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Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kpotsra (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 4.50 p.m.

Agenda item 20

The situation in Central America: progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development

Letter dated 27 October 2008 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/63/511)

Draft resolution (A/63/L.18)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Guatemala to introduce draft resolution A/63/L.18.

Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): It has been several years since the General Assembly last addressed this agenda item, on the situation in Central America. That is, in fact, a source of satisfaction for us, since, in contrast to the situation of 15 or even 10 years ago, Central America is now a region at peace where democratic institutions and respect for basic human rights have been strengthened and where progress has been achieved in the economic and social spheres. Some of those advances may be fragile or insufficient, but there is no doubt that the current situation is incomparably better than the one which prevailed during the mid-1990s. For that reason, the most recent United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission in the region — the mission to

Guatemala — left the country in 2002, after ten years of fruitful work.

Having said this, some of the repercussions of prolonged conflicts — the one in Guatemala's lasted nearly 40 years — take a long time to resolve. In the case of my own country, we inherited a culture of impunity as a consequence of that conflict, which led to a continuation over time of human rights violations illustrated by threats, extortions, intimidations and even the use of violence against judges, prosecutors, teachers, journalists, human rights activists and other innocent civilians.

Protected by the environment of impunity I just described, some delinquent groups also emerged, at times with high degrees of organization and with transnational connections. Succeeding Governments made important efforts to combat impunity through specific projects and programmes aimed at strengthening the civil police, the judicial system, the system of penitentiaries, the Public Prosecutor's Office and other entities of the State, including the legislative branch.

It was in the context of those efforts that the idea was developed to create a more robust criminal prosecution mechanism with the assistance of the United Nations. During the conceptual stage of the initiative, various alternatives were explored, the most ambitious of which being the creation of a new United Nations mission that would undertake some of the tasks of a public prosecutor, and the most modest expression of which being a technical cooperation

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project to strengthen the Office of the Public Prosecutor. Consultations and negotiations between the Government and the United Nations were extended for some time in order to search for a more appropriate model that would be consistent with Guatemala's legal and constitutional framework as well as with the norms of the Organization.

A relatively ambitious first attempt was tried during the last year of the administration that relinquished power in January of 2004, but it did not meet with the approval of the Guatemalan Congress and was even challenged by the Constitutional Court, the latter of which found that the Commission usurped some functions that were the exclusive jurisdiction of the Guatemalan State. A second attempt promoted by the previous administration moved in the direction of working through national institutions by strengthening them, with the creation of an ad hoc commission governed by national legislation. Such a commission would be composed of personnel appointed by the United Nations with a mandate that would not interfere with the Office of the Public Prosecutor and would work hand-in-hand with that body.

That revised version of the commission, adapted to the norms of the United Nations, was also judged compatible with the constitutional and juridical norms of Guatemala by the Constitutional Court, and as a result was approved by the Congress in August of 2007. The letter of 27 October sent by the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly, and which has circulated under the symbol A/63/511, offers more detailed information on the matter.

There are two specific observations to be made. The first is that the Commission responds to an initiative originating in Guatemala, rather than an initiative of the United Nations. It reflects our profound conviction that international cooperation is needed in order to confront organized groups that operate with impunity — not to replace national authorities, but to support them and thus strengthen them in the future.

We approached the United Nations because we perceived an objective and independent Organization without its own agenda. We sought creative means of partnering with the Organization without renouncing our obligations as a sovereign State under our own Constitution. We persevered in that effort and, as already stated, this is the third consecutive

administration to tackle that initiative and it has finally managed to implement it.

The second observation is that in our view, the lessons learned in Guatemala will also be beneficial to the United Nations.

We are now entering relatively new and unknown territory for multilateral cooperation, but we must recall that the United Nations has accumulated extremely valuable experience in defending and protecting the rule of law and human rights throughout its institutional life. More recently, it has accumulated a wealth of experience thanks to the activities being carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. We believe that the work of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala will open new areas of work for our Organization and provide lessons that may in due time be useful to other Member States.

The purpose of the draft resolution that we now present to the plenary is two-fold. It is, first of all, to ensure that the main intergovernmental body of the United Nations will be involved and informed about the steps taken by the Government of Guatemala and the Secretary-General from the moment the General Assembly urged the latter, in 2003, to support the initiative of creating the Commission discussed in the draft resolution. Secondly, its aim is to continue the support of the General Assembly for our initiative, without any additional financial or budgetary implications.

Let me conclude by thanking the Secretary-General for the welcome that has been extended to our initiative. I would also like to pay tribute in public to the many States that have supported the Commission by means of voluntary financial contributions or cooperation in the form of providing national experts, as well as to the staff of the Commission, and most particularly the Commissioner, Carlos Castresana, for their dedicated work. Finally, I would like to thank the countries that have supported us by sponsoring the draft resolution that we are about to consider. I would also like to thank those who, I hope, will support us in adopting it by consensus.

Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we commence this debate, I think we should not lose track of the historical background, as outlined by the preceding speaker, the representative of Guatemala. We should recall that this is an item that has been on

the agenda of the General Assembly since 1983 and its earlier title showed that it dealt with procedures to establish a sound and lasting peace. The title of the item has changed, which is, I think, clear testimony to the progress reached in Central America in the past decade and the positive role that the United Nations has played, and continues to play, in supporting the dynamic of peace, democracy and development that the subregion has experienced.

However, the strengthening of the peace process, which the General Assembly and the Security Council were examining in the 1980s and, even more, in the 1990s should not lead us to forget the needs of the subregion. Overcoming post-conflict situations is an arduous, long-term process, and in Central America there are still considerable challenges, such as combating impunity and transnational organized crime, but also eradicating poverty, especially in rural areas and among the indigenous population. Often, this is a challenge that remains in spite of very promising and positive macroeconomic indicators.

Spain supports the regional perspective in looking at these challenges. Regional mechanisms of dispute settlement, along with United Nations support, have demonstrated their strong effectiveness in Central America. We are convinced that further deepening of Central American integration is essential to achieving economic and social development, as well as strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law in the countries that make up the subregion.

Spanish assistance efforts in Central America have worked, and will continue to work, with this in mind. We will continue giving priority to assistance to democratic governance, citizen participation and strengthening civil institutions. Examples of this policy are the Cooperation Programme with Central America, put into place in 2003 and strengthened in 2006 with the Fund established by Spain and the Central American Integration System (SICA), and cooperation programmes based on commitments adopted at various Ibero-America summits, such as the one that recently took place in San Salvador. These were commitments that have led us to work more in such areas as combating gender violence, juvenile crime or impunity for violent crimes.

For all these reasons, we welcome the efforts of the Government of Guatemala in the past few years, particularly in the areas of institutional development

reform of the security forces, as has been emphasized in the recent letter by the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly (A/63/511). Initiatives such as the establishment of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and measures adopted in the area of human rights have shown that the Government of Guatemala has the determination and the necessary vision to take its country down a path of lasting peace and democratic consolidation.

As is reflected in the Secretary-General's letter that I just mentioned, the Commission, following the first year of its mandate, is at a crucial juncture. Its innovative character made it difficult to start work; however, after the initial months of getting up to speed, under the skilful, expert steering of its Commissioner, Mr. Carlos Castresana, it has already taken on significant cases. The support and commitment, both on the part of the Government of Guatemala and the United Nations Secretary-General, as well as of all the friends of Latin America, has become more necessary than ever for it to succeed.

Spain has supported the establishment and operation of this Commission from its very beginning through agreements with Guatemala and the United Nations and is the main contributor to its funding. In fact, we have already provided three million euros for the period covering 2008 and 2009. We will continue to support the work of the Commission, so that the Commission can continue to carry out the strengthening of rule of law in Guatemala.

In his letter to the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General identified some of the challenges that the Commission will have to take up as it advances with its work.

It is important for the United Nations system as a whole to respond to the Secretary-General's appeal for full cooperation to ensure the success of the International Commission and for it to fulfil its mandate as an addition to the measures adopted by the Government of Guatemala in order to meet the concerns expressed by the citizens of Guatemala.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the information he has provided on this innovative initiative and we emphasize our support for the commitment and efforts made by the Government of Guatemala. It is essential to keep working to ensure that Central America remains on the agenda of the

General Assembly as a key to progress and development and as an example of democratic consolidation.

Spain, which is part of the Group of Friends that has supported the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala ever since it was initiated, is one of the sponsors of the draft resolution that has been submitted to the General Assembly for consideration. We hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus and that it serves as support and encouragement in the difficult and important task that the International Commission and the Government of Guatemala have before them.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/63/L.18. Before giving the floor to delegations wishing to speak in explanation of position before action is taken on the draft resolution, may I remind members that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. House (United States of America): The United States wishes to make a very brief statement expressing its support for the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, as that Commission continues to implement its mandate to assist the Government of Guatemala in promoting the rule of law and ensuring justice and security for the Guatemalan people.

Over the past year, the Commission and the Government of Guatemala have directly confronted the challenge of strengthening Guatemalan institutions responsible for investigating and prosecuting crime, and for ensuring transparent and impartial legal processes. The strengthening of these institutions will enable Guatemala to protect the fundamental human rights of its citizens. Much work remains to be done but notable progress has been made, and we hope that it will continue.

The United States commends this effort and will continue to offer its strongest support for all actors committed to promoting peace and upholding the rule of law in Guatemala.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/63/L.18. Before we do so, I should like to announce

that the following additional countries have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bolivia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Iraq, Japan, Lithuania, Madagascar, Mexico, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United States of America.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/63/L.18?

Draft resolution A/63/L.18 was adopted (resolution 63/19).

The Acting President: Before calling on the representative of the Russian Federation, who wishes to explain his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Rogachev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have just adopted a very important resolution on the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala. We would like to welcome efforts by that country both to combat lawlessness and to strengthen the rule of law. We hope that the International Commission will fulfil the tasks set before it and will assist the Government of Guatemala to put an end to organized criminal groups that this country has inherited as the legacy of a lengthy internal conflict.

That being said, we would like to highlight the unique legal nature of this Commission, which was established as the result of an agreement between Guatemala and the United Nations. In that agreement, the Commission was described as a non-United Nations body.

We understand that the modalities of cooperation by the United Nations in the area of strengthening national legal systems should be part and parcel of the unique political and legal context of each specific State. Sometimes non-traditional solutions are required to achieve that. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation is convinced that the establishment of such non-traditional arrangements should be undertaken in a transparent manner, with the full involvement of bodies representing the United Nations that are fully authorized to make such important political decisions on behalf of the Organization.

In the present case, we note that we have strayed from that rule. The Russian Federation considers that bringing the issue of the establishment of this Commission up for consideration by the General Assembly *post factum*, that is, after the fact, should not become the rule in the work of the Secretariat. Of course, we reserve the right to return to this issue, and to any other issue, in the future, and we would like this statement to be included in the official record of this meeting.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the only statement in explanation of position.

May I thus take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 20?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 65

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

(a) **Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/63/81, A/63/277 and A/63/348)**

(b) **Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/295)

Draft resolution (A/63/L.21)

(c) **Assistance to the Palestinian people**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/75)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Yemen to introduce draft resolution A/63/L.21.

Mr. Mohamed (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): As members know, certain provinces of the Republic of Yemen were recently affected by unprecedented torrential rains and floods. That led to a natural disaster that caused considerable damage to property and loss of life, as well as damage to infrastructure. This has undermined the Government's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

The scale of the damage caused by the disaster is estimated to be about \$1 billion, according to a

preliminary international assessment by the World Bank, as requested by Yemen's Ministry of Planning and International Assistance. Some 3,275 houses were destroyed, over 10,000 people were left homeless and about 4,000 hectares of land were swept away due to the flooding and the torrential rains.

While we welcome the efforts, support and assistance provided to Yemen by neighbouring countries, other friendly countries and the donor community, we urge the international community, United Nations agencies and other international financial institutions and development agencies, to provide additional technical and material assistance to enable the Government of Yemen to cope with the consequences of the disaster and continue with its tireless efforts to achieve the MDGs.

We wish to express our deep gratitude and appreciation to all of those who have supported us and have sponsored the draft resolution we have submitted on special economic assistance for Yemen (A/63/L.21), and hope it will be adopted by consensus.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report entitled, "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations" (A/63/81), which we are examining today.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union: Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro, as well as Ukraine and Armenia, align themselves with this statement, which has been distributed in its complete written form. I wish here only to highlight some of its key points.

First of all I wish to communicate to the representative of Yemen Europe's expressions of solidarity with regard to the disaster that his country is facing at this time. I also wish to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for the reports submitted to this session and to reiterate the full support of the European Union (EU) as well as for all of the teams of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Conflicts, natural disasters, climate change, increasing shortages of scarce resources and increased competition to obtain them, as well as humanitarian

crises continue to affect civilian populations around the globe.

In December 2007, the European Union agreed on a framework, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. It is based on respect for and compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law and based upon a partnership approach between different stakeholders at various stages of assistance. The European Union recognizes the coordinating role of the United Nations while emphasizing the primary responsibility of States themselves.

The European Union would like to express its gratitude and solidarity towards humanitarian personnel who often risk their lives in increasingly difficult situations. The EU reiterates its commitment to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Compliance with those principles is essential so that the efforts of humanitarian actors are accepted.

The European Union condemns the attacks committed against humanitarian personnel which continue to occur in a number of crises, notably in Darfur, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan. It is even more worrying and unacceptable to find that humanitarian workers — both those from the United Nations and those from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — are being specifically targeted in greater numbers each day.

The European Union underlines that the primary responsibility for ensuring their safety falls on the States hosting United Nations operations or installations. The European Union further recalls its firm condemnation of all acts of terrorism, in any form, anywhere and whatever the excuse.

The European Union attaches great importance to respect for the areas where humanitarian efforts are being carried out. That is essential for ensuring access to the populations in distress. Humanitarian action has its own logic. However, in some circumstances, as a last resort and in conformity with certain conditions, security must be provided that conforms to the Oslo Guidelines and the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies — the MCDA Guidelines. Such security that will ensure that aid reaches populations in need, while at the same time protecting humanitarian personnel. Furthermore,

the independence of humanitarian actors as regards needs assessments of populations affected by crises must be maintained.

Finally, as several recent crises linked to natural disasters or conflicts have illustrated, there are unfortunately still some States' that, in an unacceptable manner, deliberately restrict humanitarian access to disaster-stricken populations. The European Union calls for humanitarian assistance to be delivered without any restrictions and for humanitarian personnel to be guaranteed freedom of movement.

As agreed by the heads of State or Government at the 2005 World Summit, the European Union is convinced that each individual State has the responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to assist with the protection of populations from those crimes. But where national authorities are manifestly failing to meet the responsibility to protect their population, the international community has confirmed that it is prepared to take collective action through the United Nations Security Council. The effective implementation of the responsibility to protect is of utmost importance to the European Union.

Among the millions of civilians who are victims of conflict, women and children are particularly vulnerable and unfortunately often become the main targets. The European Union underlines in that regard the importance of fully and effectively implementing Security Council resolutions 1674 (2006), 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008) and 1612 (2005). In the case of increasing gender-based violence and sexual violence that has nearly become an actual war tactic, the European Union intends to soon adopt the Guidelines to Combat Violence against Women, to show that action in this domain is a priority and to make that action sustainable over the long term.

Furthermore, the European Union welcomes the action of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and reaffirms actions made to reintegrate children who are victims of war, in particular by UNICEF.

Now, I would also like to mention the three major crises facing the international community: first, climate change and natural disasters; secondly, spiralling food prices and thirdly, the consequences of the financial

crisis. Cyclone Nargis in Burma and recent hurricanes in the Caribbean battered already vulnerable populations. The European Union reaffirms the need to help OCHA, in liaison with relevant national authorities, to play its role in coordinating responses to international disasters and underscores the crucial role that NGOs play in disaster response.

The European Union is determined to promote disaster risk reduction and to prepare populations in developing countries in the best possible manner, through coherent and coordinated action at local, national and regional levels. Local capacity-building is essential. The European Union encourages States to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action, and it supports the coordination role played by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. It supports integrating risk reduction and early planning strategies in development cooperation.

As regards the food crisis, the United Nations has been in the front line with respect to mobilizing the international community and helping to provide immediate response in the hardest-hit countries. The European Union would like to highlight the quality of the work done by the United Nations Task Force coordinated by Mr. John Holmes. The response to the food crisis will have to take place over the long term so as to address its structural causes. That is the aim of the Global Partnership for Food, promoted by the Group of Eight, with which the European Union fully associates itself.

Although it is still difficult to assess, it is clear that the current financial crisis will impact humanitarian action. On the one hand, greater needs linked to a deterioration of the situation of populations already in distress can be predicted. On the other, the countries of the South fear a potential reduction of financial contributions.

The European Union, which has reaffirmed its commitments to the Millennium Development Goals and which is the largest donor to United Nations humanitarian agencies, encourages the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator to broaden the donor base and calls upon all States to mobilize.

The European Union thinks it crucial to increase the predictability and flexibility of humanitarian financing. We believe the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and common

humanitarian funds to be very positive developments. The European Union welcomes the improvement in rapid response to crises thanks to CERF and the emphasis on underfunded crises. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs must give consideration to the outcome of the independent evaluation of CERF.

The European Union supports the United Nations humanitarian reform, especially the role of resident and humanitarian coordinators and the sector-wide approach, which helps achieve more coherent international action, bringing together all relevant actors, including international and local non-governmental organizations, and allows a better assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of humanitarian assistance. A balance between coherent action and flexible implementation must be found.

Moreover, the European Union supports the partnership approach set up within the Global Humanitarian Platform. To guarantee the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, needs assessments must be improved at the global and local levels. That requires reliable information and clearly defined priorities. In that regard, the European Union welcomes the vital role of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination System.

Lastly, it is not enough just to provide an emergency response. Early recovery and reconstruction must be the natural successors to humanitarian assistance. In order to strengthen the connection among those various aspects, the European Union encourages humanitarian and development actors to coordinate their action from the earliest stages of crisis response.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the European Union's full support for the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and our resolve to work closely with the United Nations and all humanitarian actors, so as to provide the victims of conflicts and disasters with the solidarity and assistance they deserve.

Mr. Hunte (Antigua and Barbuda): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 65 (a), "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

All countries are vulnerable to disasters. States can and indeed must cooperate to find collective and

cooperative solutions to the challenges that disaster presents. The relevance of that cooperation has multiplied with the increase in the number and impact of natural disasters in recent years. The collective efforts of Member States to promote more responsive, prompt, fair and needs-based humanitarian assistance must be augmented and strengthened.

The Group of 77 and China believes that a system such as the one just described calls for an increase in resources available to the United Nations for humanitarian assistance. We also believe that greater attention needs to be paid to the ability of the United Nations to coordinate responses to demands for humanitarian assistance. That can be achieved by strengthening the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and by making sure that the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is well funded.

In that regard, we thank the Secretary-General for his recent report on CERF (A/63/348). While we are still analysing that report, our preliminary view is that, after two years of operation, the CERF has been a step forward in ensuring a more predictable and timely response to humanitarian emergencies. We take note of the findings in the summary of the Secretary-General's report that CERF has become "a valuable and impartial tool for humanitarian action by helping to accelerate response". We also note the call to Member States to contribute to the Fund and we would, in particular, like to be kept abreast of amounts being disbursed and the policies governing the disbursement of such funds. We certainly can support the recommendations of the Secretary-General to keep the Fund's progress under review.

The increase in the number and scale of natural disasters and their impact in recent years has resulted in massive loss of life and livelihood and threatened agricultural production and food security. The global food crisis has further exacerbated conditions for more than 900 million people, mainly in developing countries, who are undernourished. The crisis is expected significantly to increase the demand for humanitarian assistance. We believe that there is a need to address those developments in a holistic manner and significantly to scale up the response to the crisis.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that international humanitarian law and the guidelines contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution

46/182 remain the framework governing the provision of humanitarian assistance. The General Assembly has stated on numerous occasions, including in the guiding principles of resolution 46/182, that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and on the basis of an appeal by it. The resolution also emphasizes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Moreover, coordination of all types of external assistance must be done by the recipient Government. That would ensure better coherence and coordination of relief efforts.

The Group of 77 and China is concerned about statements and efforts made this year that would imply the need to modify the agreed basis for the provision of humanitarian assistance. We should avoid attempts to expand the scope of humanitarian assistance or to introduce guidelines and principles on operational and other matters into deliberations of this Assembly without due regard to adequate and sufficient intergovernmental consultations. We are engaged in the strengthening of the humanitarian response capacity of the United Nations and its role in coordinating international assistance to national responses to emergencies. We remain open to proposals and ideas that will contribute to those objectives and that result from an inclusive intergovernmental process that duly takes into account the views and needs of recipient countries of international humanitarian assistance.

Sound national disaster management policies require strong capacity and coherent strategies that address both disaster prevention and disaster management. However, while there is no substitute for effective national efforts, a national response alone can sometimes be inadequate. In that regard, there is a need for more bilateral, regional and international cooperation in response to natural disasters.

The United Nations system and the international community have a unique role to play in assisting developing countries to enhance their existing humanitarian capacities, knowledge and institutions, including by promoting access to and transfer of new technology, funding and expertise to developing countries. Such assistance will help developing countries to strengthen preparedness, including through the development and maintenance of early warning systems; to respond rapidly to natural disasters and mitigate their impact; to address the long-term

challenges of the post-recovery period; to reduce the risks associated with future natural disasters and to accelerate relief and rehabilitation.

Building on this last point, an issue of great interest and concern to our Group is the transition from relief to development. We believe that it is possible to make that transition and to transform disasters into opportunities for sustainable development. That is the case when efforts are made at an early stage to support local and national recovery processes. We are convinced of the need for continuing international engagement in the post-disaster period to restore livelihoods, build resilience and reduce vulnerability. We hope that there will be a greater focus on meeting those needs even as we work towards improving CERF.

In that context, as in previous sessions, the Group of 77 and China will submit a draft resolution on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development. We believe that international cooperation in response to natural disasters gives life to the principle of international solidarity and hope to multilateralism. We are pleased with the growing consensus on this annual draft resolution and we look forward to our partners' continued support for that important initiative.

Mr. Mitchell (Grenada): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that are Members of the United Nations on agenda item 65, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and its sub-item (a) "Strengthening of the coordination of the emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

The CARICOM member States wish to associate themselves with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We welcome the Secretary-General's reports on those agenda items and wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his staff for their hard work and dedication in facing the challenges of the past year.

We remain disconcerted by continuous reports over the past five years of an upward trend in disasters of vastly devastating effect and the probability that this trend will continue as vulnerabilities increase. Even

more worrisome to the CARICOM member States in that context is the reported growth in the frequency and severity of hydrometeorological hazards. Addressing the complexity of disasters and ending the cycle of vulnerabilities necessitates an integrated approach to disaster management that would include, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/61/84), disaster planning and preparedness, sustained assistance for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, and the prioritization of risk-reduction as a matter of urgency.

To that end, the World Summit Outcome set forth three broad areas to improve the United Nations humanitarian system. Without prejudice to the importance of progress at an even pace in all three areas, CARICOM has particular interest in the improvement of facilities for rapid access to funds in the initial phase of a humanitarian emergency and for ensuring equitable response to neglected emergencies or otherwise chronically underfunded emergencies.

The development of small island developing States with particular vulnerabilities to hurricanes, floods and earthquakes is itself dependent on the frequency and magnitude of such weather events. Yet, in the most recent past, there has been an inadequate international response to the disasters that struck Grenada, Guyana, Haiti and Jamaica, as well as other islands whose infrastructure is weakened by persistent and constant strong winds, rains and tidal swells. It was in that context that we welcomed the launch of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to ensure a more predictable and timely response to humanitarian emergencies, and recognized the innovative grant element in the improved Fund.

Two years after the launch of the Fund, CARICOM remains pleased with its overall application. We note in particular the provision for the immediate disbursement of funds based on appeals for rapid response to situations in Africa, the ongoing situation in Haiti and situations caused by the current food crisis. Also to be noted is the allocation of funds to underfunded crises. The two-year evaluation has found that CERF has proven itself a valuable and impartial tool. The Fund has helped to accelerate response and increase coverage of needs, in addition to having served as a catalyst for proven field-level coordination and evidence-based prioritization.

Since its launch in 2006, the Fund has allocated more than \$1 billion for humanitarian aid around the

world. In order to ensure that CERF remains an effective funding tool, its funds must be replenished. In this regard, CARICOM member States urge the transformation of pledges into firm funding commitments and call on the Secretary-General to continue to use his good offices in that process.

Secondly, it is important to recall the purpose of CERF as a mechanism of last resort and the complementary role it plays in the humanitarian appeals, mechanisms and emergency funds of individual agencies. Thus, CARICOM notes that the Fund has been able to complement other humanitarian funding arrangements and has been a valuable and successful addition to the humanitarian financing architecture. CERF is noted to work best when used in combination with United Nations agencies' own emergency funds or with other humanitarian pool funding mechanisms.

CARICOM member States would like to take this opportunity to praise the invaluable role that the Advisory Group continues to play in the management of the Fund and to take note of the Secretary-General's recent appointment of 16 members of the Advisory Group, including four past members, to assure continuity and integrity. CARICOM continues to endorse the Advisory Group's recommendation that Member States make every effort to achieve the \$500 million target established by the General Assembly. CARICOM joins the Secretary-General in calling on Member States to contribute to the Fund at the forthcoming high-level conference on the central emergency response fund in December 2008.

In 1991, CARICOM member States established the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, a disaster-management programme designed to coordinate disaster response and management at the regional level. At this juncture, CARICOM would like to extend its appreciation to the donors for their ongoing support and to acknowledge the recent assignment by the European Commission of €3.4 million to support the Agency's new direction, in which it will no longer only respond to disasters when they occur, but also promote prevention and preparation activities that reduce the risk posed by disasters before they occur.

CARICOM is pleased to inform the Assembly that the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) is now being transformed into the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, with key elements addressing human resource management, information and communication technologies (ICT)

enhancement, and application in an integrated project management platform at the coordinating unit level.

Disasters in the Caribbean are now more destructive than ever, mainly due to more frequent and stronger hurricanes precipitated by global climate change. The situation is exacerbated by increasing urbanization. These increasingly destructive disasters not only kill but also wipe out years of investment and infrastructure, and their rehabilitation costs are stretching already fragile regional economies to the point where development programmes have to be sacrificed.

Therefore, it should be noted that timely assistance, such as that provided by the European Community contributes tremendously by strengthening the Caribbean regional response, which assists the region by enhancing preparations in advance of disasters and thereby improving prospects for speedy recovery following a disaster. These types of cooperation serve to minimize the human and economic impact caused by disaster.

It is most evident that the effects of disasters are increasingly widespread. Developed and developing countries are both feeling the brunt, thus highlighting the urgent need for all nations and regions to work together.

Mr. Singh Dhindsa (India): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Governments of Sweden and India.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the documentation presented under this item, including his report (A/63/277). We also appreciate the briefing that Under-Secretary-General John Holmes provided at an earlier date.

India and Sweden recognize that the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance is one of the most important responsibilities of the United Nations. The impartial, voluntary and multilateral nature of United Nations humanitarian assistance is highly valued by both countries.

Sweden and India have noted that the demands for humanitarian assistance are likely to trend upwards in the near future. We take note of the fact that there has been an increase in the number and impact of natural hazards. We further take note of the complex emergency situations and the humanitarian challenges these situations continue to pose.

India and Sweden reiterate that humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law provide the

basis for humanitarian assistance. The letter and spirit of these principles need to be scrupulously respected. Sweden and India reaffirm the idea that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

National Governments have a primary responsibility for disaster management although it is sometimes difficult for States to tackle emergencies on their own. Nations can and must cooperate amongst themselves to find collective and cooperative solutions to the challenges that disasters represent. The efforts of Member States to come together to promote a more responsive, prompt, fair and needs-based humanitarian assistance system must be augmented and strengthened.

India and Sweden believe that the capabilities and role of the United Nations in coordination and delivery of international humanitarian assistance need to be strengthened. This approach would mean an augmentation of the operational coordination capacities of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), improved delivery of humanitarian services by relevant United Nations funds and programmes, and a greater accountability to stakeholders.

Disaster management has to be a holistic process. India and Sweden believe that prevention is better than cure. We must, therefore, give greater attention and resources to disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness. Moreover, disaster risk reduction and preparedness need to be mainstreamed into development policies.

Sweden and India also believe that disaster management must be an inclusive process. Communities, civil society and the private sector all have important roles to play. We must act in partnership to exploit and augment synergies. Cooperation in strengthening local, national and regional capacities in the areas of emergency response, disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness will benefit all.

In a globalized world, each nation has capabilities, resources, experiences and knowledge that can be used in partnership with all nations and the international community for their mutual benefit. Mechanisms that tap these capacities and disseminate best practices and knowledge must, therefore, be given high priority by the United Nations.

The world is going through an unprecedented financial crisis. It is important in these times to highlight

the ongoing necessity of maintaining and augmenting the levels and predictability of funding for humanitarian assistance. In this regard, Sweden and India believe that the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has been a success. The fund has succeeded in mobilizing \$1 billion during its two years of operation. The disbursement of these funds has played a role in accelerating responses to emergency situations and has had a positive impact on the management of these situations. The institution and operation of the Central Emergency Response Fund has highlighted the collective and shared interests that all Member States have in the humanitarian agenda.

Member States have a common interest in ensuring effective delivery of international humanitarian assistance. The consensus that exists with respect to these common interests can be articulated and strengthened through constructive and informed dialogue. This approach will reinforce our common ability to face disasters whether natural or man-made.

I will now make a national statement on behalf of the Government of India.

India would like to align itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The humanitarian role of the United Nations has assumed added importance in the recent past. In his report on International Cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance in the Field of Natural Disasters (A/63/277), the Secretary-General has stated that there is a longer-term trend of increasing frequency and intensity of recorded disasters associated with natural hazards. Asia, including India, has been affected by these hazards in the past year.

In addition to disasters associated with natural hazards, the global humanitarian scenario has been complicated and placed under greater stress by the emergence of new challenges such as the unprecedented increase in food prices. The rise in food prices will have a negative effect on populations living near and under poverty thresholds and will increase humanitarian distress in large parts of the developing world. The nature, contour and resourcing of the humanitarian response to this development is a matter of interest and concern to India and other developing countries. Under these circumstances it would be logical to assume that the demands on the United Nations in the field of humanitarian assistance will continue to grow.

Member States have the primary responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance in response to all emergencies. While there is no substitute for effective national efforts, a national response alone can sometimes be inadequate. The United Nations has a key part to play in complementing and supplementing the efforts of Member States.

There is also a need for more bilateral, regional and international cooperation to deal with disasters and to make the most effective use of our capabilities. Greater cooperation is required not only in the emergency phase of disaster response but also in relief and rehabilitation, in disaster preparedness and in setting up and maintaining early warning systems. These all are, and should be, parts of effective disaster management strategies.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has completed two years of existence. India has noted that the report of the Secretary-General acknowledges that the Fund has largely achieved its objectives and has become, in a short time, a valuable and impartial tool for humanitarian action, inter alia, by helping to accelerate response and by catalyzing field-level coordination.

The CERF today accounts for about 5 per cent of annual global humanitarian assistance flows. As a developing country with strong faith in the universality, neutrality, impartiality and multilateral nature of United Nations assistance, India would like to see this share increase.

India is deeply concerned by the increasing incidence of attacks on humanitarian personnel and United Nations premises. India has always opposed violence and condemns such attacks in the strongest possible terms.

India would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate that humanitarian assistance has to be given on the basis of humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. On numerous occasions, including in the Guiding Principles of resolution 46/182, the General Assembly has stated that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and on the basis of an appeal by it. It also emphasizes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

However, we have noted that there have been efforts to expand this base and the scope for intervention. While the existing normative and legal basis for humanitarian assistance is adequate, India is open to new ideas to strengthen the Organization's operational and coordination capabilities. We also believe that the spirit and letter of intergovernmental processes must be adhered to in such initiatives.

Disaster management in India aims to build a safe and disaster-resilient India by developing a holistic, proactive, multidisaster and technology-driven strategy. A National Disaster Management Authority headed by the Prime Minister has been instituted to achieve this objective through a culture of prevention, mitigation and preparedness so as to generate a prompt and efficient response at the time of disasters.

India's disaster management strategy is in conformity with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Rio Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals and the Hyogo Framework 2005-2015.

The pillars on which India's disaster management strategy are based consist of community-based disaster management, capacity development, consolidation of past initiatives and best practices, and cooperation with agencies at national, regional and international levels.

The Government of India is committed to promoting a culture of prevention and preparedness and encouraging mitigation measures based on state-of-the-art technology and environmental sustainability. It is also committed to mainstreaming disaster management into the development planning process and to creating an institutional and legal framework, an enabling regulatory environment and an effective compliance regime. It believes that an efficient humanitarian response must give special attention to those who are vulnerable and weak.

The Government places great emphasis on developing contemporary forecasting and early warning systems. It also believes in working together with the media, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in generating awareness and capacity development in tackling humanitarian disasters.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.