

**Panel discussion organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
within the margins of ECOSOC - Humanitarian Affairs Segment 2010**

**HUMAN RIGHTS IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY RESPONSE: THE
CONTRIBUTION OF THE SPECIAL PROCEDURES MECHANISMS**

Thursday, 15 July 2010

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) organized a panel discussion on 15 July 2010 entitled “Human rights in humanitarian emergency response: the contribution of the special procedures mechanisms”. The panel discussion, which was chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, addressed the importance of integrating human rights considerations in humanitarian responses and specifically explored ways in which the special procedures mechanisms support humanitarian emergency responses with a view to contributing to durable solutions grounded in human rights. The panel discussion also explored ways to create stronger institutional links between human rights mechanisms and humanitarian actors, and addressed 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.

Participating in the panel discussion were the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti (Mr. Michel Forst), the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (Ms. Rashida Manjoo), the Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Mr. Udo Janz), the Permanent Delegate to the United Nations for CARITAS Internationalis (Mr. Joseph Donnelly) and the Director of Humanitarian Affairs at the International Rescue Committee’s headquarters in New York (Mr. Gerald Martone).

In her introductory remarks, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted some of the ways through which special procedures mechanisms contribute in the context of humanitarian actions and the resulting consequences for humanitarian operations. In this regard, reference was made to the thematic work of the special procedures and the provision of legal, policy and operational guidance for humanitarian actors to ensure the protection of the rights of people affected by emergencies, the provision of timely responses and expertise on such issues as displacement, freedom of movement and the right to life, as well as the provision of critical technical support in emergency situations. Important awareness-raising functions on specific protection concerns during emergencies were also highlighted.

The Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti highlighted the interrelatedness of human rights and humanitarian crises and the relevance of a human rights-based approach to humanitarian response. He also highlighted the role of the special procedures in situations of humanitarian emergencies and provided concrete examples related to the recent earthquake in Haiti. Specific reference was made in this regard to his recent country visits and reports following the earthquake and to the work of the Human Rights Council.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences argued that humanitarian responses can be more efficient when opportunities for positive change in gender roles, created or reinforced by crisis situations, are enhanced and sustained during and after emergencies. In this regard, the violence against women mandate has highlighted the importance of projects that combine protection and relief with an opportunity to collect data on violence against women; provide medical, psychological and legal assistance; and create work and livelihood opportunities for women so that their security and subsistence concerns are addressed. She emphasized the importance of the full participation of women in the management of relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts.

The Director of UNHCR's New York Office noted that forced displacement were both a cause and result of a breakdown in human rights – particularly evident in humanitarian emergencies. Attention to human rights issues was necessary to ensure sustained intervention and durable solutions and human rights concerns should be embedded in humanitarian responses at every stage. Examples of best practices in cooperation with the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons (IDPs) were provided, such as training and capacity-building, and cooperation in countries, including in emergency situations. More could be done to engage with the other special procedures and the international system needed to act together on human rights issues in humanitarian emergencies.

A representative from CARITAS Internationalis stated that humanitarian response should be guided by what he termed as “R4P” – respect for people. Their less obvious needs must be identified and addressed without hesitation or delay. Patterns of discrimination, risks and fears of affected populations must be confronted. The lessons learnt must be used to ensure that more people are protected during emergencies.

A representative from the International Rescue Committee spoke of the compartmentalization of human rights and humanitarian affairs with actors in both areas working separately. Mr. Martone also spoke of the mythology of ‘neutrality’ and noted that humanitarian actors needed to increase advocacy on human rights issues. Advocacy with intergovernmental bodies, in particular the Security Council, was of great importance.

Questions and comments from participants addressed the scope for further engagement and dialogue between the special procedures and humanitarian actors, the importance of increasing cooperation and collaboration more generally between human rights and humanitarian actors, and the role of non-state actors; and the need to integrate human rights in humanitarian response from beginning to end. The importance of ensuring attention to vulnerable groups, in particular children and the elderly, was also addressed.

Links:

- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – <http://www.ohchr.org>
- Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council - <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/index.htm>