



STATEMENT BY MR. ANAND SHARMA, MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AT THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING FOR THE LAUNCH  
OF THE CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND AT THE UNITED  
NATIONS ON MARCH 09, 2006

Your Excellency, the UN Secretary-General,  
Your Excellency, the President of the UN General Assembly,  
Rt. Hon'ble Prime Minister of Grenada,  
Rt. Hon'ble Secretary of State for International Development of the  
United Kingdom,  
Rt. Hon'ble Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian  
Affairs of Luxembourg,  
Your Excellency, the Emergency Relief Coordinator,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to address this High-Level Meeting for the Launch of the Central Emergency Response Fund - a momentous event in the evolution of the international community's response to natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

The magnitude and scale of some of the natural disasters that the world has witnessed in recent times, their catastrophic impact and the unprecedented tragedy and trauma resulting from them, have highlighted like never before the need for an effective and prompt international assistance mechanism to support the relief efforts of an affected country. Our leaders recognized this need in the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit.

It is, therefore, satisfying that the UN has moved quickly to put in place an emergency response fund, in view of the major challenges that lie ahead. Its success, however, will be assessed by how far it meets expectations, not of those assembled here, but of the thousands who annually fall victim to natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. CERF holds out the hope of ready availability of resources for rapid initial response in times of need. The adequacy of

that response will depend upon early building up of the corpus of the Fund and its regular replenishment.

We also expect the Fund to address the tragedy of what has been termed as 'neglected emergencies'. For too long, emergency aid commitment has been subject to the so-called 'CNN effect'. Dire emergencies, especially in parts of Africa, slip off the radar screen of the donor community either for geo-political reasons or because they are no longer media worthy.

We expect the Fund to be operated in a transparent and accountable manner. Indeed, the long term viability of the CERF would depend on two aspects of its functioning. The foremost would be the improvement in the response of the UN agencies to sudden onset disasters by cutting down the time required for raising resources and thereby saving lives in the immediate aftermath of such disasters. The second would be the fairness and transparency in allocation of resources from the CERF. Regular and stringent audits, not merely of the records in OCHA, but also within the agencies that receive resources from the CERF, would be a pre-requisite in establishing confidence in the CERF as an effective, transparent and accountable instrument, worthy of receiving resources. An annual review by the General Assembly would ensure that the CERF meets the high expectations of Member States and the international community.

Much as we support the setting up of the CERF, the longer-term solution lies in the capacity of countries to mitigate the effects and manage their own responses to natural disasters. Development cannot be sustainable unless disaster mitigation is built into the development process at all levels. The international community also has to maintain its focus beyond emergency relief and to support the medium and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk-reduction efforts of the Governments of the affected countries.

Two of the biggest natural disasters have affected India within a year – the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 and the devastating earthquake that struck the northern Indian sub-continent in October 2005. As a response to the multi-hazard vulnerability of our country, we have in recent years significantly strengthened our disaster management capacity. A National Disaster Management Authority has been set up in India under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. We are also establishing a SAARC Regional Disaster Management Centre. We would be happy to share our skills and expertise with other members of the international community.

Our focus on development of a disaster response capacity also enabled us to cope with recent disasters relying on our own resources. It was also clear to us that while our situation was serious, there were other affected countries where the need for immediate relief was even greater. We extended assistance to Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Indonesia, in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami. In fact, India airlifted relief and medicines for Sri Lanka and the Maldives the same evening and the very next day our hospital ship was in place in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. We did our utmost to provide material and other help to neighbouring Pakistan for relief and rehabilitation of victims of the earthquake. At the International Conference in Geneva organized by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, we also pledged US \$25 million for assistance to Pakistan. India has also offered bilateral assistance to many other countries affected by natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific, African and Central American regions.

Excellencies,

By supporting local and national recovery processes at an early stage, it is possible to close the gap between relief and development and to transform disasters into opportunities for sustained development. India is convinced of the need for continuing international engagement in the post-disaster period, for restoring livelihoods, building resilience and reducing vulnerability. We hope that the international community will focus on meeting this need even as we address emergency relief issues. International cooperation in disaster and humanitarian relief is the praxis of that ancient Indian idea - "the world is one family". That is what breathes life into international solidarity and gives meaning to the idea of multilateralism in the lives of ordinary people.

Disasters can and do afflict both the developing and the developed countries. The developing countries unfortunately lack the capacities and resources to cope with the immediate aftermath of disasters and need assistance from the international community to save lives affected by sudden onset disasters. India has always supported efforts aimed at addressing the difficulties faced by the developing countries. We see the CERF as an instrument conceived to address a vital need of the developing world and will support in fulfilling the noble objective for which it was conceived.

Excellencies,

I am happy to announce the Government of India's contribution of US\$ 2 million to the CERF.

Thank you.

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