

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

Introductory remarks at the IASC launch of the Haiti 6 months report

15 July 2010, New York

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us today for the launch of the Inter Agency Standing Committee's report on achievements, challenges and lessons to be learned six months after the Haiti earthquake. This report was prepared on behalf of the IASC, the primary forum for humanitarian dialogue and decision-making among key humanitarian partners, which includes the United Nations, NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement and international organizations. Here to discuss the report's findings are four members of the the IASC's Steering Committee on the report: Mr. Daniel López Acuña, Director Strategy, Policy and Resource Management, Health Action in Crisis, WHO, Mr. Dominic MacSorley, Operations Director, Concern Worldwide, Mr. Louis-George Arsenault, Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF, and Mr. Marwan Jilani, Head of the New York Delegation, IFRC.

We have, as a humanitarian community, been working very intensively over the last six months to help the Haitian authorities reach people as quickly and effectively as possible. The publication of the report is an opportunity to step back and take stock of what has been achieved, to look at where we could have done better, and to set out some of the lessons we need to learn. The aim is both to ensure that we help to save more lives on the ground in Haiti in the months to come, and to improve our response when the next major disaster happens – as it will, even if we cannot know where or when. This exercise is not theoretical – it has real and lasting value, so long as the lessons the report contains are actually applied on the ground.

I will cover briefly some of the main points in the report in a minute or two, but let me first update you on the situation on the ground. I returned on Tuesday from a two day visit during which I visited two key sites on the ground, and met President Preval and other key Government partners, Haitian citizens... representatives of MINUSTAH, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the donor community.

The purpose of the visit was to take stock of the humanitarian effort and to review the main areas of progress and challenges, including preparedness for the hurricane season, and humanitarian coordination arrangements. Overall, what I saw and heard confirmed that, alongside the authorities, we have really accomplished a great deal – much more than we sometimes get credit for or give ourselves credit for – a finding which the IASC's report echoes. Food, clean water, temporary shelter, medical care have been provided. Most schools have been helped to restart, even without school buildings. Agriculture has been assisted. Hundreds of thousands of people have benefitted from cash for work programmes. Protection has been provided to some of the most vulnerable. No epidemics have struck. No second disaster has followed the first. Although the hurricane and rainy season is well underway, there has not yet been any major loss of life, although of course there are still very difficult months ahead and

conditions for many displaced people are far from ideal, and are very vulnerable, as we saw from the destruction from a storm in the Corail camp a few days ago. All this against the background of as difficult and complex a starting situation as any humanitarian organization can recall. Overall, I could see that we have got a lot more right than wrong. Yet as always in operations of this kind, and given the scale of what was and is needed in Haiti, I could also see the magnitude of the task that remains, even on the humanitarian side, let alone the gargantuan task of reconstruction.

On the ground I visited the Ancien Aeroport Militaire, a camp sheltering 48,000 people, and Fort National, a hilly area of Port au Prince very heavily damaged by the earthquake where rubble removal is under way, to allow building of transitional shelters and the beginning of return for the displaced from areas like Champ de Mars in front of the Presidential Palace. I saw the ingenuity and resilience that the national and local authorities, civil society and the people of Haiti themselves have shown ever since the start of this catastrophe. People are coping with extraordinary patience in the midst of what is still terrible devastation and very harsh living conditions, despite the availability of basic services. Life of all kinds has visibly returned to the streets.

But the situations I saw were also still very worrying. The operation just to take care of humanitarian needs on a daily basis is enormous, and will need to continue well into next year. More resources are needed from the donors to keep this relief operation running. People also need to see hope and the beginning of change for the better. They ask how long they will have to stay in the camps, where violence and intimidation by armed gangs are a problem in addition to the difficult living situations. More employment, more schools, and safer housing are the main priorities. Shelter particularly is at the front of people's minds. The almost 1.5 million people still living in tents or under tarpaulins are in a very precarious situation. Contingency planning for hurricanes needs to be intensified. Arrangements and incentives for people to return to their houses, and in particular for more transitional shelters to be built, urgently need to be resolved. Rubble removal needs to be accelerated dramatically. Much has already been done in the Fort National area, by hand through cash-for-work schemes, and by machines where they can get in. But this is in many ways only scratching the surface, literally. Not much more than ¼ of a million cubic metres has so far been moved, compared to an estimated total of 20 million cubic metres.

We are working increasingly closely in all these areas with the government, as we need to. But we have to maintain and indeed increase the momentum. On this last point let me remind you that the Haiti appeal is so far only 64% funded. The initial burst of humanitarian generosity felt immediately after the earthquake needs to be rekindled, because the needs are no less evident or pressing, and some organisations may soon begin to run out of money for the provision of still-needed basic services like water tankering.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the report itself. The context is that this was the most significant disaster requiring a large-scale international response since the Pakistan earthquake of 2005. It was the second most deadly earthquake in the last 100 years, and struck the capital and nerve

centre of the country in so many ways. It was a major test of the capacity, resources and response readiness of the global humanitarian community. I believe – and the IASC report confirms – that we passed that test for the most part. Nonetheless lessons were learned which must not just be reflected on but also applied if we are to do better in future.

Coordination and leadership were challenges from the beginning in the chaotic circumstances where so much local capacity had been destroyed or disrupted. The cluster mechanism kicked in straight away and helped improve the coherence of the effort within the first days of the earthquake. It may not have solved all the problems – and we were all frustrated by how long it took to get some parts of the relief effort moving with the scale and speed necessary. But by common consent, without it we would have struggled to get anything moving at all in crucial areas like health, shelter and water. Nonetheless more resources were needed, including from lead agencies, to make these mechanisms work even better. And the influx of hundreds of humanitarian organisations to a major disaster like this, many of whom, while well-meaning, were not necessarily professional and well-informed in their approach, posed a huge challenge. A new system of certification of capacity and experience needs to be looked at again.

The presence and assets of powerful military entities, particularly MINUSTAH but also from the US and Canada, presented both opportunities and challenges. Humanitarians required the support of the military in facilitating the transport and distribution of assistance, and dealing with basic problems like running the airport and repairing the port. The establishment of coordination structures engaging both military and humanitarian actors was critical to the success of the operation. But keeping all these actors, including the major bilateral donors, on the same page, was also a huge issue. We need to learn how to work together more effectively and naturally. And we need to work harder to get across to donors in advance that not all aid is good. Unwanted or unusable goods, not least in the medical field, were again a problem in Haiti as they were in the Tsunami response five years ago.

The international humanitarian community meanwhile did not show itself to be sufficiently sensitive to the concerns and capacities of local civil society, and did not listen enough to what the people whose lives had been destroyed by the earthquake were saying. This is a mistake which has been made before, for example in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami five years ago. It leads to misjudgements about what is needed and errors in strategy which then have to be corrected. In this case it was compounded by too much use of English in the coordination mechanisms and difficult access for local NGOs to the UN base where most meetings were being conducted. This is an area where we really must do better. The humanitarian community simply cannot afford not to work with national and local structures, to the fullest extent possible, however daunting and complex an operation may be.

The operation in Haiti also showed gaps in the humanitarian community's range of experience and knowledge which require further attention. We need to look in more detail at methods for identifying the most vulnerable in a disaster operation and in distinguishing between those affected by the disaster and those – the majority of the population in Haiti – suffering from more systemic forms of deprivation. The related challenge of strengthening linkages between relief and the longer-term recovery and development agenda also requires further work. A more productive relationship between the humanitarian appeal and the Post-Disaster Needs

Assessment processes is central to this. We also urgently need to learn better how to adapt our response to urban contexts, and to identify the necessary expertise, tools, knowledge, and partnerships to be able to operate effectively in such environments.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

There is no question that the hardest part of all this still lies ahead of us. Even if Haiti is spared a direct hit by a hurricane, massive humanitarian needs remain, while the challenge of helping this country build back better is gargantuan. Those in the camps need to be helped to leave, while making sure those who have no choice but to stay for the time being continue to receive assistance. More children must be encouraged back to school, rubble must be cleared quickly in the highest priority areas where people will benefit directly, transitional shelters have to be installed as quickly as possible, and disease prevention efforts sustained. Exposure to hurricanes, storms and floods must be minimized.

We owe it to the devastated population of Haiti – and to all communities affected by disasters - to act on the lessons identified in this report with speed and determination, and to strive constantly to improve our response. Meanwhile the biggest lesson of all remains the need to reduce the risks of disasters before they happen, through measures like enforced building codes, and to prepare for them more systematically, not just to respond effectively to them afterwards. If building Haiti back better means anything, it means making sure that its people are never again as vulnerable to disaster as so many were on 12 January 2010.

Thank you.