

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE**

**SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION POINTS**

New York, 21 May 2020

**Introduction**

Mr. Mark Lowcock, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and Chair of the IASC, convened an ad hoc IASC Principals meeting to discuss the COVID-19 response, including an update on the health and on logistics.

The ERC informed the Principals that as of 18 May, 15 per cent of the revised COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) was funded, which included US\$200 million for the global operational services and support, such as MedEvac. He noted the continued efforts to strengthen resource mobilization, including letters from the UN Secretary-General and Parliamentary briefings. Mr. Lowcock noted the under-reporting and underscored the importance of registering mobilized resources on the Financial Tracking System (FTS).

He acknowledged the work of the IASC Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Financing in taking forward the discussion of accelerate funding to NGOs, noting that the outcomes would be reported to the Principals shortly. He noted that the OCHA-managed pooled funds had so far released \$204 million in funding for COVID-19 programming, split evenly between the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the country-based pooled funds (CBPFs). Approximately two thirds of the \$102 million released from CBPFs was directed to NGOs and at least half had already been or was to be disbursed imminently. The ERC reminded the Principals that the call with the Good Humanitarian Donorship would take place on 5 June and would focus on flexible and quality funding. The ERC also emphasized the importance of results reporting and encouraged the members to accelerate reporting on this.

The ERC noted that OCHA was considering two more revisions to the GHRP, possibly in late June and in August, at which point the process would be subsumed into the regular Humanitarian Programme Cycle planning and the 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO).

The ERC indicated an agreement across the UN system for modeling and costing arrangements for MedEvac. The coverage would include the staff of INGOs and the dependents of their international staff. The ERC noted that the cost would be borne through UN funding. While there were still some details to resolve, this agreement signaled a first step towards ideally having access for national NGOs as well. He underscored that the agreement does not supersede provisions put in place at the national level or any arrangements that other organizations had put in place.

## **Health Update**

Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, WHO Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, updated the Principals on developments in the COVID-19 outbreak, indicating there were now close to 5 million confirmed cases and 320,000 deaths. Dr. Fall noted encouraging signs in most parts of Europe and in some countries in Africa and Asia, however the outbreak continued to accelerate. Fragile contexts, such as Iraq, South Sudan and Cox's Bazar were particularly concerning, as were high density humanitarian settings, such as areas of India, Bangladesh, Haiti, Nigeria and Central African Republic. He stressed the importance of paying attention to cholera and malaria in addition to the spread of COVID-19. Countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, were experiencing increases in the numbers of cases following the easing of restrictions, demonstrating the need to ensure means of detection and rapid response were in place at that phase.

Dr. Fall noted that, this week, WHO and UNHCR signed a revised partnership agreement, which outlined ongoing activities to protect some 70 million displaced persons, in addition to 26 million refugees, and others. US\$10 million from the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund was released to UNHCR to support these efforts.

## **Update on Logistics**

Mr. Amir Abdulla, Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Executive Director of WFP strongly encouraged the use of the Supply Chain Task Force (SCTF) and the various booking platforms. Seven of the eight hubs were now operational and the last in Johannesburg would come on line that week. 23 passenger flights had departed for 16 destinations, supporting staff rotation and new arrivals. Although the initiative was currently funded, WFP would be looking for new funds from June 2020 onwards. Mr. Abdulla emphasized the need for all engaged actors to stay informed of the work of the Supply Chain Task Force and available services, such as the COVID-19 Partners Platform & Supply Portal. The Supply Chain Cell in Geneva was the first point of entry for support and guidance.

Mr. Abdulla, highlighted food security as a significant concern as demonstrated in a new report from the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS). He also mentioned the specific problems likely to arise in South Sudan, which required close monitoring.

## **Discussion:**

ICVA, SCHR and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) thanked the Principals for their collective work in reviewing the issues around speed and scale of funding to NGOs, as well as for the collective work around the issuance of the IASC Guidance on Localization. InterAction updated the Principals on the status of the \$12 billion appeal, which had not yet been approved, due in large part to political hurdles.

Regarding the next revision of the GHRP, UNHCR expressed concerns about presenting a revised appeal as early as June in light of the intensive work it required and the importance of demonstrating concrete results. UNHCR recommended one further revision, in August, before reverting to the normal planning cycle. SCHR agreed with UNHCR and highlighted the need for a process that would allow for further meaningful

in-country consultations. The ERC took note of the points made, while also emphasizing the need to report on achievements as a matter of urgency.

UNICEF highlighted their efforts in support of the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund with WHO, the UN Foundations, Swiss government and others and encouraged the support and participation of the other Principals. ICRC informed the Principals that the Red Cross and Red Crescent would launch a new appeal on 28 May 2020. The ICRC component included activities directly related to the pandemic response and for the associated socio-economic challenges in the most fragile contexts. The ERC offered his support to the appeal, if needed. ICRC had also chartered planes for Iraq and Lebanon, covering also Syria, and more would be available and these flights were open to other colleagues and partners. The World Bank updated the Principals that its emergency operations had now reached 100 countries. Several of the UN agencies present were key partners in sourcing the supplies and enabling implementation in fragile settings. The World Bank was co-leading the health systems track of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator initiative with the Global Fund. In June, the World Bank would also issue an update of the economic impact of the pandemic.

Next week, IOM and UNHCR would represent UN agencies in a pledging event for Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean, convened by the European Union (EU) and Spain, where the revised Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) would be presented. The ERC welcomed the intervention and noted ongoing efforts to organise a virtual event for humanitarian assistance within Venezuela.

ICVA, Catholic Relief Services and IOM commended the efforts of WFP and others in establishing the common services. ICVA highlighted the continued need for engagement at national level between the UN system and NGOs to ensure equitable and transparent access to common services. ICVA also highlighted the complementary work through the *reseaux logistiques humanitaires*, comprising 35 NGOs, supported by ECHO.

Regarding MedEvac, ICVA welcomed the discussion with OCHA while also highlighting the importance of carefully communicating duty of care issues more broadly in order to consolidate the change in mindset on responsibilities towards the local organizations who enter into partnership agreements with INGOs, etc. ICVA will be tabling a document with the IASC's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) that included 14 practical measures to take into account for the safety and security of national staff and staff of national organizations.

IOM thanked UNICEF for support in providing testing kits to African countries and called for additional support from WHO to provide kits for the Middle East and North Africa and Asia Pacific regions. UNICEF also highlighted increasing fatigue with movement restrictions in many countries and said that more could be done to support governments and their populations in countries where communications to the public were not working. South Sudan, Burundi, Madagascar, Tanzania, for example might welcome such support. The ERC agreed and noted the importance of collecting lessons learned on implementing measures such as isolation, social distancing and quarantining in low resource settings to support advocacy efforts.

UNHCR appealed to Principals for balanced, measured and factual messages about the number of cases in refugee settings, such as Cox's Bazar, Dadaab camp in Kenya and South Sudan. Where refugees were not welcome, the added concern of COVID-19 would increase the risk of discrimination.

OHCHR welcomed the point made by UNHCR on discrimination and highlighted also the experiences of people of diverse sexual orientation. There was evidence that messaging was working, however. South Africa, for example, had followed advice relating to decongestion of prisons and had announced consideration of parole for 19,000 inmates.

UN-Habitat flagged the need to look at the pandemic as a series of cyclical waves, and not a linear progression. It was important to integrate the public health response and socio-economic measures with the humanitarian response, and link humanitarian and development efforts to build resilience. UN-Habitat and UNDP also stressed that data analysis was essential; noting that a strong focus on this was critical to tailoring the response to local contexts, as well as to analyse our impact on the ground. The UN, World Bank and the EU were undertaking a COVID-19 recovery needs assessment (CRNA), building on the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) methodology, with a strong focus on conflict sensitivity, and it was important to have the engagement of humanitarian partners, including at the country level, to ensure a common understanding of the situation and priorities.

UNDP also updated the Principals that IASC Result Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration had met with OECD to jointly develop concrete actions to take forward to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace approach to COVID-19 in fragile conflicts and looked forward to sharing the results with the Principals.

IOM drew on the point made by UNHCR regarding refugee settings and highlighted also the concerning situation in Greece. Participants noted the worsening food security situation, particularly in East Africa, and South Sudan and Yemen were also pointed out as countries of concern. The ERC indicated the upcoming Yemen pledging conference as an opportunity for the Principals to send clear messages on the need to address the increasingly alarming situation. He also noted that he would be undertaking targeted communications on this and encouraged the IASC Principals to step up advocacy as well.

### **Follow-up Actions:**

1. Consider revising the timeline for the finalization of the third iteration of the GHRP, while considering the criticality of reporting results to donors. *[ERC]*
2. Share the outcome of recent discussions with Principals on ways to address the issues around the speed of disbursing funds to NGOs. *[ERC]*
3. Disseminate information within each organization on the services of the Supply Chain Task Force. *[IASC members]*
4. Ensure that communication on MedEvac arrangements are nuanced to emphasise that the system would be doing its best to support and protect all humanitarian workers during this crisis. *[ERC and IASC members]*

5. Address the growing concerns relating to food insecurity during the horizon-scanning session of IASC Principals with the UN Secretary-General on 24 June. *[IASC members]*
6. Collect lessons learned on implementing measures such as isolation, social distancing and quarantining in low resource settings. *[IASC members with OCHA]*
7. Explore the need to discuss country-specific issues in dedicated ad hoc IASC Principals meetings. *[IASC secretariat in consultation with the EDG]*
8. Share key advocacy messages on the COVID-19 situation in refugee settings. *[UNHCR]*
9. Step up advocacy and highlight the alarming humanitarian situation in Yemen, including at the 2 June pledging conference. *[IASC members]*

Next IASC Principals meeting will take place on 4 June 2020.

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#### **List of participants:**

1. Mr. Mark Lowcock, Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA
2. Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, WHO
3. Ms. Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner, OHCHR
4. Mr. Sean Callahan, President and CEO, CRS
5. Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF
6. Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner, UNHCR
7. Mr. Dominic MacSorley, CEO, Concern Worldwide
8. Ms. Abby Maxman, Chair of SCHR (President and CEO, Oxfam America)
9. Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-HABITAT
10. Mr. Ignacio Packer, Executive Director, ICVA
11. Mr. Sam Worthington, CEO, InterAction
12. Mr. Gareth Price-Jones, Executive Secretary, SCHR
13. Mr. António Vitorino, Director General, IOM
14. Mr. Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director, WFP
15. Mr. Roger Yates, Chair, ICVA (Regional Director, Plan International)
16. Mr. Robert Mardini, Director General, ICRC
17. Ms. Asako Okai, Assistant Administrator, UNDP
18. Mr. Toomas Palu, Adviser, Global Coordination Health, Nutrition & Population, World Bank
19. Ms. Shoko Arakaki, Director Humanitarian Office UNFPA
20. Ms. Natalia Ferreira de Castro, Advisor, Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons
21. Ms. Agnese Spiazzi, Coordination Officer, DOCO