



STATEMENT BY MR. SUKHDEV SINGH DHINDSA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 65[A] – STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE PLENARY OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 10, 2008



Mr. President,

I will now make a national statement on behalf of the Government of India.

India would like to align itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77.

Mr. President,

The humanitarian role of the UN has assumed added importance in the recent past. The Secretary General, in his report on International Cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance in the Field of Natural Disasters (A/63/277), has stated that there is a longer term trend of increasing frequency and intensity of recorded disasters associated

with natural hazards. Asia, including India, has been affected by these hazards in the past year.

In addition to disasters associated with natural hazards, the global humanitarian scenario has been complicated and placed under greater stress by the emergence of new challenges such as the unprecedented increase in food prices. The rise in food prices will have a negative effect on populations living around and under poverty thresholds and will increase humanitarian distress in large parts of the developing world. The nature, contour and resourcing of the humanitarian response to this development is a matter of interest and concern to India and other developing countries.

In these circumstances it would be logical to assume that the demands on the United Nations in the field of humanitarian assistance will continue to grow.

Mr President,

Member States have the primary responsibility for provision of humanitarian assistance in response to all emergencies. While there is no substitute for effective national efforts, a national response alone can sometimes be inadequate. The United Nations has a key part to play in complementing and supplementing these efforts of Member States.

There is also a need for more bilateral, regional and international cooperation to deal with disasters and to make those effective uses of our capabilities. Greater cooperation is required not only in the emergency phase of reacting to disasters but also in relief and rehabilitation, in disaster preparedness, and in setting up and maintaining early warning systems. These all are, and should be, parts of effective disaster management strategies.

Mr President,

The Central Emergency Response Fund has completed two years of existence. India has noted the report of the Secretary General that the Fund has largely achieved its objectives and has become, in a short time, a valuable and impartial tool for humanitarian action *inter alia* by helping to accelerate response and by catalyzing field-level coordination.

CERF today accounts for about 5% of annual global humanitarian assistance flows. As a developing country with strong faith in the universality, neutrality, impartiality and multilateral nature of UN assistance, India would like to see this share increase.

Mr President,

India is deeply concerned by the increasing incidence of attacks on humanitarian personnel and UN premises. India has always opposed violence and condemns such attacks in the strongest possible terms.

India would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate that humanitarian assistance has to be given on the basis of humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law. The General Assembly has on numerous occasions, including in the Guiding Principles of resolution 46/182, stated that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and on the basis of an appeal by it. It also emphasizes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

We have noted, however, that there have been efforts to expand this base and the scope for intervention. While the existing normative and legal basis for humanitarian assistance is adequate, India is open to new ideas to strengthen the operational and coordination capabilities of the UN. We also believe that the spirit and letter of inter-governmental processes must be adhered to in such initiatives.

Mr President,

Disaster management in India aims to build a safe and disaster-resilient India by developing a holistic, proactive, multi-disaster and technology-driven strategy. A National Disaster Management Authority headed by the Prime Minister has been instituted to achieve this through a culture of prevention, mitigation and preparedness, so as to generate a prompt and efficient response at the time of disasters.

India's Disaster Management strategy is in conformity with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Rio Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals and the Hyogo Framework 2005-2015.

The pillars on which India's disaster management strategy are based are:-

- Community-based disaster management,
- Capacity development
- Consolidation of past initiatives and best practices.
- Cooperation with agencies at national, regional and international levels.

The Government of India is committed to promoting a culture of prevention and preparedness and encouraging mitigation measures based on state-of-the-art technology and environmental sustainability. It is also committed to mainstreaming disaster management into the development planning process and to creating an institutional and legal framework and an enabling regulatory environment and a compliance regime. It believes that an efficient humanitarian response must give special attention to those who are vulnerable and weak.

The Government lays great emphasis on developing contemporary forecasting and early warning systems. It also believes in working together with the media, NGOs and the private sector in generating awareness and capacity development in tackling humanitarian disasters.

Thank you.

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