

ECOSOC HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS SEGMENT 2010
CLOSING REMARKS

by John Holmes
Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator

15 July 2010

Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

First and foremost, let me thank you all for your dedicated engagement during this Humanitarian Affairs Segment. The debates and discussions have been rich and valuable. In particular, I wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to the many distinguished panelists, moderators and participants, who during the panels and side events have enriched our discussions with their field perspectives, expertise and experience.

In addressing this closing session of the Segment, I would like to highlight some of the specific points that I have taken from our deliberations and perhaps mention one or two others that have not received the attention they deserve. In doing so, I would like to reassure Member States that in due course we will respond to all the points and issues raised to us during the segment.

Let me begin by highlighting some key messages that came up during the panel discussions and side-events, as well as during the debate.

Mr. Vice President,

It is horrifying that we have to continue to report to you an ever increasing number of attacks on humanitarian workers across the globe. It is worrying that the delivery of much needed life saving assistance is in some areas so dangerous that humanitarian programmes need to be suspended or even discontinued, despite our efforts to stay there.

The panel on operating in high-risk environments looked at lessons learned and discussed some of the threats posed to humanitarian operations and highlighted measures that humanitarians can take to mitigate some of the challenges. We discussed the centrality of acceptance and respect for humanitarian principles, and elaborated on the importance of programme criticality – balancing the real need for and impact of humanitarian programmes against staff security. We also considered how operating in high-risk environments affects the costs of operations, which need to be met.

We looked at remote programming, information sharing among humanitarian organisations and with authorities, decentralised security management and threat analysis, the need to understand better operational contexts, aspects of visibility and footprint of humanitarian operations and organisations, and the importance of sustained dialogue with all actors in an operational context, including with non-state actors.

We all agree that our actions must strive to comply with the humanitarian principles. This remains key. We discussed how using national and local capacities can be effective – as long as we do not put our colleagues into harms way by transferring risk from international to local staff. And I think we all agree to the importance of adhering to established codes of conduct and displaying utmost transparency in the implementation of our programmes.

But all our efforts will be fruitless if we do not have the support from you, the Member States, and the host governments. Member States can support humanitarian operations by adhering to and promoting the adherence to the basic principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and of course by providing security themselves, as is their primary responsibility. They can also support humanitarians by understanding their operational imperative to dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. And last but not least, they can help as donors by providing predictable and long-term resources for the safety and security of humanitarian operations.

Let me take this opportunity to emphasise that none of this, and nothing related to humanitarian assistance in general, poses a challenge to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Humanitarians must not and can not challenge these fundamental building blocks of the international community. For example, as I already mentioned in my opening address, dialogue about humanitarian access with non-state armed group does not affect their legal or political status in any way.

Mr. Vice-President,

Our discussions during these past two days, and our second panel this morning on vulnerability and humanitarian response in particular, clearly highlighted that humanitarian crises and needs are changing and evolving. Speakers on the panel agreed that the distinction between humanitarian assistance and development is in many long-standing emergencies even more artificial than before. Focussing just on emergency humanitarian response is insufficient to address chronic vulnerability. Governments and development actors need, with the same urgency, to address root causes and structural issues. To address chronic fragile livelihoods, and issues like food security and public health problems, we need to find ways to link our action, and the financing of that action, with development actors, together with and in support of the affected governments.

Many statements during this ECOSOC, and, I remember, last year's ECOSOC, have highlighted and recognised how the multiplicity of global challenges have a significant impact on the humanitarian landscape world wide.

Today's deliberations showed again that the challenges we are facing are way beyond the capacities, capabilities and mandates of humanitarian organisations. We heard that poverty is a multiplier of vulnerability and disasters a multiplier for poverty. We recognised that growth and poverty alleviation are not sustainable or fully effective without integrating vulnerability and risk management into longer-term national development programmes. We discussed the importance and the opportunities that lie in current communications technology, such as using mobile phone technology to reach out to affected populations, and, as importantly, to hear from them. We also recognised that access to and use of robust data is an essential component of effective humanitarian programming.

I think we also all agree that we need to focus more on capacity building for prevention, preparedness and response at the local, national and regional levels. I was encouraged to hear that more and more countries are going to the World Bank to ask for investments into prevention, rather than reconstruction. And as the World Bank representative pointedly stated in this morning's panel 'if you have very little resources for prevention, invest it into early warning.'

Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

More widely, I am encouraged that Member States in the general debate and side events acknowledged in their statements the importance of efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance. First and foremost, the cluster approach; but also the need to strengthen humanitarian leadership on the ground, and to improve humanitarian needs-assessments, including by taking into account gender and age disaggregated data. Member States also called for more investment in capacity-building and disaster preparedness.

I very much welcome the support expressed by most Member States for the importance of coordination of international humanitarian assistance, and the need for sufficient capacity to do this. In these difficult financial times, OCHA and other parts of the international humanitarian system need all the support - including financial - which Member States can provide.

Many of the above issues were discussed in more detail in the various side-events:

- The side-event on 'The power of resources – tackling issues of financing for transition', co-chaired by India and Sweden, aimed at greater dialogue on how to enhance international engagement in post-conflict countries. The particular focus was on how to ensure that resources flow effectively to where it is most needed in post-conflict countries, in a predictable and timely fashion.
- The side-event on gender equality highlighted the importance of collecting and analysing of humanitarian information, again disaggregated by sex and age in order to ensure that the humanitarian community is meeting the different needs of women, girls , boys and men
- The side-event on Resilient Cities: Disaster Risk Reduction in an Urbanizing World, reminded us that one billion poor people are living in urban contexts, many of them in informal settlements and slums, often at high risk of exposure to natural hazards. Recent earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and China have been stark reminders of the increasing disaster risk faced by urban settlements around the world. As I have said before, megacities may mean mega disasters. The side-event emphasized the importance of incorporating disaster risk reduction in urban planning and development through measures such as risk assessments, adequate building standards and construction regulations as well as community preparedness. Communication, education, public awareness and social mobilization were also highlighted as crucial for successful disaster risk reduction in the urban context and therefore ensuring sustainable and resilient urban growth.
- The side-event on environmental emergencies hosted by Switzerland highlighted that environmental and humanitarian actions are intrinsically linked. The session called for a

high-level commitment to ensure that environmental emergencies do not fall into gaps either between humanitarian and development fields, or between humanitarian and environmentalists. It also discussed the need for stronger cooperation between humanitarian response and early recovery efforts, and for more governmental and local authority capacity building, not least in light of the increased frequency of weather related disasters and above all the increasing human pressure on the environment.

- A side-event organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights in humanitarian emergency response addressed the importance of integrating human rights considerations in humanitarian responses. The panel discussed how to create stronger institutional links between human rights mechanisms and humanitarian actors, as well as the importance of ensuring attention to the specific protection needs of groups in vulnerable situations in relief efforts, as well as in the recovery and reconstruction planning efforts.
- Finally, during the last side event of this year's packed ECOSOC agenda, I introduced the Inter-Agency Standing Committee 6-month report on the Haiti Earthquake Response that outlines achievements, challenges and key lessons learned. Instead of repeating the key elements here I encourage interested delegations to go to the IASC website, where the report can be downloaded.

Mr. Vice-President,

Adequate resources are of course absolutely fundamental to any hope of providing an adequate humanitarian response. Many concerns have been expressed about the effects of the economic and financial crisis on funding levels for humanitarian causes.

Yesterday we launched the Mid Year Review of the Consolidated Appeals. This year we have 16 consolidated appeals and so far, two flash appeals. Humanitarian funding requirements have increased by 1.5 billion US dollars since the start of the year, bringing the total 2010 target to 9.5 billion dollars, compared to 6.3 billion at the same point last year. But it is a strikingly positive fact that donors' response to these appeals in 2010 is now the best ever at mid-year, at \$4.6 billion, 49% of requirements.

Despite this positive response, we must recall that the unmet humanitarian requirements are also at their highest levels ever at some \$4.8 billion. If the global recession is putting pressure on donor governments' aid budgets, it is of course putting even greater pressure on vulnerable communities across the globe. Let me again take this opportunity to appeal to all Governments to maintain your generosity and to contribute to ending the suffering and restoring the dignity of the 53 million people the appeals are trying to help this year, which is 15 million more people than at the same time last year, itself a striking illustration of the way humanitarian needs are already rising.

I would also like to request donors to look at appeals in an integrated way and to try to ensure more even funding between the clusters, as we discussed yesterday. The different panel discussions and side events have illustrated the equal importance of all humanitarian sectors to the saving of lives and the restoration of dignity. Let me also take this opportunity to point out that the CERF, while not in itself a donor but a pooled fund bringing together the contributions of very many donors, aims to

practice optimal donor behaviour, examining funding levels among crises to target the least-funded, and examining sectors within crises and appeals to target the most urgent under funded actions.

Mr. Vice-President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to commend Member States on achieving the consensus resolution you have just adopted. I would like to add my thanks to the co-facilitators Australia and Indonesia, for their able stewardship of this year's negotiations process.

The resolution reaffirms the importance of access and humanitarian principles and acknowledges the importance of effective emergency rules and procedures, as well as common needs-assessment.

However, I would like to note that the resolution does not operationalise this year's ECOSOC themes. For example to help UN humanitarian organisations and staff with more normative guidance on operating effectively in dangerous environments would be welcome. If we send our colleagues and staff to such places they deserve full support from Member States.

More widely, with all the looming challenges ahead, the more that Member States 'own' a shared vision for international humanitarian assistance, the better. I therefore hope that the discussion of this year's main themes will be a beginning for your debates and legislative efforts, not an end.

Mr. Vice President and Colleagues,

In conclusion, I would like to thank again all Members of this Council and indeed all Member States for their support to humanitarian actors and to our efforts in strengthening the provision and coordination of humanitarian assistance. I hope the ideas and enthusiasm we have generated during this Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC can be used to ensure that the fruits of our collective thinking are put into action for the benefit of all people in need. What counts at the end of the day is how many lives we can save and how much human suffering we can reduce, not how many fine words we can utter.

Finally, I would like to thank you personally, Mr. Vice-President, for your distinguished and able leadership of this session, and for Chile's stewardship in facilitating the ECOSOC process from February's extensive theme consultations onwards.

I would also like to thank those who have worked with you, particularly the Bureau, and all those behind the scenes, notably the interpreters, who have done so much to make this year's Humanitarian Segment the notable success I believe it has been.

I wish you all a good and disaster free summer.

Thank you.