

Note to Members of the Deputies Forum
Options for Consideration on the Role and Purpose of the Deputies Forum
3 December 2020

1. This note is developed in light of calls by member of the IASC's Deputies Forum to further clarify the purpose of the Forum. This call was echoed by a number of IASC Principals in reaction to the ERC's recommendation to extend the mandate of the IASC subsidiary bodies for an additional year (January – December 2021). The objective of the note is to layout options for consideration by the Deputies Forum regarding the purpose of the Forum. It is informed by informal consultation with a number of Deputy Forum members.

3. As per the IASC restructuring paper endorsed by the IASC Principals in January 2019, the Deputies Forum “serves as an informal platform for dialogue and information sharing on strategic issues of common interest. It supports progressing key issues which have been endorsed by the IASC Principals and works to resolve potential bottlenecks. It also serves as a platform for strategic dialogue on issues and processes that have an impact on humanitarian action as well as a critical link with other key forums. In addition, the Deputies Forum is an important platform to ensure strategic dialogue with key non-IASC stakeholders, including affected governments, regional bodies, donors, among others”¹.

4. As of late 2018, the Deputies Forum played a critical role in reviewing various options for the reform of the IASC subsidiary bodies prior to review/endorsement by the ERC and the Principals. They also convened with humanitarian leadership on the ground to discuss areas of support to progress on humanitarian-development collaboration including in Central African Republic and Cameroon, and the regional humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad Basin (with the participation of RC/HCs from Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad). The Forum was also used as an opportunity to discuss critical process with a potential impact on humanitarian action – and, as such, senior officials leading on the UNDS Reform as well as the Migration Compact engaged in a dialogue with the DF on opportunity for engagements and areas of concern to manage. Most recently, and at the request of the IASC Principals, the Deputies Forum convened on the issue of Racism and Racial Discrimination and agreed on a series of actions to arrest any manifestations of racism and racial discrimination both within IASC member organizations and in the humanitarian sector by leading efforts to capture best practices and lessons learned from IASC member organizations to promote learning and information sharing, ensure coordination and coherence of efforts with UN member organizations outside of the IASC, and engage in the UN system-wide consultations/focus groups being organized by the UN Task Force on Racism and Racial Discrimination.

5. Based on informal consultations conducted, it is clear that the role and purpose of the Deputies Forum needs to be further clarified either in terms of (a) facilitating a stronger and more robust role for the Forum, (b) maintaining its informal nature of the group, or (c) considering the discontinuation of the group.

6. Given its membership and its assemblage of senior leaders in the system with significant leverage within their respective organizations, a number of members want to see a more robust role for the Deputies Forum which could mobilize political support/backing for specific IASC issues; facilitating the strengthening of the linkages between the OPAG and the EDG; identifying sensitive issues that require follow-up/resolution but does not necessarily require the attention of the IASC Principals; consider feedback from evaluations and considering ways to ensure that the system learns and take forward recommendations around systemic issues faced on the ground; serve as a platform

¹ As agreed on 31 January 2019 and included in the circulated “IASC Structure and Working Method 2019 – 2020” document.

for reflection on system-wide issues, including as an example post-COVID challenges and operating environment and its implications on humanitarian action.

7. Equally, a number of Deputy Forum members were more in favor of the informal nature of the structure and were largely in support of the group meeting on an as-needed-basis to address issues that are either tasked directly by the IASC Principals (such as the issue of Racism and Racial Discrimination) or to address issues of mutual interest that do not have a natural home in the OPAG or the EDG and that can benefit from the seniority of the membership of the ASG (such as PSEA, Duty of Care, humanitarian leadership, Climate, and the Grand Bargain).

8. On the Chairmanship of the Forum, there was broad agreement on the need for OCHA to continue to Chair the group and that Deputy Forum members can lead the discussions on issue of interest.

9. Against this backdrop, the Deputies Forum will convene to consider the following options:

- (i) Maintain the Forum as an informal platform for informal inter-agency dialogue, consultations, and knowledge-sharing, providing a voice on issues of common priority..
- (ii) In support of the IASC, meet only on an ad hoc basis to deliver only on specific issues/taskings from the Principals and address issues of common interest including:
 - a. Biannual strategic priorities for the IASC and the IASC structures to take them forward (needed ahead of the May 2021 Principals meeting on the subject)
 - b. Racism and Racial Discrimination
 - c. PSEA/SHA
 - d. Humanitarian Leadership
 - e. Climate
 - f. Duty of Care
 - g. Systems learning informed by the IASC's IAHEs and Operational Peer Reviews conducted by the Peer-to-Peer Project.
 - h. Grand Bargain
- (iii) Strengthen the decision-making authority of the Forum on key issues and convene relevant IASC structures (EDG, OPAG) by ensuring coherence and strengthened collaboration to more effectively influence Principal's actions and follow-up to decisions.

IASC secretariat
3 December 2020