



# General Assembly

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*Official Records*

*President:* Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

## Agenda item 69 (continued)

### Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

#### Reports of the Secretary-General (A/61/79 and A/61/463)

#### (a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

##### Letter from the Secretary-General (A/61/550)

##### Reports of the Secretary-General (A/61/85, A/61/87 and A/61/314)

#### (d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

##### Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/80)

**The President:** I give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): We have gathered here today to discuss an issue that is of vital importance to the Palestinian people, both economically and politically. International assistance, which has been a lifeline for the Palestinian people, began as much-needed humanitarian assistance to a people, the majority of whom had become refugees by force and coercion. Soon after, with increased international attention to the core political context of the Palestinian question, international assistance to the Palestinian people developed. That evolved into assistance on

which the Palestinian people could depend. It helped them endure the crushing reality of the Israeli military occupation and the economic and political deprivation that has been imposed on them and with which the majority of them have had to live.

This assistance is also very political in terms of its context. That was clearly evident from the sharp increase in international assistance with the start of the peace process and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. Numerous large-scale infrastructure projects were internationally funded, laying the foundation for sustainable development in a stable Palestine leading to a brighter tomorrow for future generations. The international community was determined to support the political efforts of the Palestinian leadership to achieve peace and stability in the region through the building of a stable and economically viable Palestinian entity, committed to peace and respect for international law. Regrettably, that commitment and the resulting accomplishments have been confronted with the crushing military might of the Israeli occupation, which, over the past six years, has decimated the cherished achievements of the Palestinian people. In fact, through illegal policies and military aggression, as well as a severe economic siege, Israel, the occupying Power, has ensured the ruin of the Palestinian economy and the transformation of the Palestinian population from a young, productive society into a crippled and starved one.

It has been 39 years since the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem,

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began. Much has changed on the ground and at the political level since then, but one thing has remained relentlessly consistent: the Israeli occupation's policy of subjugating the Palestinian people by exploiting their resources, denying them their rights and sabotaging their dreams.

Before the beginning of the peace process, the Israeli occupation shackled the Palestinian economy and kept it hostage, denying it the ability to reach its full potential or to establish any viable foundations. Production, manufacturing, import and export were all economic activities denied the Palestinians and reserved for the exclusive benefit of Israel, the occupying Power. For decades, the Palestinian economy was coerced into being an outlet for Israeli products that enjoyed absolute hegemony over the market. Even after the signing of various economic agreements as part of the peace process, Israel, the occupying Power, insisted on the upper hand over the flow of currency, merchandise and other economic elements, keeping overwhelming pressure on the fledgling Palestinian economy.

In addition to exercising that hegemony over the past six years, Israel, the occupying Power, has also employed an intricate system of closure and siege that has repeatedly caused serious crises in the Palestinian economy and, more recently, has absolutely devastated all sectors of society.

Israel, the occupying Power, has spared no effort and left no stone unturned in working to achieve economic and social development for its citizens at the expense of the Palestinian people. More important, it has made a policy of denying the Palestinian people the right even to lay down the foundations for a future State, destroying whatever achievements are accomplished to that end.

Over the past six years, Israel, the occupying Power, has repeatedly and systematically targeted and destroyed the economic achievements that international assistance funded for the Palestinian people.

Infrastructure projects, including water and sewage networks, have been repeatedly targeted and destroyed by the Israeli military aggression. Gaza's only electrical power plant was destroyed. Its international airport and port have also been turned into a pile of rubble by the Israeli occupying forces. Palestinian institutions, including those essential for the protection and upholding of the rule of law, have

also been systematically destroyed. The crippling effect of this systematic campaign of destruction cannot be overstated.

At the same time, it is very important to keep in mind that this tragic situation is doubly devastating because the losses incurred by the Palestinian people are losses that the Palestinian economy cannot withstand and at the same time are funded by international resources that the Palestinian people cannot replace. Allow me to emphasize here that the destruction of one internationally funded project means that important and scarce resources have to be diverted to the project's reconstruction, resulting in the Palestinian people losing a potential additional economic asset to their economy.

In effect, this systematic Israeli campaign of destruction and sabotage has trapped the Palestinian people into a cycle of repair and reconstruction rather than of construction and development. The comprehensive nature of the devastation wrought in all sectors of the Palestinian economy and society by Israeli military aggression leaves no room for development and planning. Instead, it confines the Palestinian people to a limited reality, where survival is an end goal rather than a given, and where development is a long-forgotten priority rather than a continuous reality.

Examining the destruction of what international assistance builds is only half of the story, for it does not expose the wider picture. Nor does it uncover the comprehensive effect of these devastating Israeli acts of aggression. Hand in hand with the economic siege imposed on the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip, Israel, the occupying Power, has succeeded in neutralizing any positive outcome of international assistance to the Palestinian people. It has diverted this assistance from sustainable development into largely emergency humanitarian assistance. While the generous contributions of the international community in this respect enjoy the highest regard and appreciation of the Palestinian people and their leadership, they do not solve the problem. This is simply because what is now largely emergency assistance only aids Palestinian recipients in surviving the current crisis, rather than in building for a brighter future. It is therefore of great importance to look at current assistance needs in this context.

Currently, a large number of Palestinians live under the poverty line of less than \$2.10 a day. Over the past year, the number of people living under the poverty line in Gaza has risen by 30 per cent, to a shocking 75 per cent. These disturbing figures are the direct result of the siege that Israel, the occupying Power, has imposed on the Gaza Strip, which isolates it from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and the world.

Consequently, out of 1.4 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, 1.1 million now depend on United Nations assistance for their daily food. Simply to say “food insecurity” in this case is an understatement. Regrettably, these astounding facts are the tip of the iceberg in Palestine, which, as the United Nations and other experts have warned, is facing a catastrophic humanitarian situation as a result of the oppressive policies of the Israeli occupation.

Over the past year, international assistance to the Palestinian people has continued, although through a new mechanism designed by the Quartet as a response to the appointment of the new Palestinian Government. However well-intended this new mechanism is, the consequences on the ground of what has essentially been an international community boycott of the Palestinian Authority has been absolutely paralysing. This is especially significant when taking into consideration the fact that the current mechanism does not include assistance to the Palestinian Authority that would aid it in paying the 130,000 public servants who constitute 23 per cent of the employed Palestinian population. Moreover, the boycott is compounded by Israel’s withholding of the \$60 million a month owed to the Palestinian Authority in collected taxes.

These new circumstances vis-à-vis international assistance have aggravated an already intolerable economic and humanitarian situation on the ground. Adding to the woes of high unemployment and virtual economic collapse, Palestinian public servants, who had hitherto been the remaining secure financial contributors to the economy, are now, in a word, bankrupt.

While it is understandable that assistance cannot be provided contrary to a Member State’s policies or political goals, this international boycott is inexplicable, as it has effectively resulted in the collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The boycott is simply counterproductive, because it has

also complicated an already complex situation on the ground, both politically and economically. In this context, I would like to draw the Assembly’s attention to the recent report submitted by Mr. John Dugard on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in which he stated that “[T]he Palestinian people have been subjected to economic sanctions — the first time an occupied people have been so treated” (*A/HRC/2/5, summary*).

Israel, the occupying Power, has repeatedly used the convenient guise of self-defence and so-called security needs to justify its unrelenting violations of international law and international humanitarian law, its campaign of destruction and military aggression against the Palestinian economy as well as the siege it has imposed on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and, in particular, the Gaza Strip.

Self-defence and security needs should never be acceptable excuses for gross human rights violations and contraventions of international law. In effect, aiming attacks at civilian targets is forbidden under international humanitarian law and is considered a war crime. In view of the occupying Power’s responsibility for the lives and welfare of the population under its occupation, Israel is obliged under international law to make reparation for the war crimes it has committed.

This case should be no different. Indeed, the serious situation on the ground resulting from the reprehensible actions of the occupying Power should further motivate the international community to act resolutely and put a final end to the destruction of an entire people, not merely their property, funded projects and potential future.

In this context, international assistance to the Palestinian people is of imperative importance, as this assistance is the lifeline on which a viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, could be founded. The destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, public buildings and other economically vital institutions by the occupying Power amounts to war crimes, as many reports submitted to the Assembly have stated.

These must be brought to a halt so that the assistance of the international community can be redirected towards construction and development. The international community must not allow Israel, the occupying Power, to continue wasting and sabotaging the world’s generous contributions through its

collective punishment of the Palestinian people, denial of their rights and destruction of their chances for a viable State.

**Ms. Sahussarungsi** (Thailand): I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Permanent Representative of Thailand.

Allow me at the outset to acknowledge with appreciation the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General in the context of the series of reports focusing on the current recovery process in the aftermath of natural disasters, as well as the strengthening of international coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance — reports that are before us.

As Thailand was one of the countries adversely affected by the tsunami in 2004, the issue of humanitarian and emergency assistance is close to our hearts. We are pleased to humbly share with the Assembly, in this joint debate under agenda item 69, sub-item (a), our own past experiences regarding the strengthening of emergency and humanitarian assistance for the road to recovery, as well as our views on the strengthening of international cooperation in those fields.

The road to recovery in the aftermath of the tsunami in Thailand has remained challenging for our country. In this regard, we appreciate all of the assistance contributed by the international community during that time. For its part, the Thai Government has established a policy of preparedness for disaster crisis — a national master plan that the State agencies concerned can use as a framework to adopt methods and measures to respond to future disasters in the region.

Of equal importance to crisis management are pre- and post-crisis management, which require cooperation among national agencies and from the international community. One approach to mitigating the impact of disasters is establishing early-warning systems, while raising the alert level of the general public and relief operators. Thailand believes that regional arrangements are necessary to effectively respond to regional disasters.

In this regard, in late 2005, Thailand, together with countries in the South-East Asian and Indian Ocean region, established a Multi-Donor Trust Fund for a tsunami early-warning system. The objective of the Trust Fund is to enhance the development of

capacity-building for a tsunami early warning system for the countries in the South-East Asian and Indian Ocean region. The Fund is under the management of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The current amount in the Fund is \$12.5 million — \$10 million having been contributed by Thailand and \$2.5 million by Sweden. At the most recent meeting of the Advisory Council of the Trust Fund in October 2006, approximately 23 projects were proposed through regional and national arrangements for the utilization of the Fund, and we wish to encourage further contributions to the Fund — and its utilization — by the international community, civil society and the private sector.

We also wish to draw attention to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum standby arrangement. The arrangement aims to facilitate timely and effective relief efforts in the region through strengthened linkages, and we believe that it can complement and link up with existing United Nations arrangements and programmes, as well as with those of other organizations, including the World Food Programme (WFP). In this regard, we wish to express our appreciation to the WFP for having chosen Thailand to be the site of the Asian regional preparedness and response facility. We believe that the Utapao air base offers an ideal location for the humanitarian operation. The Government of Thailand will work out the details with the WFP in order soon to make it a reality.

Thailand also welcomes the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund, which will strengthen responses in the context of time-critical requirements, as well as core elements of humanitarian responses in underfunded crises.

Sustainable development with an emphasis on human and social development is the core of Thailand's humanitarian assistance policy. Emphasis will also be placed on sustainable and long-lasting results. In this regard, it is of the utmost importance that United Nations agencies coordinate their policies and programme implementation in order to deliver assistance more effectively and make real changes on the ground. The capacity-building of local communities and individuals is also a key factor in determining sustainable responses.

In this regard, the United Nations country team has a key role to play in strengthening synergies

between the capacity-development efforts of local and international actors, including the private sector and non-governmental organizations, with a view to ensuring greater coherence of policies and effectiveness of humanitarian responses.

In this respect, Thailand takes note of the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations, particularly in the field of humanitarian assistance. We also look forward to the Secretary-General's forthcoming report and recommendations.

Strengthening the capacity of national and local government and communities to prepare for and respond to crises is crucial if we are to mitigate the negative effects of disasters. The United Nations should assess existing preparedness capabilities and networks at the national and local levels in order to provide for the diverse needs of capacity-building assistance.

Finally, my delegation wishes to stress that the success of our work with the United Nations depends not on what we promise, but on changes and improvements we actually make in the lives of people on the ground.

**Mr. Løvald** (Norway): Norway remains a strong supporter of the humanitarian work of the United Nations. We support the reform agenda and the efforts made to strengthen the humanitarian response system. A lot has been done in this regard. However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed.

Norway would like the United Nations to intensify its work to integrate a gender perspective in all United Nations programmes in a systematic manner. Evaluations of the recent emergency responses following the tsunami, the Pakistan earthquake and the situation in Darfur demonstrated that gender issues have been neglected to a large extent.

Gender aspects must be integrated in the cluster reform agenda and in disaster risk reduction strategies. More effective preventive and protective measures are needed to address sexual and gender-based violence. We are pleased with the ongoing work in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on concrete measures to mainstream gender in humanitarian action.

It is safe to conclude that the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has been a success so far. The CERF has led to improved response and more

predictable funding, both as regards sudden-onset emergencies and neglected crises. It is vital to maintain speed and flexibility while at the same time ensuring sufficient financial control. In line with the recommendation by the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence, Norway intends to increase its contribution to the CERF in 2007. We encourage other donors to increase their contributions. At the same time, a wider donor base is needed, and we encourage Member States that have not yet contributed to do so.

Effective humanitarian coordination on the ground is of utmost importance. Strengthening the humanitarian coordinator system is all about having the right people with the right skills in the right places at the right times. Recent initiatives, such as developing a stand-by capacity of trained humanitarian coordinators, are steps in the right direction.

Norway remains fully committed to the cluster approach as a key element of humanitarian reform. Important improvements have been achieved, but a lot remains to be done to ensure a clearer division of labour, better capacity and defined operational targets. We need to develop more effective partnerships between the United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian actors, such as non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The prevention of humanitarian crises needs to be put higher on the United Nations agenda. We are faced with prolonged armed conflicts, as well as climate change, environmental degradation, floods, droughts, hurricanes, population growth, uncontrolled urbanization and corruption. We need to be better prepared to respond to humanitarian crises that result from these challenges.

Norway would like to underline that cooperation between military forces and humanitarian agencies in disaster relief must be approached from a humanitarian perspective. Recent emergencies have demonstrated the need for better coordination between humanitarian and military responses, based on clear guidelines. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has now updated the Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief. The Guidelines will be re-launched in Oslo on 27 November. We hope that the updated Guidelines will contribute to a better

understanding and better practices in civil-military coordination in the years to come.

In conflict situations too — such as that in Afghanistan — it is vital to ensure effective civil-military coordination, while at the same time respecting the different roles and responsibilities of civilian and military actors. There is a need for a change of pace in civilian efforts to build a durable peace in Afghanistan. In order to achieve this, civil-military coordination must be improved. In particular, we would like to see a strengthened coordination role for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in close collaboration with the Afghan authorities. We look forward to discussing further how this can be achieved.

The High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence has called for a more unified United Nations country presence: the “One UN” programmes. The Panel confirms the need to continue humanitarian reform efforts vigorously. The recommendations must be followed up, and we look forward to the continued leadership of the Secretary-General and the incoming Secretary-General in this respect.

Finally, Norway wishes to express its gratitude to the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, for his tireless efforts in mobilizing the United Nations and the entire humanitarian community to respond to humanitarian emergencies. His strong leadership following the Indian Ocean tsunami set new standards for emergency response. He has also brought the world’s attention to neglected and underfunded crises, such as those in Darfur and in northern Uganda.

**Mr. Kapoma** (Zambia): My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for the good report (A/61/314) on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development. The report highlights key challenges faced by the international community in improving the international response to disasters and in strengthening the capacity of disaster-prone countries in disaster management.

Zambia attaches a great deal of importance to United Nations efforts in strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, and to the special economic disaster-management assistance that has been provided and continues to be provided to disaster-prone countries. We therefore welcome the recommendations contained

in the report of the Secretary-General, which was submitted in response to resolution 60/125 of 15 December 2005, which requested the Secretary-General to improve the international response to natural disasters.

My delegation recognizes that disasters cause direct losses to productive capital and stocks and to economic and social infrastructure, as well as indirect losses, by disrupting production and the flow of goods and services, thus leading to loss of earnings. Furthermore, we recognize that the importance of addressing what has become a vicious cycle of recurrent human and material loss, environmental and social degradation and increased vulnerability requires that the international community work together towards a disaster management approach that addresses the interconnectedness of threats and vulnerabilities on a global level. We believe that this approach should engage national Governments in strategic disaster planning and preparedness at regional, national and local levels, sustaining high levels of assistance for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction and giving priority to risk reduction as a matter of serious concern.

*Mr. Chidyausiki (Zimbabwe), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Zambia values the importance of the institutional, administrative and legal frameworks for effective disaster management, the more so now when the emphasis is more on disaster risk reduction — a proactive approach — than on disaster management, which tends to be reactive in nature. In this regard, Zambia launched, in 2005, a national disaster management policy and a national disaster management operations manual.

The development of the policy and its subsequent launch were necessitated by the need to move away from an ad hoc and fragmented approach to a disaster management to a proactive and coordinated approach. The policy provides the national framework for a disaster management regime that spells out the functions of all stakeholders, from the central Government to the satellite or village committees at the community level. The country is also in the process of putting in place a legal framework for disaster management. The bill to that effect is at the draft stage.

To ensure consensus on national issues relating to disasters, Zambia has also established the National

Disaster Management Consultative Forum, which is a national platform that brings together the Government, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and private-sector agencies. The platform provides a forum for exchange of information relating to disaster-risk reduction activities and also serves as the entry point for humanitarian assistance from the private sector and civil society.

With regard to international cooperation on humanitarian assistance, Zambia has participated in a number of international assistance activities such as the international rescue operation for the Mozambique flood experience in 2000, and has participated, and continues to participate, in a number of United Nations assessment missions. I would also like mention that Zambia is ready to participate in any future international activities, as and when the need arises.

Zambia has also recorded some achievements in the area of disaster and risk reduction. Those include initiating the disaster management bill; establishing and equipping an emergency operations centre; operationalizing the national disaster management structure, taking it from the Committee of Ministers to community members at community and village level; hosting the Southern African Development Community simulation exercise code-named Operation Blue Angel, which involved the airlifting of relief supplies from towns to rural parts of Zambia in 2003; and successfully implementing the World Bank-supported emergency drought recovery project from 2003 to 2005.

Despite those achievements, Zambia still faces a number of constraints. Those include the lack of comprehensive baseline information on vulnerability; limited logistical capacity for timely response to disaster situations; the need to streamline an early warning system; and the lack of comprehensive national capacity assessment relating to resource availability for disaster response and the implementation of mitigation activities.

In conclusion, I would like to appeal to the international community to continue to support least developed countries in strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. In the case of Zambia, we would request assistance in the following areas for building capacity for preparedness and timely disaster response: education and training for disaster preparedness; logistical capacity for timely

response to disaster situations; streamlining and strengthening early warning systems; carrying out a comprehensive vulnerability assessment and analysis in order to have baseline information on national vulnerability; and carrying out a national capacity assessment to determine resource availability and gaps.

Once provided, that assistance would play a very important role in enabling Zambia to participate effectively in humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters when the need arises, both at the national and the international level.

**Mr. Bouresly (Kuwait)** (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly has before it today an important agenda item: "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations". In recent years, the United Nations has done important work through its specialized institutions, programmes and offices, especially in facilitating the transport and provision of emergency assistance. We support the recommendations of the Secretary-General regarding re-orienting international humanitarian assistance efforts and the provision of goods and services, so as to strengthen local, national and regional disaster relief management and implement the programmes of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

I would like to underscore that the State and people of Kuwait continue to stand by friendly and brotherly countries that have suffered as a result of devastating disasters. We welcome the efforts, solidarity and cooperation of the international community, as well as its rapid response in providing generous assistance and managing the delivery of humanitarian relief to mitigate the effects of such disasters on the people affected by them. The international community has given expression to the noblest form of solidarity and cooperation during crises, such as the 2004 tsunami, which affected South-East Asian and Indian Ocean countries, the devastating disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, in the United States, and the earthquakes that struck Pakistan. Kuwait's policy in addressing such disasters is to provide bilateral assistance to affected regions and countries after assessing their needs, keeping in mind the need to act expeditiously. Over the past two years, we have provided \$800 million to countries suffering as a result of the tsunami, \$800 million to countries whose citizens suffered from the South Asian earthquakes and \$500 million to the victims of

Hurricane Katrina. We have also participated in addressing the destructive effects of Hurricane Wilma by offering \$300,000 to Jamaica, Grenada, Cuba, Honduras, Haiti and Belize. Those figures reflect net assistance, as we deduct no transport or administrative costs from our contributions.

We have also contributed \$200,000 to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). In addition, we have provided \$2.5 million to the Kuwaiti Red Crescent to provide assistance to the victims of the earthquake in Pakistan and South Asia. That is in addition to our contributions to United Nations entities, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund.

The rise in natural disasters in recent years, including in terms of their devastating impact on human lives and their socio-economic and environmental effects, in particular in developing countries, calls for international solidarity and the mobilization of efforts commensurate with the scale of disasters. In that regard, we would like to point to the importance of a strong regional early warning system, to mitigate the harmful effects of natural disasters.

With regard to assistance to the Palestinian people, the report (A/61/80) of the Secretary-General emphasizes that, in the period under consideration, there has been a very rapid series of events in the occupied Palestinian territories. This period has been marked by uncertainty, ambiguity and disappointment. The report also cites very grave figures about the Palestinian economy. For instance, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 48 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line, 23 per cent are unemployed and 76 per cent have expressed the desire to receive assistance. In this regard, we emphasize that Kuwait continues to offer assistance to the Palestinian Authority, either directly or through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

We believe that the international community must intensify its efforts to put an end to Israel's outrageous violations, to halt construction of the separation wall, to end restrictions on the movement of Palestinians, and resume negotiations to reach a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict.

Kuwait will continue aid on a bilateral basis, as well as through United Nations agencies, not only for disaster relief but also to help rebuild through efforts undertaken by entities such as the Kuwait Economic Development Fund and Kuwaiti civil society organizations and charities, with a view to creating a world of peace, stability and prosperity for all.

**Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt)** (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express my support for the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and to convey my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports, which help to facilitate our discussions on this issue — one that is of special importance to Egypt.

The Secretary-General's report, submitted in accordance with resolution 60/124, on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance by the United Nations (A/61/85) is a response to issues of real concern. There was an 18 per cent increase in the number of large-scale disasters last year, which caused the deaths of 92,000, affected the lives of 157 million others and resulted in \$159 billion worth of material damage. We are particularly concerned about the statistics that show that hydrometeorological and geological disasters are increasing in frequency, diversity, intensity and strength and that their destructive impact is therefore also increasing.

Accordingly, Egypt reaffirms that there is an urgent need to build up the institutional capacities of countries to effectively and successfully deal with natural disasters and the consequences of conflict and war before disaster strikes through preventive actions aimed at strengthening the capacities of countries in terms of predictability, early warning and preparedness, as well as to prepare for the subsequent phase of assisting in eliminating the effects of disasters through reconstruction efforts leading towards sustainable development.

The report of the Secretary-General confirms that, despite the many international instruments emphasizing the importance of building capacity to respond to disasters, such capacity remains constrained because of a lack of funding and other resources. Thus, in the face of these changes, United Nations efforts to coordinate national and international entities and to promote international multilateral coordination must be intensified.



We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's invitation to Member States, donors and relevant humanitarian organizations to invest in preparedness, vigilance and recovery operations aimed at reducing the possible negative affects of emergency humanitarian situations. We agree with his reference to the regional dimension in dealing with crises that require a cross-border response, and support his proposal that Member States and relevant United Nations organizations support regional coordinating mechanisms, which will result in additional coherence and the flexible, effective and optimal use of capacities.

Egypt is eager to participate in international efforts to deal with the effects of humanitarian disasters and in international, regional and bilateral efforts to provide emergency humanitarian relief according to the needs and priorities of affected countries. Egypt was one of the countries that established the Central Emergency Response Fund and has provided the Fund with financial support. We have also provided technical support through the participation of one of our experts in the Fund's consultative group. In this regard, we support the recommendation contained in the Secretary-General's report that the impact of the Fund be maximized and its functions improved, as envisioned in resolution 60/124.

We have all agreed that we should avoid using general and non-specific concepts in humanitarian activities, such as the language used in the recommendation in the Secretary-General's report that donors provide the necessary resources for implementing the cluster approach and cluster-related activities at the country level. The usefulness of defining concepts and consolidating activities when dealing with natural disasters and other crises has yet to be proved.

Because countries have the right, the responsibility and the primary role to provide assistance and protection to their citizens, in accordance with resolution 46/182, the important role played by non-governmental and civil society organizations should be based on reinforcing national efforts and ensuring that assistance reaches those in need. Such organizations, which provide for people's urgent humanitarian needs, should not be exploited as a means of interfering in the internal affairs of countries

or of imposing special agendas that focus attention on certain groups and not on others.

The events of the past few days — namely the Security Council's failure to stop Israel's attacks against the Palestinians, owing to the use of the veto — have confirmed that there is an urgent need for an effective response to the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people (A/61/80), which was submitted pursuant to resolution 60/126.

The tragic reality of Palestinian daily life under the Israeli occupation, and Israel's continued and increasing violations of human rights, including its hindrance of organized international and regional efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, require the General Assembly to take a firm stance, especially since recent events have shown that the use of force — whether in Palestine or in Lebanon — will not result in a settlement. Rather, it will only worsen feelings of frustration and despair that foster extremism and hatred, which we do not need.

If we are to prevent a further deterioration in the quality of life inside the occupied Palestinian territories, a further decline of the Palestinian economy and an increase in the economic, social and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population, the Secretary-General's recommendation that significant financial assistance be provided by the international community must be effectively implemented.

If international support is to achieve the goal to which we aspire, United Nations agencies must be able to urgently and adequately meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people by strengthening existing mechanisms. The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must therefore be supported; it should be able to play its proper role in the Palestinian territory. Israel must respect the Agreement on Movement and Access, which must be renewed, and all restrictions on the movement of assistance organizations must be removed. The Palestinian people must be allowed to interact with the rest of the world and to receive humanitarian assistance until our fundamental goal is achieved at the earliest opportunity through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, as a result of negotiation, and not through violence and humanitarian crises.

We are looking forward to receiving the recommendations of the Secretary-General in this regard. His report on assistance to the Palestinians ended with a number of observations, without presenting any prospects for addressing the issue in future. We believe that that should be rectified effectively by the Secretariat in its future reports so that the vision of the United Nations can interact with the vision of Member States in order to end the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation.

**Mr. Skinner-Klée** (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank the Secretary-General for each of the reports submitted under this agenda item, which I shall now discuss — particularly the report on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/61/85) and the report on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters (A/61/314).

We also wish to highlight and express gratitude for the efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian and relief assistance in cases of disaster by the United Nations and all countries that find themselves in a constant struggle to reduce them. In that connection, we commend the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and particularly of its Under-Secretary-General, who has had a very busy year full of important achievements, particularly for Africa.

Emergency humanitarian assistance should begin with risk reduction and preventive attention to persons who live in conditions that make them vulnerable. We must recognize the need to break the devastating vicious cycles of vulnerability that exact a constant toll in terms of human and material losses as well as environmental and social degradation. In order to put an end to those cycles, we agree with the idea of focusing first on potential disaster hot spots and channelling our efforts from a regional perspective so as to ensure a comprehensive, integrated and multidimensional response over the long term.

Guatemala, like the other countries of Central America, is an obvious potential disaster hot spot that constantly suffers from great vulnerability. We know that from June to November, the region can be hit by hurricanes, storms, floods and mudslides; that from November to June, it can suffer from droughts and forest fires; and that throughout the year, it can be

beset by volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tidal waves. Our risk is of cataclysmic proportions.

Thus, according to the Secretary-General's report, last year Guatemala was among the 10 most affected countries in terms of both the number of persons killed by natural disasters and the number of those affected by such disasters. Sadly, within that group of countries, our country ranks fourth in terms of major economic damage caused by natural disasters.

Under those circumstances, we agree that the capacity of national and local responses must be determined before we can decide on which aspects need to be strengthened and where. Guatemala has a national coordinator for the reduction of natural or man-made disasters — an institution comprising offices and entities from the public and private sectors that work together on risk management and mitigation. It also works with other countries in the Central American region, within the framework of the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America, to pool efforts, experts and resources in order to face disasters more effectively.

With regard to the United Nations humanitarian assistance coordination system, we believe that, with the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), we now have valuable elements at our disposal that will not only permit greater predictability for the financing of humanitarian emergency responses, but will also contribute to humanitarian assistance directed to specific needs — assistance that, we trust, will be more rapid and effective.

Likewise, we consider important and support the broadening of engagement by interested actors, including those in the private sector, in the area of humanitarian response. In that connection, we support the idea of broadening engagement and coordination with entities outside the United Nations and creating more formal interaction structures that will make it possible to mount a coordinated response before and after crises. We also believe that the cluster approach is an important opportunity to achieve greater participation by the international community.

Regarding the chronic financing deficit crisis, my delegation believes that all disasters are of equal importance and that they should not be assessed in terms of which country suffers the greatest number of deaths or has the most damage or the broadest media

coverage. That is why we support the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, as well as the Secretary-General's recommendation that indicators be established for humanitarian assistance, in particular by setting minimum levels of assistance for beneficiaries and long-term targets related to the Millennium Development Goals.

In that context, we take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the information provided by the Secretary-General in the report contained in document A/61/85/Add.1 concerning the detailed use of CERF, which includes important conclusions regarding its first six months of operation. Like other delegations, we urge that the pledges to the Fund become cash payments, because if CERF is to be a useful tool, its funds must be replenished. We consider timely the high-level donor conference for CERF, to be held in early December this year. It will be a good opportunity to obtain additional pledges and contributions for emergency response.

Through many difficulties over the years, Guatemala has understood the importance of meeting the special needs of vulnerable groups, whose fragility is worsened by the collapse of community and governmental structures. In that connection, we agree with the Secretary-General on the need to pay special attention to the scourge of gender-based violence committed in humanitarian emergency situations. We reiterate once again our total and categorical rejection of that form of violence. That is why we support efforts to strengthen national institutions and to adopt measures providing greater protection, training and education to the population to prevent upsurges in this kind of violence during humanitarian crises. Our international obligations, and the duty to protect human rights and the rule of law, compel us to punish such violations against our vulnerable populations and to provide appropriate support and offer minimum guarantees to surviving victims.

Guatemala also believes that the special attention that must be given to particularities and cultural specificities is crucial. In October 2005, the devastating effects of tropical storm Stan were felt mainly in our indigenous communities. According to the Secretary-General's report, more than 670 persons died, 844 were reported missing, 386 were injured and an estimated 475,000 were affected.

The community tradition of indigenous peoples is a fundamental contribution both to the success of the management of the humanitarian crisis assistance system and to efforts aimed at subsequent recovery, which necessarily depends on reconstruction of the social fabric. Therefore, we strongly support the notion that humanitarian assistance must take into account the cultural specificities of each country, not only to coordinate effective integration activities, but also to guard against the pernicious effects of the dislocation of populations and the resulting social chaos that jeopardizes their traditions.

Another aspect to which we accord high priority is the incorporation of humanitarian components into the initial mandate of integrated peacekeeping missions. Our own experience has raised our awareness of that issue. We are a country that, during its transition from conflict to peace, suffered the consequences of natural disasters, such as the powerful Hurricane Mitch, which devastated Central America in 1998, only two years after the signing of the peace agreements in Guatemala. Thus, we support and recognize the usefulness of the efforts made thus far in the missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. We also urge that, despite the challenges ahead in the missions in Haiti and Côte d'Ivoire, we continue to carefully determine priorities and improve coordination with humanitarian actors in the process of planning integrated missions.

We are therefore pleased with the importance the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence gives to the Organization's role in humanitarian assistance and to its reform in order to ensure a better response capacity.

Finally, I wish briefly to refer to the tragic events in recent months in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, as well as in Lebanon. The situation in the Gaza Strip is cause for particular concern. It is regrettable to see the growing pace at which the situation continues to deteriorate. Israeli military operations, actions of Palestinian extremist groups and growing tension between Hamas and Fatah partisans are the main factors in this deterioration. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated further as a result of the extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure in the territory. We stress that crossing points must remain open in order to allow for the entry of food, medicines and other important items, especially fuel.

With regard to the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, we appreciate the efforts made by OCHA and the humanitarian agencies. The priority in the present circumstances must be to guarantee access to the affected population in southern Lebanon and provide assistance to persons returning to their homes. We also wish to recall that the presence of many unexploded munitions creates an additional challenge for these operations.

We appeal to the donor community to respond generously to the humanitarian needs in the Gaza Strip and in Lebanon.

**Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba)** (*spoke in Spanish*): Unfortunately, we continue to face the reality of a world characterized by inequality and growing threats and obstacles to peace and development, where humanitarian crises proliferate and where there is a continuing lack of will among those who can mobilize resources to alleviate the consequences of disasters.

Nature's fury does not distinguish between developing and developed countries. Nevertheless, the consequences of successive natural disasters in recent years reveal, as never before, the serious crisis underlying the international sustainable development agenda that we, the third world countries, are facing. The peoples of the South continue to suffer the impact of conditions resulting from the current unjust international order, which undermines national capacity to respond immediately to the huge challenges imposed by the effects of natural disasters.

Therefore, it is essential that humanitarian assistance be accompanied by serious commitment, without conditions, to the economic growth and sustainable development of the developing nations. There, contributions for humanitarian assistance should not be predetermined and should not be made at the expense of resources for international development cooperation.

In an international system marked by unipolarity and the exercise of hegemony through the illegal "pre-emptive" use of armed force, Cuba reaffirms the validity of the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182 and in successive Assembly resolutions. The principle of independence is crucial. Humanitarian objectives should be divorced from political, economic, military or any other objectives that any actor might have vis-à-vis areas in

which humanitarian assistance operations are being implemented.

The present state of affairs requires that the transition from relief to development capture the interest that it deserves and that the international community act diligently to enable those who are recovering from the impact of natural disasters to resume their national plans for viable economic growth and to continue their progress towards sustainable development fostering the creation of the resources required for a long-term response to the disaster's consequences.

In this regard, it is crucial to take steps to revive socio-economic activity in affected communities. These can include the following: the cancellation, significant relief or rescheduling of external debt, giving the country a grace period that would help accelerate its relief, reconstruction and development efforts; the promotion of a coordinated effort involving a variety of new and additional sources of financial resources for the affected nations, including the international financial organizations, especially the World Bank; and granting temporary facilities and trade preferences for specific domestic products, in particular those from the areas affected by the disaster. This would aim at helping to rebuild productive capacities and generate jobs. Other actions could be launched through UNICEF, UNESCO and other bodies, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system in order to help children affected by disasters, especially those who become orphans, thus contributing to their physical and mental development.

In this context, the increasing negative impact of natural disasters demands the strengthening of national activities related to prevention, mitigation and planning, and the implementation of the outcome of the second World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Japan in January 2005.

International cooperation mechanisms should be strengthened. The experiences of recent years with the hurricanes that have hit the Caribbean basin, the Gulf of Mexico and Central America, as well as the natural disasters suffered in Pakistan, Indonesia and other places, are proof of this.

Giving assistance out of solidarity with those who need it is one of the pillars of Cuba's foreign policy, and our cooperation programme has continued throughout the more than 40 years of our Revolution.

In this spirit, Cuban doctors, teachers, engineers and other professionals and technicians have provided noble services in several regions of our planet. After Hurricane Katrina's impact, the Henry Reeve international contingent of doctors specializing in disaster situations and serious epidemics was formed on 19 September 2005. Its members have provided assistance to people in many countries. They stand ready to act not only in natural disasters, but also in other emergency situations that require assistance, such as epidemic outbreaks, and in the worldwide fight against HIV/AIDS.

This is Cuba's contribution: specialists and engineers ready to share the Cuban national experience in assistance work and emergency aid; doctors who will save lives, ease the pain and fight outbreaks of disease, providing essential health services to those who have lost everything and who suffer the calamity of neglect. As their only reward, they take home the satisfaction of a job well done and do not ask for the frivolous fame offered by coverage in big transnational media. Nor, perhaps, will they receive any awards or prizes for their humanitarian conduct; that is not what they seek. The appreciation of those persons whom they cure and save will suffice.

The selfless solidarity of Cuba, a small, blockaded third-world country, should serve as an example to coax hugely rich States and international financial bodies into providing needed assistance to those who suffer terribly at the hands of nature. It is possible. The suffering of the victims is in stark contrast to the trillion dollars that are wasted in military expenditures every year.

We need permanent mobilization, a true spirit of human solidarity and a strong political commitment to solve the underlying ills that feed the uncontrollable forces of natural disasters. As long as that is not achieved, the efforts by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance will be in vain.

**Mr. Ainchil** (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, the delegation of Argentina would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the relevant reports he has submitted under agenda item 69. They constitute an excellent basis for our deliberations today.

Every year we are witnesses to the devastating effects of natural disasters that overwhelm the capacity of national authorities, showing the chronic

vulnerability of a great number of developing countries. Those disasters cause enormous human and material losses, and their consequences will last, unfortunately, for a long time.

At the same time, many of the humanitarian crises that we face are not the result of natural events beyond the control of Governments and communities, but the consequence of the deliberate action of armed groups, with or without governmental control, causing suffering among civilian populations.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1) recognized human rights as a pillar of the Organization that should permeate all of its activities in a crosscutting manner. It is from that rights-based perspective that places the individual at the centre of our concerns that Argentina supports the humanitarian action of the United Nations. In this regard we wish to express our appreciation to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the agencies of the United Nations system that every day, under the most dangerous circumstances, provide humanitarian assistance and protection to populations affected by emergencies.

When speaking of the humanitarian activities of the United Nations, we cannot fail to express our serious concern for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, including locally recruited personnel. The Secretary-General's report on this issue (A/61/463) indicates that humanitarian personnel continue to be killed or injured and are victims of hostage-taking, physical assault, rape and sexual assault, robbery, harassment and detention, and that the right of the United Nations to protect them is denied in violation of agreed conventions. That is simply unacceptable.

Argentina once again condemns the criminal acts of violence of all kind suffered by humanitarian personnel when performing their duty. We also express our sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who have generously given their lives assisting people in situations of extreme need.

The delegation of Argentina is concerned by the continued lack of access of populations affected by emergencies, including refugees and internally displaced persons, to humanitarian assistance and protection. As stated in Security Council resolution 1674 (2006), parties to a conflict are urged to allow humanitarian personnel full unimpeded access to

civilians, to make available all necessary facilities for their operations and to promote the safety, security and freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel and their assets.

Argentina firmly believes that, in the context of the humanitarian action of the United Nations, special priority should be given to the situation of women, children and vulnerable groups, as they constitute the least protected sectors in current humanitarian emergencies.

In addition to the work of Member States and of the United Nations system, we would like to stress the essential role played by other humanitarian actors in the field, including non-governmental organizations. Efforts aimed at improving coordination mechanisms between the United Nations and those actors should be continued both at Headquarters and in the field, including on safety and security matters.

Concerning the participation of civil society in humanitarian action, Argentina continues to develop the White Helmets Initiative, placing teams of specialized volunteers, previously trained and on a standby basis, at the disposal of the United Nations humanitarian system.

The desperate situation of displaced populations is not affected by the fact that those populations may or may not have crossed an international border. In all cases, displaced populations are entitled to assistance and protection. Argentina would like to express its support to the work of OCHA and the United Nations agencies concerning internally displaced persons, bearing in mind the standards compiled in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The experience and capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is essential in this respect.

The end of the last century brought to light again the horrible realities of genocide, atrocities of war and massive attacks against civilian populations. The Security Council has provided a legal framework on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts through its resolutions 1265 (1999), 1296 (2000) and 1674 (2006). At the same time, new concepts have been discussed, questioning the idea of absolute sovereignty of the State with respect to horrifying criminal acts. Argentina participated in the formulation of those norms and has repeatedly stated, in various forums, that the principle of non-intervention in the internal

affairs of States must be balanced by the principle of non-indifference towards massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

In this respect, the General Assembly, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1), consolidated the debate of the previous years through the adoption of the concept of responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In that important document, our leaders indicated their readiness to take collective action in a timely and decisive fashion, through the Security Council, against these grave situations.

Finally, the Argentine delegation would like to thank Mr. Jan Egeland for his committed service to the United Nations as Emergency Relief Coordinator and to wish him the best in his future activities.

**Mr. Jenie (Indonesia):** The Indonesian delegation welcomes today's meeting on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. My delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the reports on that subject submitted by the Secretary-General, which offer an analysis and a set of recommendations to be considered by the General Assembly.

It is indeed important to strengthen the present foundation with a view to mobilizing an effective international response to humanitarian emergencies. At the same time, our gathering here today should aim to make communities safer as a global priority that goes far beyond emergency relief.

For obvious reasons, loss of life and destruction strike a familiar chord in all of us, compelling us to offer an international humanitarian response to alleviate the suffering. However, we are all aware that after the period of immediate emergency relief has passed there is a bigger and more arduous task ahead: namely, to rebuild and bring normalcy back to the affected populations.

Therefore, while Indonesia supports strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations as an important first step in disaster response, we nevertheless have concerns regarding efforts beyond that initial phase. My delegation therefore appreciates the Secretary-General's report entitled "International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development"

(A/61/314). This report acknowledges the importance of the efforts of the United Nations and other international organizations in supporting disaster-affected countries as they make the transition from emergency to reconstruction.

On this issue, coordination between national Governments and United Nations agencies and international organizations is important to achieve greater coherence and avoid duplication of programmes in order to ensure that the results are in line with the aspirations of the affected communities. Moreover, in the reconstruction phase, one of the building blocks that will help countries and their populations deal better with disasters is the enhancement of local, national and regional capacities for disaster management.

The international community must be able to recognize that it plays a supporting role. We agree that strengthening disaster risk management capacities not only builds on technical strengthening, as pointed out by the Secretary-General, but requires the support of donors and financing institutions as well.

One of the funding sources for humanitarian assistance is the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) which was upgraded and launched this year. Recognizing that the sustainability of the Fund depends on maintaining the political and financial thrust generated during its launching, Indonesia has contributed a total of \$50,000 to the Fund this year.

In terms of the use of the Fund, in spite of its limitations, Indonesia is confident that the appropriate decisions and measures will be adopted, taking into account the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality, as outlined in General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991.

With respect to the coordination of humanitarian assistance, it will be recalled that at one time the humanitarian system consisted of only a few players. Now, many organizations with varying skills and priorities have a bearing on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, Indonesia agrees that strengthening coordination is crucial and joined other Member States last year in endorsing the improvement of the humanitarian system.

One of the areas requiring strengthening is the capacity of the United Nations humanitarian system to identify and fill gaps in critical humanitarian

programme sectors. In this connection, the Emergency Relief Coordinator developed the cluster leadership approach as a means to develop a strong standing response capacity, more predictable and responsible leadership, greater effectiveness in aid delivery and improved coordination.

While my delegation recognizes that the cluster approach is still in its early stages, it would seem beneficial to determine whether or not it has strengthened system-wide preparedness, technical capacity at the global level and delivery of humanitarian assistance at the country level. The sharing of lessons learned and best practices accumulated during the implementation of the cluster approach in the Pakistan earthquake response, as well as in some African countries, would certainly shed some light on the ongoing process.

Before concluding, allow me to touch on the Secretary-General's report on international assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people (A/61/80). We commend the work of the United Nations in providing assistance to the Palestinian people even in the most difficult of situations. In this regard, we urge the international donor community to continue its generous support. Ultimately, however, we must rededicate ourselves to peace in the Middle East and to the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

Indonesia fully supports strengthening United Nations capacity to coordinate humanitarian response. At the same time, we must remember that it is the start of a much longer process which is equally important in priority.

**Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil):** I wish to express my delegation's appreciation for the continuous efforts of the United Nations system in helping States to strengthen capacities to prepare for and respond to emergencies and, in particular, for the leadership of the Secretary-General in this area.

The participation of Brazil in humanitarian efforts is growing. An inter-ministerial working group for international humanitarian assistance has recently been established by our Government, and the Brazilian Congress is currently conducting a comprehensive review of national legislation on humanitarian matters. Brazil is actively engaged in the White Helmets

Initiative and, within this framework, is working closely with Argentina, the initiator of this process, and other countries of our region to build up partnerships with the World Food Programme and the Organization of American States.

Brazil has also delivered more humanitarian assistance, especially by donating food, medicines, medication kits, blankets and shelter. In the last two years, Brazil has pledged resources for the reconstruction of Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories and contributed to the assistance of victims of the Asian tsunami, the South Asia earthquake and the floods in Guyana, Ecuador and Suriname.

I wish to highlight a few aspects of United Nations humanitarian assistance that my delegation deems essential at this stage. First, there is the need to strengthen local, national and regional capacities, which are an essential element to the timely and optimal use of resources in preparing and responding to emergencies, as well as in supporting the resilience of societies in post-emergency situations.

We concur with the Secretary-General's report (A/61/85) in its assertion that improvements to the humanitarian response system will work only if all relevant actors are involved. In addition to national and local governments, representatives of civil society should fully participate in all phases of the coordination of humanitarian response. Our own experience in situations following natural disasters confirms that local communities and community-based organizations play an important role in humanitarian response. The inclusion of those actors in the coordination efforts will render the response system more effective as a whole.

My delegation shares the concerns expressed on the situation of displaced populations, especially in complex emergency situations. While it is encouraging to learn that the general trend is toward a decreasing number of refugees, the growing number of internally displaced persons continues to challenge efforts being made in the humanitarian field. In certain cases, this problem is made even more serious by the lack of access of humanitarian personnel to those who need assistance. In several situations of armed conflict, a deliberate denial of access is a powerful weapon against the civilian population, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. In other cases, the

denial of access may mask breaches of international human rights law and refugee law.

The sovereign right of States to protect their own populations should not be an excuse for the denial of access of humanitarian personnel and the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the populations concerned. As the State is primarily responsible for the protection of its citizens, it also has the main responsibility of investigating and prosecuting violations of human rights in cases of armed conflict.

Brazil is in solidarity with the work of humanitarian personnel, who usually find themselves in situations of extreme risk when endeavouring to achieve their mandate. I take this opportunity to deplore the persistent acts of violence against humanitarian workers, which has resulted in 215 violent incidents against United Nations personnel since July last year, including 15 deaths. We fully agree with the recommendation of the Secretary-General regarding the need for a stronger commitment by States to the protection of humanitarian personnel.

One of the fundamental aspects of humanitarian assistance is that of transition from disaster to development. Brazil shares the increased concern about the negative impacts of natural disasters and complex emergencies on the attainment of development goals, since they are associated with displacement, agricultural and environmental damage, enduring cycles of poverty, destruction of infrastructure and the spread of disease, among other things.

Building the capacity of national institutions should be another main feature of United Nations action, with the aim of creating favourable conditions for the development of sustained and nationally owned strategies. But this is not all.

In order to address the gap that exists from relief to rehabilitation and development, the various reports of the Secretary-General correctly underline the need to mobilize international cooperation from a comprehensive perspective. Such a comprehensive approach should include a frank and straightforward discussion on climate change and its connection to natural disasters.

To conclude, I wish to draw attention to a matter that permeates the discussion on humanitarian issues. The prevailing dual model that places providers and



beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance in separate fields needs to be reviewed. A balanced approach to the humanitarian agenda must correct the misperception that developing countries are only recipients of assistance and that assistance is assessed only in monetary terms.

Developing countries, particularly those in the neighbourhood of conflict-ridden areas, make a substantial contribution to humanitarian assistance provided either through the United Nations or bilaterally. They usually absorb massive refugee flows and the highest economic and social costs of regional humanitarian emergencies. They also contribute through human resources, training programmes and South-South cooperation, not to mention the supply of food, clothes, drugs and vaccines.

It follows that developing countries must be given an appropriate role in the humanitarian reform agenda and be assured of broader participation in decision-making and policy supervision of humanitarian affairs. One condition for such a development would be a substantial increase in the involvement of the relevant United Nations sector with the countries of the South, in terms of promoting best practices and of helping to better identify available options for cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance. We in Brazil are ready to work together with the United Nations in order to accomplish these ends.

**Mr. Gonzalez Milla** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we would like to thank the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the work done to strengthen humanitarian assistance in the United Nations. We thank the Secretary-General for the reports presented on this important matter and for his efforts, and we have taken note of the recommendations.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela attaches crucial importance to the question of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief at the international level. We must live on the basis of our experience. The creation of the Simon Bolívar International Humanitarian Assistance Task Force, coordinated by the National Directorate of Civil Protection and Disaster Management, under the Ministry of Interior and Justice, is clear proof of the cooperation and solidarity of our country in this area.

This cooperation is organized according to the three stages of a disaster — namely, prevention, emergency assistance and reconstruction or rehabilitation of the impacted areas. Recently, Venezuela, within the regional framework of the Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development of the Organization of American States (OAS), offered experts to provide training in the area of disaster prevention, in particular on the basis of our successful national experience in this field. Also, the Strategic Plan for Partnership for Development of the Organization of American States incorporated this question, on the initiative of our country, as part of its activities.

At the national level, we have coordinated risk reduction actions and activities and have devoted attention to various groups affected by adverse events. At the international level, since 2005, we have supported our brothers in Cuba, Jamaica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Guyana; and, in 2006, we have lent assistance to Ecuador, Suriname, Chile, Bolivia and Lebanon. In the case of Suriname, a country that suffered the greatest disaster in its recent history, assistance to this brother country was in two stages. One was the emergency assistance stage, which included 14 tons of rice, grain, children's clothing, medicines; in the second stage, we sent 126 additional tons of cargo, with 33,000 gallons of fuel for ships, aircraft and electric generators. Working in coordination with the Government of that country, we sent some water pumps, based on the Government's damage assessment and the needs of the affected population that live mostly in indigenous villages. They were of the Wayana and Trio tribes, near the border with Brazil.

In Bolivia, we also responded to the Government's call to assist in an emergency caused by rains. We offered 24 experts in risk and disaster management, all of them members of the Simon Bolívar Humanitarian Task Force. We contributed 12.5 tons of non-perishable foods, blankets, carts, picks and shovels, in addition to a four-wheel-drive vehicle. This was part of the first advance assistance to our brother country, aimed in particular at the populations in the north and south of the Bolivian *alteplano* and at other areas of the Department of La Paz, a region where 80 per cent of the families affected by these natural disasters are found.

Also, in Chile, at the request of the Government and based on the bonds of friendship and solidarity that unite us, the Venezuelan Government sent 34 tons of goods, including medicines, foodstuffs, drinking water, rubble-removing machinery, among other things, to support the local authorities after the devastating rains that affected that nearby country.

In Ecuador, the Government of Venezuela sent 10 tonnes of goods to support the authorities of that country in caring for those affected by the floods caused by heavy rains in February 2006, which affected 29,000 families, according to Ecuadorian authorities. Donations were made in accordance with the damage assessment, needs analysis and the requirements of the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Organization for Civil Protection of Ecuador.

Similarly, in Lebanon, during the serious emergency that country faced as a result of armed action by Israel, Venezuela sent more than 20 tons of humanitarian assistance, mainly foodstuffs, drinking water and medicine, in an operation coordinated by the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry and the Lebanese authorities. In Jamaica, representatives of the Simon Bolívar assistance brigade, operating in Jamaica since 2005, have been building more than 100 housing units in solidarity with Jamaican families affected by hurricane Ivan in 2004.

In the framework of the training offered by the National Organization of Civil Protection and Disaster Management, 30 members of the Simon Bolívar Humanitarian Task Force, fire fighters and volunteer organizations received, over a two-week period, a course on first response in situations of massive disasters. The course was given by expert consultants from the Swiss Cooperation for Development, and we thank Switzerland for this important contribution in strengthening our national capacity in this field.

The work of the Government of Venezuela is to lend necessary support to any country in the South American continent needing assistance, as well as to any country that may need humanitarian assistance, especially those populations where the attention of the international community has not been focused, but where disaster has repercussions, even though they may be considered small-scale disasters.

That is why the Venezuelan Government has established contacts within the framework of the OAS — specifically with the sector dealing with

civilian protection and disaster management, which is part of the Department of Sustainable Development and included in the Inter-American Strategic Plan for Partnership for Development. These contacts will make it possible to help Venezuela participate in OAS institutions and to enable all countries of the continent to take advantage of experience in mitigating, preventing and combating natural disasters. We hope that the OAS will adopt that successful experience in the form of a pilot mechanism to help its members benefit from that important experience.

In that context, we will take steps within the United Nations framework to ensure that the Simón Bolívar Humanitarian Task Force is seen as an important component of the regional disaster response networks and that its experience in the Latin American and Caribbean region is taken into account by United Nations disaster assessment and coordination teams in the region.

Finally, the strength of our country in the humanitarian area is grounded in the national Constitution and is a matter of State policy. It is clear that natural phenomena and disasters affect everyone equally, all people, without class distinctions. The Bolivarian Government is, therefore, prepared to offer support under any circumstances that may arise.

**The Acting President:** I now call upon the observer of the Holy See.

**Archbishop Migliore (Holy See):** My delegation would like to add its voice to the expressions of deep concern about the destruction caused by recent man-made and natural disasters. In every case, those disasters have served to reaffirm the pre-eminent value of humanitarian law and the consequent duty to guarantee the right of affected civilians and refugees to humanitarian aid. From hurricanes to earthquakes, from drought to war, the past year has shown that all peoples and countries are susceptible to the catastrophic effects of disasters and that a coordinated emergency response is crucial in preventing the loss of life, rehabilitating communities and establishing long-term redevelopment strategies.

That is why we believe that it remains vitally important to shed light on humanitarian situations that have not received international headlines and remain critically underfunded. We welcome efforts to highlight such forgotten crises and efforts to secure funds for essential life-saving activities.

As is well known, the Holy See, through the Pontifical Council Cor Unum and organizations such as Caritas Internationalis, is active in non-partisan humanitarian assistance in every corner of the globe. As demonstrated by the 2004 tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake and the hurricane season of the same year, concern for our neighbours transcends the boundaries of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizons to the whole world.

The chambers of this House have been the scene of many discussions about the various aspects of globalization. But if that phenomenon has one particularly positive aspect, it is its potential to marshal an array of means for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The welcome and growing globalized response to humanitarian emergencies requires coordination that carefully balances efficiency with respect for the autonomy of the various humanitarian actors.

To that end, there remains little doubt that coordination of relief activities in emergency situations is essential and that the United Nations should play a coordinating role. However, it is not the principle of coordination, but its modalities, that need to be constructively adapted to meet the needs of all people and all agencies. Humanitarian organizations have specific characteristics, qualifications and empathies that they bring to their work, which, in view of the cumulative goal before us, we would do well to respect. Coordinators should play a fundamental role in the collection and dissemination of information, in creating contacts with local authorities and in giving advice to humanitarian organizations.

Further, collaboration between coordinators and humanitarian agencies is important in order to formulate agreements and policies that respect the specificities and mandates of the humanitarian agencies, while allowing them to continue to operate constructively within a given set of circumstances.

A set of criteria appears to be required in order to create fully comprehensive and respectful cooperation. First, any coordinating system must respect the independence and autonomy of humanitarian organizations. Secondly, the coordinating body must not simply favour large humanitarian organizations, but should also allow competent medium-sized and small organizations to have a legitimate role in relief. Thirdly, United Nations bodies must not detract from

the ability of non-governmental organizations to act — especially those well acquainted with the peoples in question and their needs — or from their effectiveness in the field. Those principles could help to ensure that a multifaceted response to humanitarian crises remains available in all disaster areas.

In the area of funding, the recent establishment of the grant facility of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) promises to be an important element in ensuring that reliable emergency relief funds are available upon short notice. It is to be hoped that the Emergency Relief Coordinator will harmonize CERF's activities with those of other intergovernmental and non-governmental emergency relief funds in order to allow for the effective employment of resources. Further, large relief funds, such as CERF, should not limit the ability of civil society and faith-based humanitarian relief organizations to attract private and governmental donations.

The Holy See looks forward to participating actively in the debate on this very important question, because it is through the exchange of ideas and best practices that the most effective means to alleviate suffering and rebuild communities can and must be found.

**The Acting President:** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/4 of 16 October 1992, I now call on the observer of the International Organization for Migration.

**Mr. Dall'Oglio** (International Organization for Migration): The International Organization for Migration (IOM) welcomes the opportunity to address the General Assembly and to share its views on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. That is a topic intrinsically characterized by collaboration and partnership with a broad range of humanitarian actors, particularly in the areas most relevant for IOM's operational work: the situation of population displacement and sudden population movements.

The reports of the Secretary-General that have been prepared for this session of the General Assembly offer a valuable opportunity to take stock of progress made and to draw lessons for the future with respect to new modalities for working together. In addition, the recommendations of the Advisory Group for the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) provide

important insights into the predictability and effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

It is with a sense of guarded optimism that IOM recognizes that 2006 has been a year of implementation of the humanitarian reform agenda in all its sectors: improvement of operational response coordination, more predictable funding and the devolution of certain responses to the field. IOM has played its part in that reform process, assuming responsibilities for cluster performance, engaging in and benefiting from CERF and ensuring that relevant expertise is planned and mobilized to benefit the humanitarian coordination system in the field.

Inter-agency collaboration in the implementation of the cluster approach within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee is already giving us preliminary indications of the opportunities that lie ahead for improved coordination and coherence if this approach is followed consistently by all partners.

In order, for instance, to increase effectiveness and exploit synergies, and as cluster lead for camp coordination and camp management in natural disasters, the IOM has agreed with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — the lead agency for camp coordination and camp management for conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs) — on a unified cluster approach at the global level for both natural-disaster and conflict-induced IDPs. This unified approach avoids duplication, while recognizing the primary responsibility each agency has for its respective areas.

Now, more than a year into the cluster approach, we are able to see some tangible results. In the spirit of the unified cluster, the IOM and UNHCR are performing the functions of a virtual secretariat, supporting the shared objectives of this cluster. An increase in external emergency networks is also taking place, to include those actors with experience and interest in disaster response. An example of this is the creation of a cluster working group for both members and non-members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee that holds joint workshops and training in order to create a pool of qualified staff readily deployable at the onset of an emergency and facilitating increased participation of non-governmental organizations, a key requirement for strengthening operational capacities.

Similarly, close coordination with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, conveners for shelter responses in natural disasters, is necessary for ensuring that issues common to both shelter and camp management and camp coordination are addressed. In sum, the aforementioned example amply demonstrates that, while still in its infancy stage, the cluster approach has provided a more collaborative inter-agency framework, stimulating a more responsive, timely and effective mechanism, both at the global and country levels. Increased interoperability, stronger preparedness and better-integrated training have more systematically brought organizations and their staff together to address common challenges and to foster a shared environment.

The IOM stresses that inter-agency coordination, however, must not hinder the response or eclipse the key role of national partners. In the final analysis, the relevance of the cluster approach will be decided by its capacity to add value to national responses, at all stages of an emergency, including in the assessment process.

The IOM would also like to put on record its satisfaction concerning the evolution of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). In its short period of operation, the IOM has witnessed a greatly improved turn-around time for application, thus leading to immediate improvement of response capacity at the field level. Within its rapid response window, the CERF has been instrumental in IOM's relief activities in Côte d'Ivoire, Sri Lanka and Timor Leste, while the under-funded emergency window has supported important humanitarian projects in Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe.

The CERF can aid organizations such as the IOM considerably in shortening funding gaps in response to serious humanitarian crises. The IOM trusts that the international donor community, including non-traditional donors, will appreciate the significance of this new mechanism and will help meet the funding target established in the relevant resolution.

Finally, we could not conclude these remarks without expressing the organization's appreciation for the dedication and commitment of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who used his tenure to the fullest, inspiring public opinion, guiding and prioritizing the international community's response and leading the

reform process. To Mr. Jan Egeland and his team at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the IOM renews its commitment to a most valuable partnership.

**The Acting President:** In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I call on the observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

**Ms. Johnson** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): I welcome this opportunity to address the General Assembly, on behalf of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in this very important debate on humanitarian coordination.

We know that the number of disasters resulting from natural hazards is rising, along with the number of organizations providing response. The need for strong coordination is clear. With this in mind, and drawing on our eight decades of experience in disaster management, I would like to touch on four essential conditions for effective coordination.

First, effective coordination requires a thorough understanding by all parties of our specific mandates and our capacities. There is a wide range of organizations active in humanitarian action, each with its own areas of expertise and modes of operation. Last July, a historic meeting took place in Geneva, bringing together 40 leaders from the three pillars of humanitarian action: the United Nations, the non-governmental organization community and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which includes the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the International Federation and our 185 members. At that meeting, which launched the Global Humanitarian Platform, the leaders of these three pillars recognized the particularities of one another's organizations and agreed to work together as equal partners with complementary roles. The discussions affirmed the uniqueness of the Red Cross movement and of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Our national societies are an important bridge between local and national levels. On the one hand, we mobilize volunteers in thousands of communities around the world; on the other, we have special auxiliary status which is recognized by national Governments.

At the same time, we are bound by the Red Cross movement's fundamental principles. Here, I would like to underline, in particular, the importance of

independence and neutrality as cornerstones of effective Red Cross/Red Crescent action.

The second essential condition for effective coordination is a clear definition of responsibilities. The International Federation welcomes and supports the reform initiative launched by Jan Egeland, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the drive for more effective and better coordinated humanitarian response. We are active participants in the meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and we are well placed to contribute to the outcomes of humanitarian reforms at the global level, along with other leading humanitarian actors. We are optimistic that, with clear and inclusive leadership, the new coordination mechanisms — the clusters — can make a real difference, improving the speed and effectiveness of emergency response.

It is based on this belief that we have offered to play a global leadership role in emergency shelter in natural disasters. This special role has been clarified by a memorandum of understanding signed by the International Federation and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in September of this year. The memorandum sets out our willingness to take on this role, while remaining loyal to our fundamental principles of independence and neutrality by working alongside, but not as part of, the United Nations system.

The third essential condition for effective coordination, in our view, is the participation of national authorities and local communities. It is our experience that, to be effective, natural disaster management must be owned at both national and local levels. National Governments are, first and foremost, responsible for preparing and assisting their people to face natural disasters. Red Cross and Red Crescent societies are identified by national legislation as auxiliary to their public authorities.

We call on Governments to recognize and more effectively integrate the contributions of national Societies in national contingency planning processes. Local response capacity must be recognized and supported, for it is key to the success of nationally led disaster management efforts. Friends and neighbours are always the first to respond in a crisis. Our experience at the community level shows that the investment in local capacity — for instance, in well-trained volunteers — pays off. By investing in local community capacity, we can greatly reduce suffering,

we can speed recovery, and we can smooth the return to sustainable livelihoods.

We believe that the fourth essential condition for effective coordination is a holistic approach integrating preparedness, response, recovery and risk reduction. The importance we attribute to disaster risk reduction is highlighted in our Global Agenda, which calls for increased action with vulnerable communities to reduce disaster risk. It is also highlighted in our efforts to help States meet the objectives of the Hyogo Framework for Action and to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction system.

While seeking to ensure that every country has the capacity to respond to its own needs, we also work to build the legal preparedness of the international community of States through our programme on international disaster response laws, rules and principles (IDRL). IDRL was recently discussed in the Sixth Committee and received positive recognition from many Governments. It will be a significant item on the agenda of the November 2007 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The International Federation's own ability to prepare for disasters requires the long-term commitment of donors for predictable funding. Since 1985, our own Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) has provided emergency funding for immediate disaster response before an international appeal is launched by the International Federation. The Fund has also enabled us to fund smaller response operations for those many disasters that do not make the headlines in the international press. We have therefore followed closely the development of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and welcomed its expansion. However, we would like to take this opportunity to remind Governments that the Red Cross Movement does not access CERF funding and that, in order to support effective and fast humanitarian action in a broader range of crises, it is of critical importance to support Red Cross facilities, such as DREF.

In closing, I would like to remind the Assembly that there are thousands upon thousands of Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers throughout the world on the front lines, responding to terrible disasters, day in and day out. The effective coordination of international support for those volunteers, for their neighbours and for their local and national Governments is an

imperative for all international humanitarian organizations. The International Federation will continue to do all it can to deliver better coordinated and more effective humanitarian action, and we are dedicated to working with all institutions that share that commitment.

**The Acting President:** In accordance with resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call upon the Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

**Mr. Shafer** (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): Allow me first of all to express my sincere thanks, on behalf of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Malta, for the opportunity to take the floor and present the views of the Order on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian disaster assistance of the United Nations.

The past year was marked by an 18 per cent rise in the number of large-scale disasters, affecting 157 million people. The overall trends suggest that tragedies are becoming more frequent. The Order is therefore very pleased to see that the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has made great progress towards its objective of improving field-level coordination and further strengthening the humanitarian response in under-funded crises.

The Order of Malta fully recognizes the need for coordination in the field and the pre-eminent role that mechanisms like the CERF and United Nations agencies can play in this respect. However, the Order believes that the management and funding should not be overly centralized.

The Order works actively in partnership with United Nations agencies, States and local and international non-governmental organizations to further strengthen a synchronized response to all humanitarian challenges. One example is the Sudan, where the Order has been active since 1998 and has assisted over 630,000 Sudanese people in basic health care.

In Darfur, the Order ensures health care for over 115,000 people and, with the collaboration of UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), has vaccinated more than 16,000 people against polio. The Order offers medical assistance to pregnant women, treats children and combats cholera and malaria. It is committed to providing aid to the most isolated and vulnerable communities.

In the region of Wadah, in northern Sudan, where medical services had not been available for more than three years, the Order is now providing these services to more than 30,000 people — again in collaboration with UNICEF and WHO. On average, about 6,000 patients in this country alone are treated each month in the numerous hospitals of the Order. Together with its work in northern Sudan, the Order of Malta continues to develop its long-term health-care services in southern Sudan, where the focus is on combating tuberculosis, leprosy and sleeping sickness.

The Order has more than 80,000 dedicated volunteers, who work in 120 countries to provide emergency relief to victims of natural disasters and those affected by war and lethal epidemics.

In the case of an emergency situation, it is imperative for humanitarian assistance not only to provide immediate relief to victims, but to develop comprehensive long-term support systems. The Order is convinced of that, and has demonstrated its ability to broaden its role from immediate relief to long-term development in many areas. In northern Pakistan, the Order had personnel on the ground in the first days following the devastating earthquake. It collaborated with other organizations and the local community to provide medical care, water and vital goods for the survivors. Once the emergency needs had been met, the Order shifted its activities towards sustainable rehabilitation.

The Order always strives to accomplish two goals in the execution of its humanitarian work. First, it seeks to place local non-governmental organizations at the centre of the relief effort and the training of local staff at the core of many of its projects.

Secondly, the Order strongly believes that a long-term commitment is necessary so as to have a lasting impact on the community. This is exemplified in our support in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the Order has been active for more than 10 years. The Order closely collaborates with 300 locally run health-care facilities there, providing them with medicine and medical equipment. As a result, more than 900,000 people in the province of Kivu, and nearly 2 million people in Ituri, have access to primary health care.

The United Nations has taken significant measures to improve the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers, but they continue to be

victims of physical attacks, threats and robberies. They are often the first to respond to a crisis in the most unsafe regions, and the last to remain, long after financial resources ebb away. The Order stands with the Secretary-General in his appeal to Member States to fulfil their obligations to ensure the safety of all humanitarian aid workers. It is only with the full commitment and cooperation of all Member States that meaningful steps to enhance security for humanitarian workers can be achieved.

Regarding agenda item 69, sub-item (d), “Assistance to the Palestinian people”, may I say that the Order remains dedicated to the development of a sustainable health system for the Palestinian people. The Order of Malta has, for 16 years, operated the Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem-Palestine — a maternity hospital on whose board my wife serves — where more than 36,000 healthy children have been delivered. Those works are carried out despite the fact that the hospital has been besieged and damaged as a consequence of the violence — violence that continues — in the area.

The humanitarian principles, neutrality, impartiality and independence of the Order of Malta provide the credentials for it to continue the delivery and to improve the effectiveness of the provision of humanitarian relief and development. Allow me to assure the Assembly that the Order is responding daily to the challenges that humanitarian work presents, and we will continue to closely follow the leadership and initiatives of the United Nations and its agencies.

**The Acting President:** In accordance with General Assembly 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

**Mr. Buff** (International Committee of the Red Cross): It is a great pleasure for me to speak today, on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), about the essential issue of humanitarian coordination.

During the past year, the ICRC engaged once again in wide-ranging and intensive humanitarian activities owing to diverse situations of armed conflict and internal violence. In some 80 countries in which it is active, the ICRC's absolute priority is to maintain and strengthen its ability to reach and help those who are affected.

During the same year, the United Nations humanitarian system began to implement changes aimed at fundamentally improving its international response to humanitarian crises. The ICRC was involved in the discussion on United Nations humanitarian reforms because, although those reforms are primarily a matter for the United Nations, they have implications for humanitarian organizations outside the United Nations system.

The ICRC resolutely supports the main reforms of the United Nations humanitarian system and sees a number of potential benefits in those efforts. An improved and strengthened response capacity within the United Nations, including clearer lead responsibilities, will make possible a more efficient and more reliable humanitarian response where it counts most — in the field — for people affected by disaster or armed conflict. The ICRC will continue to participate and cooperate with the United Nations system to an extent that corresponds with the ICRC's responsibility to act at all times as a neutral and independent intermediary and that enables the ICRC to carry out strictly and exclusively humanitarian activities.

This year saw the implementation of the United Nations cluster approach. The ICRC, in its task of meeting the needs of affected populations in a holistic way, cannot be governed by that approach. Indeed, assistance and protection are interlocking aspects of its operations and are provided simultaneously, because needs cannot be strictly divided into categories or sectors. At the same time, the ICRC firmly believes in a diversity of approaches, so that various agencies can act according to their respective mandates and strengths and can provide an effective presence where it is needed and a capacity to deliver in order to achieve the best possible results.

For that reason, effective coordination between the ICRC and the United Nations humanitarian system is taking place where it is necessary in order to achieve efficient operational complementarity and a strengthened response for people in need of protection and assistance. For example, when the cluster approach was implemented in Pakistan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Somalia and Lebanon, ICRC delegations were already operational in all those

contexts and participated in a constructive manner in the numerous cluster meetings, while at the same time respecting the ICRC's principles of neutrality and independence.

The ICRC's natural partners in the humanitarian community are, first and foremost, the other components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: the International Federation and its member national societies, particularly in the countries where the ICRC operates. In emergencies, the national societies are the local capacity of the International Movement. They are usually the first responders and, as such, are the first to provide critical life-saving activities. The national societies remain the ICRC's primary partners in operations, and whenever possible — for example, recently in Lebanon — they are fully supported and resourced to deliver vital front-line emergency medical services.

Thus, the ICRC's first priority with regard to humanitarian coordination is to invest in the national societies of countries where it operates. By supporting and developing their local capacities and improving coordination in emergency situations, the ICRC is determined to reinforce the response of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

In conclusion, the ICRC renews its commitment to work in the best interests of the victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence. Its goal is to avoid duplication and to ensure a comprehensive humanitarian response without gaps. In doing so, the ICRC must act in accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the 194 States parties to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. At the same time, the ICRC recognizes that it cannot meet by itself all the specific needs of victims, and it does not claim to be able to do this. For that reason, it is the ICRC's conviction that various approaches to humanitarian coordination must be considered. That represents our greatest chance to meet the expectations that suffering populations are entitled to have of the international humanitarian community.

**The Acting President:** The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 69 and its sub-items (a) and (b).

*The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.*