

Expressing her appreciation for the support to the initiative, Ms. Robinson reflected the Envoys’ work with Governments and other actors in eight countries, and how she had used the opportunity to provide advice on building the resilience of communities. She noted the need for stakeholders, including donors, to work ‘horizontally’, out of traditional humanitarian-development or sectoral silos, and with a wider range of actors: from the World Bank, to national Governments and the private sector. The Envoys anticipate piloting the ‘Blueprint’ from early April 2017, and are already engaging with a number of countries on this, including Ethiopia, Mozambique, Honduras, Palau, Zimbabwe, Timor Leste, and Botswana. National leadership and ownership will be a key component for success.

The discussion reinforced the need for ‘bottom-up’ approaches, as well as early and enhanced engagement by RC/HCs, HCTs and with national actors and civil society to ensure a coherent approach which draws on the comparative advantage and experience of all stakeholders and affected groups, including women and girls. The importance of sound analysis was emphasized and, in relation to the on-going development of Standard Operating Procedures for response in El Nino contexts, Principals agreed that both preparedness and early action is essential to mitigate possible El Nino impacts, and could prevent full-scale humanitarian crisis.

Principals expressed broad support for the ‘Blueprint for Action’, agreeing the importance of ensuring use of, and links to, existing frameworks and tools, including the Sustainable Development Goals, The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change, as well as ensuring consistency within and across existing IASC policies on disaster response and resilience. Increasing engagement with, and alignment to, the UN Secretary-General’s ‘Climate Resilience Initiative A2R – Anticipate, Absorb, Reshape’ was proposed as a concrete way to take forward both the ‘Blueprint’ and new linkages and ways of doing business.

**The IASC Principals agreed to:**

* *Support use of the ‘Blueprint for Action’ in relevant contexts.* ***Action by: IASC Principals through 2016/2017.***
* *Consult and agree on Inter-Agency Standard Operating Procedures to guide early action by development and humanitarian actors to future El Nino and La Nina episodes and ensure that these are aligned with, and relevant elements are integrated in or supplement, existing IASC guidance.* ***Action by:******OCHA to submit draft SoPs to IASC Working Group for consideration and recommendation, prior to submitting to IASC Principals for endorsement (2017).***
* *Maintain momentum in collectively taking forward the ‘New Way of Working’, including through support, as appropriate, to the Secretary-General’s A2R Initiative for Climate Resilience.* ***Action by: IASC Principals (2017) and*** *the IASC Task Team on Strengthening the Humanitarian/Development Nexus with a focus on protracted contexts.*

**Session 4: Strengthening the Credibility of Humanitarian Planning and Appeals**

On 5 December, the launch of the Global Humanitarian Appeal sought over US$22.2 billion to meet the needs of the most vulnerable 92.8 million. In light of donor scrutiny on the credibility of humanitarian planning and appeals, resource constraints and Grand Bargain commitments, Mr. Dominque Burgeon, Director, Emergency and Rehabilitation Division, FAO, presented on the on-going efforts to ensure that HCTs present evidence-based, consistent and credible response plans. He shared findings and recommendations from the IASC Costing Sub-Group, tasked by Principals in December 2015 to develop proposals to improve costing methodologies.

Noting long-standing issues of how humanitarian actors measure and understand humanitarian needs, use this to inform planning, budgeting and financing, and reflect what has been achieved with donor funding, Mr. Burgeon recalled improvements brought by new humanitarian programme cycle methods and tools. There are remaining issues, however, on defining and comparing severity of needs, reaching agreed ‘big numbers’ of affected people, and as different drivers and incentives affect needs analysis and related costing. He sought feedback on the proposed ‘roadmap’ to increase credible and transparent ways of costing as one means to bring greater transparency and accountability.

Principals appreciated the work of the -Sub-Group, commended the consultants on their review, agreed the need to improve costing methodologies, and welcomed the analysis and next steps outlined in the consultants’ report. Concern was expressed, however, that the ‘roadmap’ presented to Principals was overly heavy, that the proposed ‘piloting’ might burden the field, and suggested starting with a ‘table-top’ simulation exercise to test options. Principals cautioned on over-centralisation or over-standardisation, and stressed that costing methodologies should be able to deliver the results needed, take into account intangible work in areas such as protection and early recovery, with flexible approaches also being key to both contextualize and promote the localization agenda. An emphasis was placed on ‘outcome’ over ‘activity’ costing, and a request was made to ensure a light, incremental approach, reflecting further field analysis, in moving forward.

At the same time, Principals underscored the importance of tackling the broader issues of the strategic and human costs of underfunding, lack of donor trust, and the need to continue exploration of alternative costing methods, and maintain momentum in all efforts to reinforce transparency and accountability for the system itself in line with the Grand Bargain commitments, and not only in response to donor demands.

**The IASC Principals agreed:**

* *That the IASC Costing Sub-Group should continue its work, under the direction of the Principals, but with expanded expert participation (as noted in the Roadmap) to include budget/finance experts as well as staff with hands-on experience of developing response plans at the country level.* ***Action by:******the IASC Costing Sub-Group, until end June 2017.***
* *That the IASC Costing Sub-Group explores future options for a light, incremental approach, building on field analysis and lessons learned from current and previous costing approaches, and testing of different methodologies initially through a table-top simulation exercise.* ***Action by:******the IASC Costing Sub-Group by end June 2017.***
* *To explore opportunities for further strategic conversation with donors on enhancing credibility and accountability, and increasing funding. Discussion on building credibility will be included as an agenda item in the proposed Principals retreat to inform this engagement with donors.* ***Action by: the Emergency Relief Coordinator by end May 2017.***

**Session 5: Humanitarian System-wide Activation for Infectious Hazards**

Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization, reminded participants of the context and lessons from the Ebola response in 2016 and the High Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crisis that had prompted the decision at the Principals Meeting held in June to develop Standard Operating Procedures for infectious hazards. The SOPs, now endorsed, provide guidance with respect to an effective collective response in the event of future outbreaks.

The SoPs ensure appropriate procedures are in place and reflect the critical link between the IASC mechanisms and WHO responsibilities under International Health Regulations. Dr. Chan graphically highlighted the factors impacting on responses, emphasizing the importance of timely communication, of work to contain an outbreak at an early stage, and in ensuring resilient health mechanism, systems, and structures are in place in close coordination with national actors. The discussion highlighted the need to ensure health preparedness, logistic capacity, possible stockpiling, and appropriate disbursement of funding, including from CERF, to actors on the ground. Acknowledgement of the potential severity of an outbreak is essential, as well as engagement with national and local actors, including female leaders, who can support response. The high probability of outbreaks in fragile contexts, alongside a natural disaster, or within an emergency, was highlighted.

While noting the successful response to multiple, varied outbreaks every year in different contexts, Dr. Chan informed the participants of ongoing WHO initiatives to enhance its own ability to respond quickly and effectively to major, complex outbreaks. These include strengthening its own logistical capacity, setting up a contingency fund to ensure immediate availability of resources, as well as on-going work with other actors, such as UNICEF on polio. A simulation exercise was proposed to test this new ‘IASC plus’ response, as outlined in the new procedures.

**The IASC Principals agreed:**

* *To reconfirm endorsement of the L3 protocol on “Activation Procedures for Infectious Disease Events”.*
* *To engage in a simulation exercise, based on the protocol, in the first half of 2017.* ***Action by:******WHO, in liaison with the IASC secretariat, to convene a small inter-agency task team to plan and implement a simulation exercise by end July 2017****.*

**Session 6: Discrimination and abuse of female aid workers in the workplace**

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator, presented results and recommendations arising from the Humanitarian Women’s Network Survey (HWN) of some 1,000 UN and NGO field workers from across 70 Organizations on their experience with sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace.

The survey revealed widespread sexual harassment, spanning from explicit sexual comments, to sexual assault and rape. Over half of all harassment or physical aggressions were committed by a supervisor, and the majority of the respondents reported limited support from their respective Organization or efforts to make them feel safe. 69% of the affected women did not report incidents because of a fear of professional consequences, lack of trust in the system or an absence of a mechanism to report.

Principals expressed their shock and serious concern at these findings, and agreed the need for immediate action to reinforce the duty of care to all staff, change workplace culture, and to create an environment that holds perpetrators to account, and supports staff affected. Such abuse impacts upon the essential well-being of staff, as well as the reputation and credibility of the humanitarian community itself. It reflects broader issues on gender discrimination and empowerment. Principals stressed the need for action and a clear collective statement on this to help drive the necessary culture change. It was agreed that HC and HCT support would reinforce this messaging within the system at field level. Principals endorsed proposals to ensure full attention and momentum by appointing a ‘champion’ to take this issue forward, to convene a senior-level task team to conduct a more extensive survey to systematically analyze who is affected and how and the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms, and reinforce agency governance and support. Principals highlighted opportunities to learn from individual agency and collective work to date on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and internal governance mechanisms, and to maintain vital linkages with on-going PSEA initiatives, including in preventing the rehire of perpetrators.

**The IASC Principals agreed:**

* *To confirm the appointment of Ms. Kate Gilmore, OHCHR, and Lindsey Coates, InterAction, as Co-Champions, and request Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, to remain engaged on the issue.*
* *To ensure senior-level participation through the appointment of agency-specific senior focal points, to be convened by the Co-Champions, to take forward a system-wide survey, providing more systematic and deeper analysis, to inform an appropriate ‘road-map’ of action.* ***Action by: IASC Principals and Co-Champions by end June 2017.***
* *To ask Humanitarian Coordinators and Humanitarian Country Teams to raise awareness and reaffirm zero tolerance on this issue, inform on governance structure and support available, with all staff at country level.* ***Action by: Emergency Relief Coordinator, with IASC Co-Champions, to send a message to all HCs and HCTs****.*
* *Issue an IASC Principals’ statement, expressing ‘zero tolerance’ for such actions, and commitment to reinforce governance and support for those affected.* ***Action by: Emergency Relief Coordinator to develop a Statement in consultation with Co-Champions and IASC Principals****.*

**Session 7: Any Other Business and Chair’s Closing Remarks**

In closing discussions on some country operations, the Chair called for further scale-up of capacity on the ground for the humanitarian response in **Nigeria**. He noted the on-going IASC Emergency Directors’ mission to the Nigeria and Central African Republic, and welcomed the upcoming mission by the High Commissioner for Refugees to the Lake Chad region. Concern was raised on the escalating situation in **South Sudan**, and the potential for genocide there, on drought in **Somalia**, and the related situation of Somali refugees in Dadaab, Kenya. UNDP raised the analysis of **Venezuela** included in the internal Early Warning Early Action Report, provided as background to the meeting, sharing the RC’s concerns on disseminating sensitive information. At the same time, the importance of maintaining space for analysis and discussion at IASC Principals level was reaffirmed.

The Chair, on behalf of the IASC, warmly thanked Dr. Chan for her outstanding, and always frank, contribution to the work and discussions of the IASC. The Chair also welcomed two new Principals to their first meeting: Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Senior Vice President for the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations Relations, and Partnerships, World Bank, and Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs, while expressing appreciation for the work of their predecessors, Mr. Colin Bruce and Dr Chaloka Beyani, respectively.

The Chair indicated that the IASC secretariat would liaise with IASC Principals’ offices to identify dates for the IASC Principals’ retreat/first annual meeting (before May 2017), and a forward schedule of the two meetings per year for 2017-2019. *Ad hoc* Principals meetings will be scheduled when needed on operations, including a possible *ad hoc* meeting on fundraising and advocacy.

1. Note: The IASC/UNDG Workshop in October 2016 reviewed a proposed typology which will be helpful to adapt approaches to different types of contexts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)