



Side-event, ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment 21 July 2011

“Enhancing the Effectiveness and Quality of International Disaster Assistance : International and Regional Initiatives to Support Affected States”

Panelists

Beat von Däniken, Chief of Staff, Deputy Head of Humanitarian Aid, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

H.E. Evan P. Garcia, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the UN, Geneva

Xavier Castellanos, Director for the Americas, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, Executive Director, International Council of Voluntary Agencies

Rudolf Muller, Chief Emergency Services Branch, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva

This event brought together a number of international response actors, from governments, the UN system, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the NGO community, to share their vision on the importance of a complementary approach to improve the quality and the effectiveness of response by all actors, and provide useful lessons learned for stronger coordination.

Several initiatives were highlighted by the panelists as useful tools and contributions for an improved response, such as the “cluster approach”, the IDRL Guidelines, the OCHA consolidated Flash appeal, the IASC and the INSARAG guidelines. Furthermore, an important focus was given during this event to the significant support provided by regional initiatives, such as the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). As mentioned by the Philippines Ambassador, “*South-South Cooperation is increasingly important, on a bilateral and regional basis* ».

The IFRC and its members have been working primarily at the national level to assist states to “*put themselves in the driver’s seat*” by preparing their legal frameworks to facilitate incoming relief and to provide incentives and oversight to ensure the quality and complementarity of international assistance with domestic efforts. They benefit from a strong and fruitful collaboration with regional organizations, such as the CEPREDENAC, the CAPRADE and the CDEMA in the Americas, each very active in promoting the development of models, operating procedures and dialogue on international relief.



Quality and accountability initiatives such HAP, Sphere and ALNAP were highlighted as key stakeholders to directly contribute for a more effective and efficient delivery of humanitarian aid. As mentioned by ICVA, those initiatives – together with the NGO code of conduct - are significant milestones to promote quality. Yet, there is still a need for them to be better explained as well as promoted to the States themselves, especially those who are regularly faced with natural disasters. There is no need to invent any new standard. On the other hand, as ICVA proposed, there is a real need to initiate a dialogue with States to ensure that these standards are put into practice.

A stronger cohesion and consultation among States is also needed. Therefore, the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative provides a unique platform to build on a constructive exchange of good practices and lessons learned. The need to invest in prevention and preparedness was also enhanced during the panelist's presentation, as Switzerland mentioned that 15% of its humanitarian funding supports Disaster Risk Reduction activities.

The side-event discussion, through the participants' interventions, highlighted the risk of excluding neighboring countries or local humanitarian interventions due to an increased focus on certifying humanitarian agencies together with their aid workers. There is indeed a danger to cut-off and prevent other local actors to intervene during a natural disaster, due to the lack of having these quality labels, although they sometimes have a far better cultural understanding of the beneficiaries needs and expectations due to their geographical proximity.

Although the whole debate around certification and professionalization of humanitarian workers is complex and holds some risks, there are some good practices to learn from such as the PAHO/WHO initiative on foreign medical teams or the recent study OCHA is carrying to identify the possibility of granting quality labels to customs in order to facilitate the delivery of aid.

Lastly, the side-event was an opportunity to announce the upcoming “**International Dialogue on Disaster Response**” which will take place on the 25th and the 26th October in Geneva. As OCHA mentioned, “*the event will be unique in that it will bring together selected government representatives engaged in disaster response, with representatives from UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, NGOs, and regional organizations to consider the bottlenecks and what steps can be taken to better support governments to carry out their role and responsibilities in the receipt of international assistance.*” More information will be communicated on this event nearer the date.