



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAN SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGNEDA ITEM 69 [A],[C] & [D] ; STRENGTHENING OF HE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AT THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 13, 2006

Mr. President,

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports that have been prepared for the discussions under this agenda item. We appreciate the candid approach adopted in the report that identifies the areas of improvement even as it describes the positive developments.

Mr. President,

The Central Emergency Response Fund was launched in March this year to address the concern regarding allocation and availability of resources for humanitarian assistance and to enable the UN to provide timely humanitarian assistance evenly across emergencies. India strongly supported this initiative out of our conviction that, through this reform measure, the UN would be better positioned to assist developing countries in their hour of need in the aftermath of a disaster. India demonstrated solidarity with the international efforts aimed at addressing the needs of developing countries for emergency humanitarian assistance through pledging a contribution of US \$2 million to the CERF at its launch in New York (half of which has already been disbursed).

As promised by the Secretary-General, detailed information on the use of CERF has been provided to Member States. The report indicates that CERF has made good progress towards its objectives of promoting early action and response to reduce loss of life and enhancing UN humanitarian assistance to time-critical needs in the aftermath of disasters and in under-funded emergencies. We note that the Emergency Relief Coordinator has focused on the need for timely allocation and disbursement of CERF funds. We also note with satisfaction that, despite the implementation being at an early stage, CERF has enabled humanitarian assistance to be made available within 72 hours. We encourage the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue efforts to address administrative delays and streamline application processes. While appreciating the need for completing the requisite paper work prior to disbursement of funds, there is need for balance so that developing countries are not burdened by excessive paper work at a time when the capacities of their authorities are stretched in coping with the aftermath of a disaster.

We have perused with interest the note on the meeting of the Advisory Group of CERF, held in Geneva in October 2006. We note that the Advisory Group made some substantive recommendations for further improvements, such as through the consideration of an umbrella letter of understanding, delegation of authority and development of additional standardized templates. The Advisory Group also emphasized the importance of a field-driven approach. We would suggest that the recommendations of the Advisory Group, including those related to the decision to undertake field visits to implementation sites, be examined by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his recommendations brought to Member States for their consideration.

Mr. President,

India is committed to the Guiding Principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance contained in the annex to GA resolution 46/182. We believe that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. We recall that the Guiding Principles enjoin that sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected and that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle, on the basis of an appeal by the affected country.

In this context, we are concerned at the recommendations of the report on "humanitarian access", which are not in line with the scope of the Guiding Principles of resolution 46/182. We have been encouraged by the achievements that the UN has made through the establishment of CERF. These gains can be consolidated and built upon by retaining the neutrality and non-political character of UN humanitarian assistance. The Fourth Geneva Convention Commentary defines humanitarian as "being concerned with the condition of man considered solely as a human being, regardless of his value as a military, political, professional or other unit" and "not affected by any political or military consideration"; country ownership is crucial and this should be genuine and not disingenuous. Humanitarian assistance is aimed at relieving immediate suffering only and therefore ensuring all this should be relatively easier.

The report appears to project the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as standards for countries to follow. The Guiding Principles were developed on the basis of experience of massive displacement in war and conflict situations. The Secretary-General's reports in the past have acknowledged that adequately assisting IDPs requires knowledge and understanding of the specific context in which the disaster occurred. India believes that well functioning and stable Governments with strong national and legal institution can and do take care of their IDPs. They are also best placed to understand their own national context and legislative requirements.

Mr. President,

The report recommends the strengthening of local, national and regional capacities for preparing and responding to humanitarian emergencies. India has strengthened its disaster preparedness and response capacity over the past several years. The aftermath of the Tsunami disaster further spurred these efforts. The Disaster Management Act 2005 envisages a holistic and comprehensive approach to disaster management with a greater

focus on prevention, mitigation, preparedness and capacity building. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), chaired by the Prime Minister, has been created with the provision for similar organizational arrangements at the state and District levels. Some states have already taken action in this regard. The NDMA has formed core groups to formulate strategy and guidelines to mitigate effects of disasters, such as earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and chemical and industrial disasters. The Disaster Risk Management Project is being implemented jointly with the UNDP in 169 districts with high vulnerability to natural disasters and includes the important elements of community preparedness and community capacity building. The process for the creation of Disaster Response Teams for providing a specialized response has started and is looking at equipment and training needs. The political economy of humanitarian assistance is broader – touching on ethics (the principle of negative action is that not doing enough and letting death and disaster happen is as bad as inflicting death and disaster); economic development (it is the poor that often bear the brunt of natural disasters); science and technology (in India satellite based early warning systems have greatly mitigated if not eliminated the consequences of cyclones and we hope would do the same for any future Tsunamis and we have always been prepared to share the technology with developing countries).

Mr. President,

We note that, as desired by Member States, the report recommends other areas of improving the delivery of UN's humanitarian assistance, including through the improvement of UN coordination activities at the field level. The report cites the 'cluster leadership approach' as an effort in this direction and recommends that at the country level, 'cluster lead agencies' should collaborate closely with Government partners. We believe that there is need for further information and understanding of this approach, especially from the perspective of the receiving countries where this approach has been implemented so far. In keeping with the basic principles that guide the work of the UN at the country level, we recommend that this approach be implemented at country level with the consent of and under the leadership of the national government of the affected State. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the 'cluster approach' in enhancing coordination amongst UN agencies, taking into account the financial costs incurred in implementing the approach, and incorporating the inputs of the affected States, should be presented to Member States. We agree with the Secretary-General that the cluster approach can only be considered as a first step, and not as a solution.

We are happy that the report has devoted considerable attention to the issue of chronically under-funded emergencies. We note that the report recommends development of indicators for humanitarian assistance. We recommend that this issue be discussed carefully at the intergovernmental level, in the first instance.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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