

13 November 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
on Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian and Disaster
Relief Assistance of the United Nations, including Special Economic
Assistance (Agenda Item 69)**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

So far this year, the world has been spared from major natural disasters and there have been fresh opportunities for peace. Be it in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Timor-Leste. As a result of these favorable circumstances there has been a reduction in the demand for humanitarian assistance.

This pause gives an opportunity for the United Nations to focus preparedness activities in several regions prone to natural events. Also, to consolidate the humanitarian reforms initiated during the World Summit in September 2005.

This reform programme has already been successful.

The Central Emergency Response Fund, established by the General Assembly last December, has delivered time-critical responses saving lives in 25 countries. It was particularly effective during the Lebanon crisis this summer, providing immediate funding for the transportation of humanitarian goods across Lebanon, when no funds would have been available otherwise. It will be important to continue to improve the CERF and ensure that it is fully funded in future.

Last week, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence noted that the United Nations has a unique and leading role to play in humanitarian disasters and emergencies. The panel also recommended various measures to enhance this role further, building on the ongoing reforms.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The humanitarian community continues to have a number of challenges in various areas.

Firstly, there are a number of ongoing emergencies that need to be addressed urgently, such as, the drought in the Horn of Africa, which affects 15 million people in 5 countries. Drought cycles have increasingly rendered populations more vulnerable to minor shocks that can disrupt livelihoods, trigger famine and even cause conflicts.

Secondly, access to populations in need of humanitarian assistance remains an issue of great concern. In the Darfur region of Sudan, 3.6 million people are in need of relief supplies. However, for humanitarian personnel access is restricted due to growing insecurity. Since the 30th of June this year, 12 humanitarian workers have been killed in Darfur. A substantial grant from the Central Emergency Response Fund has allowed helicopter access to remote areas, but only for a three-month period. This is not a sustainable solution.

Thirdly, gender-based violence is also an issue of concern to the humanitarian community. Sexual violence is only one form of gender-based violence; forced conscription and the recruitment of boys into military ranks are others. Member States have the prime responsibility for preventing these violations, by putting in place measures to prosecute perpetrators and establishing structures to take care of its victims.

Finally, today's debate also covers the sub-item d) on assistance to the Palestinian people. Significant long term financial support from the international community is needed in order to avoid further degradation of the humanitarian and economic situation in Palestine. Due to the ongoing political uncertainty and economic hardship, United Nations agencies have directed most of their activities towards immediate emergency assistance.

As we conduct our deliberations today, let us keep in mind all the vulnerable people around the world in need of humanitarian assistance. Our common efforts to strengthen the coordination of the humanitarian and emergency response system of the United Nations, should aim to alleviate suffering and improve chances of survival in times of emergencies. We must not fail those who depend on the UN as their final hope.

Thank you.