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Official Records

President: Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 53

Sustainable development

(d) Protection of global climate for present and future generations

Report of the Second Committee (A/64/420/Add.4)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, may I take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the report of the Second Committee that is before the Assembly today?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the Second Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, that is, either in the Committee or in plenary meeting, unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee. Also, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendation contained in the report of the Second Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take a decision in the same manner as was done in the Second Committee.

The Assembly has before it a draft resolution recommended by the Second Committee in paragraph 10 of its report.

We will now take action on the draft resolution, entitled "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind".

I give the floor to the Rapporteur of the Second Committee.

Ms. McQuade (Ireland), Rapporteur of the Second Committee: This statement is to correct an error in operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution recommended for adoption in document A/64/420/Add.4. The word "Copenhagen" should be deleted from the title of the Climate Change Conference, so that the paragraph ends "with a view to making the United Nations Climate Change Conference a success;".

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt the draft resolution recommended by the Second Committee in paragraph 10 of its report, as orally corrected?

The draft resolution, as orally corrected, was adopted (resolution 64/73).

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 53.

Agenda items 70 and 71

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

Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/336)

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

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/64/84, A/64/327 and A/64/331)

Draft resolutions (A/64/L.19*, A/64/L.31, A/64/L.32 and A/64/L.33)

(b) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/78)

Assistance to the survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, particularly orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence

Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/313)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Before we proceed, I should like to make a brief statement.

It is an honour for me to open today's plenary debate on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance. The world continues to face complex emergencies that leave whole communities devastated. Without much warning, lives are shattered and families uprooted. Climate change, the dangerous spread of pandemics and the global food and financial crises affect populations across the world and have created new emergencies. The work of the United Nations in responding to humanitarian crises remains as important as ever.

Every year, Member States have reaffirmed their support for the humanitarian work of the United Nations by adopting by consensus draft resolutions such as the ones before us today. This year, I would like to express my appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Luxembourg for coordinating the work on the agenda items under consideration.

The draft resolutions before us reflect new global challenges such as the continued food crisis and the global economic and financial crisis, which have increased the vulnerability of populations across the world. Climate change threatens to exacerbate natural disasters. Once again, the most vulnerable populations will be affected disproportionately, and there is a risk that gains in development achieved over the years could be reversed. An estimated 36 million people were displaced by sudden-onset natural disasters in 2008. Of those, around 20 million were displaced by climate-related disasters.

In addition, internal displacement owing to conflict continues to be of serious humanitarian concern. There are some 26 million displaced persons today, many of them having lived that way for many years. Most draft resolutions emphasize the urgent need to reduce the risk of disaster and to prepare for emergencies through capacity building and other mechanisms.

I look forward to a constructive and forward-looking debate and to the adoption of decisions by the General Assembly that further enhance the capacity of the international community to effectively respond to humanitarian crises around the world. I call on Member States to provide the necessary financial resources in order to enable the United Nations and other international and regional organizations working in the area of humanitarian assistance to effectively undertake their crucial tasks.

Ms. Larsen (Norway): Why are humanitarian workers being killed, when all they want to do is to help? Why are they denied access to people in desperate need, when all they want to do is to relieve suffering? And why are we, the international community and national Governments, unable or unwilling to invest in disaster preparedness and prevention, when we know that such investment will save both lives and money?

The international humanitarian system is under intense and growing pressure, and the questions I have raised all indicate what the problems are. I believe that the United Nations is, and will remain, indispensable to solving all three sets of humanitarian challenges.

Natural hazards are perhaps fewer in number, but their severity and impact have dramatically increased. In 2008, the number of deaths caused by natural disasters was three times the average for the period

from 2000 to 2007. Complex emergencies have escalated over the past few years, with severe impacts on people's lives and well-being. Those impacts are often coupled with the effects of natural hazards and global challenges such as the food, fuel and financial crises. And we have only seen the beginning.

We, the representatives of the international humanitarian community, have to ask ourselves whether the people affected by the increased severity of natural disasters and escalating conflicts experience that humanitarian assistance in a more adequate, timely and efficient manner. I am not sure that they do. There are several reasons for that.

I would like to focus on three specific areas of concern, namely, the lack of humanitarian space and lack of access for humanitarian assistance, the lack of protection for civilians and the increased occurrence of sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflicts, and the lack of early recovery and disaster preparedness.

Time and again, we see that the humanitarian space is being limited and not respected. We still see that the lack of safe, unimpeded and timely access to many victims continues to be one of the key obstacles to the effective protection of civilians. All parties concerned, including non-State actors and neighbouring States, must cooperate in ensuring access to civilian populations and in protecting aid workers in armed conflict. Norway will continue to promote respect for fundamental humanitarian principles and a clear division of roles between humanitarian organizations and military forces. Humanitarian space must be understood and protected in all emergencies.

The core principles of international humanitarian law are as valid as ever. Yet, the complexity of modern armed conflict demands renewed reflection on the interpretation and implementation of those principles in order to ensure adequate protection for civilians. Accountability is essential.

Warfare conducted in violation of international humanitarian law should carry a strong political stigma, and perpetrators should be brought to justice. The recently published study on protecting civilians in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations reveals many of the existing gaps and provides clear recommendations. Overall, it is evident that mandates to protect civilians have yet to be matched by political resolve and resources, or by doctrine and clear

operational guidance for peacekeeping personnel. Norway welcomes the study and intends to make sure that it does not end up on a shelf, but that it is used as a tool for improvement.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in humanitarian crises. Nowhere in the world is that more obvious today than in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The widespread and systematic sexual violence in that country has devastating consequences, not only for each and every victim but also for future peace and reconciliation in the country.

Internationally, sexual violence is considered to be a savage weapon of war. In fact, it is a war crime and a threat to international peace. It can be stopped if we take it seriously enough. The incredible truth is that the world has too often looked away.

Norway welcomes the increased coordination in the area of women, peace and security. We look forward to the Secretary General's appointment of a Special Representative to address sexual violence. We call upon all relevant United Nations and humanitarian organizations to strengthen capacity, including for supporting victims, to find effective means of combating impunity and to establish more effective preventive measures.

Today, the international humanitarian system is better coordinated and more robust than ever. But early recovery following natural disasters is still lagging behind on the reform agenda and is in urgent need of renewed attention. With the increasing number of natural disasters, the link between reconstruction and prevention needs to be strengthened. The establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund gave the United Nations a rapid-response capacity. The humanitarian community must now place prevention and preparedness much higher on the reform agenda. We all know that it is less expensive to anticipate and prevent than to react and repair.

We need a robust international humanitarian system that is supported by all member countries. We need a genuine global alliance for humanitarian principles and values. We all share responsibility and we all share the same world. For those reasons, Norway continues to be a predictable supporter of United Nations humanitarian efforts. Today, I will sign a four-year framework agreement with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that will

provide a total of more than \$40 million in un-earmarked funding. Later this week, we will pledge Nkr 325 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund, which amounts to more than \$58 million and is an increase of 10 per cent over this year.

Finally, before I conclude, let me underscore that we should not be thought of as either donors or recipients. As the Secretary-General has underlined, States that have turned to their friends in past disasters are today in a position to offer help and to provide international aid in its many forms. Such a broadening of substantive support for relief efforts is crucial if the world is to respond to growing humanitarian needs. It is my hope and vision that we will be able to move forward together in a renewed partnership, with the strong and sound leadership of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden to introduce draft resolution A/64/L.32.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, document A/64/L.32.

I would like to thank all delegations for the constructive spirit of partnership in which the consultations were held, which allowed us to reach consensus on this important resolution once again. The draft resolution is a statement to the world of our shared humanitarian concerns and our commonality of purpose. It is also a reaffirmation of the importance of humanitarian action and confirmation of the fact that humanitarian assistance is a priority and a responsibility for all.

The draft resolution reaffirms the unique and leading role that the United Nations plays in humanitarian emergencies. Since the origin of the resolution 18 years ago, during the Assembly's forty-sixth session, national and international emergency response capacities have been strengthened considerably. At the same time, humanitarian action stands at a dangerous crossroads. It is confronted with rising difficulties of access, insecurity and increasing needs, as well as global trends that are driving chronic vulnerability on an unprecedented scale. The multilateralism of the United Nations has never been more needed.

Tensions between international humanitarian assistance and the notion of State sovereignty are always present in our deliberations on this resolution, which at times are difficult. There have been many advances in support for international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. But there are obstacles when combining such universal norms with the sovereignty of nations.

The primary role of affected States in providing humanitarian assistance and protecting civilians must always be respected. But we must also ensure that the international community takes collective responsibility for dealing with challenges that affect us all. Sovereignty means, above all, responsibility. Respect for human life and the protection of vulnerable people are universal concepts that are supported by all the religious traditions and accepted in all cultures.

There is too often a perception that humanitarian assistance is not genuinely neutral or independent, but is rather a Western affair reflecting a Western agenda. While recognizing remarkable humanitarian efforts at the national and local levels in many developing countries, traditional international humanitarian assistance has indeed for many years been a Western-dominated affair. We should pay tribute to all humanitarian workers, wherever they come from, for their unselfish efforts — often in dangerous situations — to save lives and alleviate suffering.

As we move forward, there should be less emphasis on the international fire-brigade side of humanitarian business, even if well-coordinated international responses will always be needed, and more focus on building local, national and regional capacity. We need a new approach, with full respect for the people and the societies who are being helped and for the countries from which they come: a genuinely shared global humanitarian partnership.

The world faces a series of interconnected global trends, which will transform the humanitarian landscape in the years to come. Climate change, the global food crisis, population growth, rapidly increasing urbanization, land, water and energy scarcities, the risks of pandemics and the current global economic and financial crisis are challenges that go well beyond the ability of any State to deal with alone.

We cannot tackle those challenges successfully without greater cooperation, coherence and

coordination within the international community. We must reshape our understanding of humanitarian aid versus development aid to deal with situations where there are humanitarian needs in developmental contexts. We must favour prevention rather than response, and reinforce social protection programmes in developing countries. Strategies, whether developmental or humanitarian, must be aimed at supporting resilience in the face of those global challenges.

This draft resolution should ensure that the fruits of our collective thinking are put into action for the benefit of all people in need. What counts at the end of the day are not how many paragraphs we agree upon, but how many lives we can save and how much suffering we can alleviate. My delegation and the other sponsors look forward to the adoption by consensus once again of this important draft resolution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina to introduce draft resolution A/64/L.31.

Mr. Fuks (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since the Assembly adopted resolution 49/139 B in 1994, during its forty-ninth session, the White Helmets Initiative is this month finishing its fifteenth year as part of the United Nations system. I should like to express our satisfaction with the work that has been done in the United Nations during that time. That work has taken us from Rwanda to Paraguay and to Pisco, Peru; from Palestine to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans; and from India and Lebanon to the hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean, such as in Cuba, Guatemala, Grenada and the always stricken Haiti. This year also marks the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Mitch, when White Helmets were also involved.

In those 15 years, we have built up an Argentine initiative that operates in the Latin American and Caribbean region but has a clear global and multilateral character. Our initiative began at a time when the debate was focused on the coordination of humanitarian assistance. In the intervening years, we have participated in discussions concerning integrated risk management, community participation, targeted assistance, capacity-building for volunteers, vulnerability and many other issues that have served to enrich and democratize the debate.

Looking to the future, we would like to move towards closer coordination with the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in expanding priority 5 of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 and in universalizing the role of voluntary service in the management of risk, together with United Nations Volunteers. We would like that to be reflected in the debate on the White Helmets Initiative during the Assembly's sixty-fourth session. To that end, we count on the express recognition on the part of the Secretary-General, who in his report (A/64/84) tells the Assembly that the White Helmets can provide an interesting model for volunteer organizations, both regional and local.

In that regard, through the White Helmets, in 2010 Argentina will host OCHA's third regional meeting to promote relationships in the area of international humanitarian assistance. In addition, it is also worth mentioning the great level of interest shown by Argentina, in the context of the White Helmets, in new United Nations endeavours, such as our contribution to the Central Emergency Response Fund, our work with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), and our participation in the ISDR Global Platform and support group. To those activities we can add the renewed work with the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization initiative this year, among others.

Our well-known commitment to voluntary service is also demonstrated in the annual observance in Argentina of a day to honour it, which involves the White Helmets, and by our active support for the follow-up in 2011 of the International Year for Volunteers, coordinated by the United Nations Volunteers.

To conclude, I wish to note that this initiative comes from a developing country. It should be assessed in its two dimensions: the effort that it represents for a country such as ours, and the possibility of replication by other developing countries.

Further, at a time when disasters are less and less natural and of an ever greater magnitude, the efforts of developing countries in the area of humanitarian assistance deserve special support, because they bring together technical, professional, volunteer and even financial resources and supplies, which are highly valued by peoples in need.

We trust that in the Assembly's sixty-fourth session, the member countries will support the White

Helmets Initiative, thus facilitating better day-to-day coordination in the United Nations system.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden to introduce draft resolution A/64/L.33.

Mr. Örnéus (Sweden): I have the honour to deliver in one sequence three different statements, so I ask members to please bear with me and be patient.

On behalf of the European Union (EU) and the sponsors, I have the pleasure of introducing two draft resolutions: A/64/L.33, entitled “Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel”, and A/64/L.35, entitled “Assistance to the Palestinian People”. I will begin by introducing the former.

I would like to thank all delegations for their active participation throughout the negotiations on draft resolution L.33. Delegations’ constructive engagement allowed for consensus to be reached once more on this important issue. The safety and security of humanitarian personnel is increasingly challenged and requires full attention and strong support from all Member States. We thank delegations for their constructive approach in the negotiations this year. That allowed for an unprecedented, timely agreement, sending a strong message of unity in support of the safety and security of humanitarian and United Nations personnel.

Mr. Hackett (Barbados), Vice President, took the Chair.

Over the last few years, there has been a dramatic escalation of threats to and deliberate attacks on humanitarian and United Nations personnel. Locally recruited personnel are often most severely affected. For the first time, we have alarming reports of politically motivated attacks. That development cannot be accepted and calls for concerted action.

The draft resolution recognizes those developments and suggests ways to address them. It urges States to ensure the full and effective implementation of the relevant principles and rules of international law and to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. It emphasizes the need to pay particular attention to the safety and security of locally recruited humanitarian personnel. States are urged to end

impunity for acts of violence against humanitarian and United Nations personnel.

The draft resolution requests the Department of Safety and Security to continue to improve and implement an effective, modern and flexible information management capacity, in order to reduce the risks arising in the context of United Nations-related operations. It also takes note of the ongoing efforts by the Secretary-General in addressing the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises Worldwide.

We look forward to further reports on measures to follow up on those important recommendations.

Finally, the draft underlines the urgent need to allocate adequate and predictable resources with a view to reinforcing the efforts of the Department of Safety and Security to meet its mandate and responsibilities. There can be no programme without security, and no security without adequate resources. The deteriorating conditions under which both international and national humanitarian staff carry out their work require increased efforts to reinforce safety and security. We hope that the consensus resolution will provide a foundation for wider efforts in ensuring the safety and security for humanitarian and United Nations personnel.

We look forward to draft resolution A/64/L.33 being adopted by consensus.

Let me now turn to draft resolution A/64/L.35, entitled, “Assistance to the Palestinian people”, under agenda item 70 (b). The draft resolution has been shared with Member States and will be considered on Friday, 11 December. As in previous years, we expect the draft resolution to be adopted by consensus.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to providing assistance to the Palestinian people. The sustained support from the donors of the international community is essential in order to support State-building efforts, to strengthen the Palestinian economy and to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people.

The EU stands ready to further develop and enhance its bilateral relations with the Palestinian Authority. The European Union will promote Palestinian State-building and intensify work in partnership with the Palestinian Authority towards

further implementation of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. That will involve a broad range of areas, including health, education, governance, customs, public financial management and the rule of law.

The European Union fully supports the Palestinian Authority's Government Plan entitled "Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State" and will work for enhanced international support for that plan.

The European Union welcomes the Palestinian Authority's efforts to develop an effective and reformed security sector and will cooperate with the Palestinian Authority towards additional improvement in restoring law and order, countering terrorism, implementing a more comprehensive security strategy, and developing an effective and reformed security sector and criminal justice system. Civil police and justice will continue to be a focus of EU support through the assistance provided by EUPOL COPPS — the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories — the European Commission and member States, and in close coordination with the United States and other partners.

The EU remains gravely concerned at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the immediate and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid in accordance with international humanitarian law, and of commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. Reconstruction and economic recovery have to be allowed and the current humanitarian crisis must be solved.

Let me reaffirm the European Union's gratitude to and solidarity with humanitarian actors whose safe, unhindered and timely access to civilian populations, in particular in times of armed conflict, is a fundamental condition for the fulfilment of their mandates and mission. We applaud the work of humanitarian personnel on the ground and call on all actors to respect the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

The European Union welcomes Israel's steps to ease restrictions of movement in the West Bank, which have made a contribution to economic growth. We look forward to further and sustained improvements of movement and access, noting that many checkpoints and roadblocks remain in place.

We call on all partners to contribute actively to the achievement of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The European Union urges Arab countries and other partners to be forthcoming, both politically and financially, in assisting the Palestinian Authority, in accordance with Road Map provisions.

A comprehensive settlement requires a regional approach covering the political, security and economic dimensions. Encouraged by enhanced United States engagement and convinced that tangible benefits regarding economic development and security would facilitate achieving agreement on the various political tracks, the European Union stands ready to use all instruments at its disposal, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Union for the Mediterranean. Through numerous agreements with partners in the region, the European Union is uniquely placed to work with the parties on key issues of regional development.

In the light of further developments at the political level and on the ground, the European Union will carefully assess how its policies and programmes can promote concrete and early results on the path towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

I would like to express our gratitude to the delegations that have thus far requested to be included in the list of sponsors of this draft resolution. We would also like to thank the Palestinian and Israeli delegations for their cooperation during the negotiations.

Finally, I will now turn to the statement of the European Union on the reports of the Secretary-General (A/64/84, A/64/327 and A/64/331) under agenda item 70, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, including special economic assistance".

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia align themselves with this European Union statement.

The coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance are among the core activities carried out by the United Nations. The European Union thanks the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. John Holmes, for his tireless leadership and acknowledges his key role and that of the Office for

the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in coordinating international humanitarian action.

The world is currently facing interconnected mega-trends such as climate change, population growth, urbanization and the scarcity of energy and water. Continued high food prices and the impacts of the financial crisis further add to the vulnerability of already fragile populations. The various challenges may also lead to destabilization and new dynamics in conflicts. Together, these factors put increasing pressure on the humanitarian system. Together, we all need to ensure that the humanitarian response is strengthened and fits the purpose.

More efforts are needed to strengthen disaster preparedness at the local, regional and national levels. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction has, indeed, a central role in coordinating international efforts to enhance disaster risk reduction. These efforts go beyond the scope of humanitarian aid. Disaster risk reduction must be integrated into planning and policies in the field of development cooperation and in climate change adaptation. Humanitarian and development actors must join in partnership, applying the principles of partnership to ensure integrated support for national and local authorities and non-governmental organizations. Support should also be provided to strengthen capacities to effectively receive international assistance.

Further efforts are needed to strengthen the international humanitarian response to ensure the timely and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. We welcome the positive effects of the humanitarian reforms to date. The cluster approach has contributed to improving capacity in the field and enhancing accountability towards stakeholders and the inclusiveness of all actors involved. Humanitarian coordinators have, indeed, a key role in ensuring the coordination of and leadership for international humanitarian assistance. Enhanced efforts to further empower and strengthen the capacity of humanitarian coordinators are imperative.

In times of increasing global humanitarian needs, we have a responsibility to ensure that scarce resources are allocated in proportion to actual humanitarian needs. A framework for common needs assessments is absolutely crucial to bringing about a shared understanding of humanitarian needs. This would contribute to a more optimal allocation of resources

and a more effective and targeted response. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs plays a central role in taking this process forward and the European Union strongly encourages all relevant humanitarian actors to cooperate in this important endeavour.

Effective humanitarian response is also dependent on adequate, predictable, equitable and timely funding. We urge all donors to apply the principles of good humanitarian donorship. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has proven to be an efficient and valuable financing mechanism, and we welcome the large number of Member States that have contributed to this Fund. Looking forward to the CERF high-level meeting this week, we hope for renewed commitments and contributions from new donors to this important Fund. Adequate and predictable funding to humanitarian organizations is key to an effective and timely response, including through pooled humanitarian funds and support to humanitarian agencies' individual emergency reserves.

Effective humanitarian response addresses the needs and concerns of all groups in an affected population. Understanding how conflicts and disasters affect women, men, boys and girls differently and basing programming on their different needs and capacities is indeed crucial. This includes specific attention in needs assessment processes, including gender balance in the deployment of personnel and the allocation of resources. Gender inequalities also undermine the ability of women and girls to be active partners in emergency response and rehabilitation.

Displacement is the most significant humanitarian challenge that we face. The estimated number of people displaced by armed conflicts and violence is over 26 million. It is also estimated that, each year, approximately 50 million people are displaced due to natural disasters. The displaced are left destitute, with little or no access to basic services, food, water, adequate shelter or livelihoods. Despite these recognized facts, the protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons remains the greatest gap in humanitarian response. The European Union welcomes the recent adoption of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. This is an important step.

The European Union is deeply concerned that, in situations of complex emergencies, the preservation of humanitarian space continues to be a challenge. As a result, millions of vulnerable people are deprived of assistance and protection. We urge all Member States and all parties to conflict to ensure the timely, safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel and humanitarian supplies to affected populations in accordance with international humanitarian law. The European Union will continue to strongly advocate for international humanitarian law and respect for and adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. These principles constitute the core of humanitarian assistance and must be respected by all parties at all times.

The European Union calls for urgent efforts to strengthen the protection of civilians. Action on the ground has not yet matched the development of international norms and standards. We welcome the adoption of resolution 1894 (2009) by the Security Council, with emphasis on clarifying the role of peacekeeping missions in the protection of civilians.

Action is particularly needed for the effective prevention, investigation and prosecution of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. We call for the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions and look forward to the Secretary-General's appointment of a special representative to lead concerted international action against sexual violence.

Threats and deliberate attacks against United Nations and other humanitarian personnel are unacceptable. Reports of a dramatic escalation in incidents, including politically motivated attacks, are of grave concern. We need concerted international action now. We must acknowledge that the safety and security of humanitarian workers is an issue of interest to all stakeholders — humanitarian organizations, affected populations, host Governments and donors alike. All States and all actors must take the necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of all humanitarian personnel. We must also promote understanding of and support for independent, neutral and impartial humanitarian action.

The European Union is concerned by the increased involvement of military actors in humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance must be civilian by nature. While there must be situations

where military capabilities have an added value, this should only be an option of last resort. The distinct roles of military and humanitarian actors must be respected. Adequate civil-military coordination is essential, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs plays a central role in this regard. We emphasize the need to use existing guidelines in this field: the Oslo Guidelines and the Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies.

More frequent and severe humanitarian emergencies are a reality. The interconnected mega-challenges will hit already vulnerable populations the hardest and can hamper poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. By forging a deeper and more engaged humanitarian partnership, we enhance the legitimacy of international humanitarian assistance and allow for a more effective response to these challenges.

The European Union is committed to continuing to engage with all Member States in strengthening this humanitarian partnership as we head towards important milestones in the next few years. In 2011, 20 years will have passed since the General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182, which founded the international humanitarian system as we now know it. Next year we celebrate the fifth anniversary of the establishment of CERF. These events, we believe, will provide the opportunity to take stock and, even more importantly, to look to the future.

Mr. Srivali (Thailand): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 10 States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Viet Nam and Thailand.

ASEAN would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports (A/64/84, A/64/327 and A/64/331) on issues related to agenda item 70.

Humanitarian and disaster relief assistance is an issue to which all ASEAN member States attach great importance. Many global challenges mentioned in the Secretary-General's reports are also challenges faced by ASEAN member States. In this context, I would like to share the views of ASEAN on some key points, as follows.

First, ASEAN is gravely concerned about the changes in the pattern of natural hazards, specifically climate-related hazards. As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, climate-related hazards are more than 90 per cent likely to have caused disasters in 2008 (see A/64/84, para. 3), which is consistent with the trend of increasing climate-related disasters in recent years. It is alarming that, on average, some 70 per cent of disasters are now climate-related, compared to 50 per cent two decades ago. This worrisome trend should make clear what is at stake for all of us at the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change. ASEAN Member States are committed to participating actively and constructively in the deliberations to ensure a satisfactory outcome, which is vital in mitigating the impacts of increasing climate-related hazards.

Secondly, ASEAN believes that enhancing capacity at the local and national levels must be a priority. Only thus can we mitigate the risks to populations and ensure the effectiveness of disaster preparedness, risk reduction and response operations. To achieve this, leadership at both the local and national levels is vital.

Thirdly, ASEAN believes that regional leadership is crucial in order to complement local and national leadership. When national capacity proves to be insufficient in responding to an emergency situation, a regional response mechanism must be promptly activated to provide needed emergency assistance to shore up national response capacities.

With this in mind, in October ASEAN leaders pledged at the recent ASEAN summit held in Thailand to enhance regional cooperation in disaster management. They instructed the ASEAN Disaster Management Committee to ensure effective and timely implementation of the ASEAN Standby Arrangements and Standard Operating Procedures and a fully operational ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance. ASEAN leaders also encouraged closer cooperation among military, civilian and civil society organizations.

At the same time, ASEAN is enhancing cooperation with our partners across East Asia. During the East Asia Summit in Thailand in October, leaders from 16 East Asian countries — the 10 ASEAN member States together with Australia, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand — adopted the Statement on East Asia Summit Disaster

Management. In the Statement, East Asian countries expressed their determination to strengthen cooperation in developing integrated preparedness and disaster risk reduction capacities for transboundary, multi-hazard disasters, end-to-end early warning systems and response capacities in the region.

East Asian leaders envisaged enhanced linkages and networks among local, national and regional disaster management agencies across East Asia, in cooperation with relevant international organizations. All 16 East Asian countries would work together to promote networking and sharing of best practices, experiences and operational manuals through the ASEAN Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise and other relevant simulation exercises, including with the United Nations system.

Fourthly, ASEAN believes in the synergy of partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations. In many emergency cases, while the United Nations can mobilize resources and expertise from the whole system to assist affected countries, regional organizations can provide critical advantages, such as offering a diplomatic umbrella to facilitate smooth delivery of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. This is possible because the regional organizations have better knowledge of the sensitivities and specificities of local situations, closer contacts with local actors and, above all, a foundation of trust and confidence established over time with the affected countries.

Here, the role played by ASEAN, in partnership with the Government of Myanmar and the international community acting through the United Nations in response to cyclone Nargis in May 2008, offers a good example of such partnership. In the wake of the cyclone, a Tripartite Core Group (TCG) comprised of the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and the United Nations was established with the aim of promoting the coordination and facilitation of delivery of humanitarian assistance on the ground. Today, the TCG is still active and is conducting joint planning for long-term recovery and preparedness in the affected areas through its prioritized action plan. On 25 November this year, a Post-Nargis and Regional Partnership Conference was organized in Bangkok by ASEAN, in partnership with the United Nations. We welcome the fact that over \$88 million were mobilized during the Conference to assist in recovery activities.

Fifthly, ASEAN agrees with the Secretary-General that well-targeted, timely and needs-based humanitarian response plans provide the best basis for a properly functioning humanitarian financing system. We fully agree that adequate, predictable and timely funding is critical to an effective humanitarian response. We are of the view that greater efforts should be made to improve the quantity and quality of humanitarian funding, ensure greater coherence among funding streams, and strengthen coordination on humanitarian financing tools with cluster leads and resident and humanitarian coordinators.

In this connection, ASAN strongly supports the Central Emergency Response Fund. We see the Fund as an essential part of the multilateral humanitarian financial architecture that has enabled United Nations agencies to jumpstart relief operations following sudden-onset disasters and to fill gaps during emergencies. We welcome efforts to increase the Fund's effectiveness and strengthen its complementarity with other humanitarian financing mechanisms, including country-based pooled funds and agency emergency funds. We join the call for all Member States to provide greater political and financial support to the Fund in order to maintain its viability and ensure that it will be able to meet the ever-increasing demands.

Finally, ASEAN would like to affirm our strong support for the safety and security of United Nations and other humanitarian personnel. We are saddened by the rising number of casualties among United Nations and humanitarian personnel due to violent attacks. We fully support ongoing efforts to strengthen the United Nations security management system to ensure better protection for men and women around the world who are working for the Organization.

Mrs. Dunlop (Brazil): Today's debate on the emergency humanitarian assistance provided by and through the United Nations and its partners allows us to take stock of the major events that have drawn the attention of the international community. As in previous years, we are faced with the stark reality that a great many people around the world are still affected by disasters caused by natural hazards or human action. This is even more distressing in the light of the fact that the direst consequences of these disasters could be avoided by putting in place effective prevention, disaster risk and preparedness strategies that would significantly reduce the number of casualties.

There are well-documented cases in which we were able to learn from past experiences and thus mitigate disasters that could have reached catastrophic proportions. The cases of Bangladesh, Mozambique and Cuba, to name just a few, come to mind. These countries established disaster response systems that enabled them to stave off the worst effects of recent floods or hurricanes that in the past would have taken a heavy toll in human lives.

Fortunately, the hurricane season in the Caribbean this year was not as severe as that of 2008. Still, late in the season, Hurricane Ida struck El Salvador and Nicaragua, causing hundreds of deaths. The unpredictability of such events only reinforces the conclusion that reducing disaster risk and vulnerability and enhancing preparedness for natural hazards are fundamental tasks, especially in disaster-prone countries. The increased transfer of know-how and funding for these areas should be a priority for these countries and donors alike.

Even where there has been progress, developing countries are still disproportionately affected by disasters, and poor communities within them are especially affected, as recognized at the second session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in Geneva last June. In such conditions, the allocation of funds for building developing countries' resilience and capacity to respond to disasters must be among donors' priorities.

In post-disasters scenarios, there is a clear need for an approach to assistance that incorporates reconstruction and development concerns, which entails providing funding for these phases. In this sense, we welcome the increasing inclusion of early recovery activities in the consolidated appeals process, a trend that we encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to enhance. We also welcome the increasing recognition by the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee that the international humanitarian system must shift some of its focus from response to addressing vulnerability.

We are particularly concerned at the worsening global food crisis. Despite all the commitments made since the beginning of 2008 to increasing international cooperation in order to reduce food insecurity through a series of short-, medium- and long-term measures, the crisis has not abated. On the contrary, the number of people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition has

only increased and is now over 1 billion persons, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Brazil fully supports programmes like Purchase for Progress of the World Food Programme, which, by opting for local procurement, contributes to the development of the agricultural sector in the affected community. We have established, as a priority for our contributions to humanitarian response efforts, the procurement of relief supplies in the affected countries whenever possible. We have also increased our contributions to the entities of the United Nations system present on the ground as a means of responding quickly to emergency situations. Additionally, since the beginning of the year, the humanitarian warehouse inaugurated in Rio de Janeiro always stocks a certain amount of food of high nutritional value that can be sent anywhere in the world within 48 to 72 hours.

While we engage in this debate today, discussions have started in Copenhagen aimed at making concrete progress in tackling the challenges posed by climate change. The impact of climate change on the increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters is a reality. International cooperation is necessary to enhance adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change, including through the provision of new and additional financial resources, technology and support for capacity-building in developing countries. Furthermore, we must not shy away from addressing the causes that compound the negative impact of climate change, such as poverty and exclusion, which make communities especially vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

We are concerned that the number of violent and deliberate attacks against humanitarian and United Nations personnel is on the rise. Apart from criminality, one reason is the misperception of the nature of the activities carried out by humanitarian and associated personnel. Special efforts to allay these misperceptions are needed. In this sense, we congratulate the Secretariat on its activities in the celebration, for the first time, of World Humanitarian Day on 19 August 2009. We expect this day to become one of the main events of the United Nations in the years to come, in recognition of the increasingly important role played by this Organization and its partners in alleviating human suffering worldwide.

Mr. Okuda (Japan): We thank the Secretary-General for his reports (A/64/84, A/64/327 and

A/64/331) and commend the Emergency Relief Coordinator and humanitarian organizations, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Because of the importance it attaches to human security, Japan has a special interest in the protection and empowerment of those vulnerable people desperately in need of humanitarian assistance. We therefore thank the humanitarian community for its activities.

In recent years, the greater incidence and severity of natural disasters resulting from climate change and other factors, as well as protracted complex emergencies, have produced a heightened need for humanitarian assistance. We are concerned about the impact that the current financial and economic crises are having on the ability of the international community to provide such assistance. As a major donor country, however, Japan has continued to provide assistance to the best of its ability and will continue to do so in the future.

One example of Japan's commitment is a new programme that will provide Afghanistan with humanitarian and reconstruction assistance of up to \$5 billion over an approximately five-year period beginning this year, in accordance with its developing needs. In concrete terms, Japan will extend its full support to enhancing Afghanistan's own capacity to maintain security and provide assistance for the reintegration of former Taliban soldiers and for Afghanistan's sustainable and self-reliant development in areas including agriculture and rural development, infrastructure development, education, health and other basic human needs.

Another example of Japan's commitment to progress in this area is our continued close monitoring of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Africa, a continent that faces the prospect of prolonged conflict and natural disasters caused by climate change and therefore continued poverty and food shortages. Some of Japan's initiatives to address this situation include its decision to double its official development assistance to Africa by 2012 in areas such as agriculture, food, health and water, which it announced at the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, and to lead a discussion on humanitarian issues in Africa at the Group of Eight's Hokkaido Toyako Summit, which Japan chaired last year.

Japan is also committed to addressing the implications of climate change. Last year, it announced that it would make contributions to the Cool Earth Partnership amounting to \$10 billion over the next five years, and it is fulfilling that commitment. Japan also pledges to work to make the fifteenth United Nations Climate Change Conference, which opened in Copenhagen today, a success.

This year again, particularly this fall, a series of earthquakes, typhoons and other natural disasters have struck Asia. In order to minimize the impact of calamities, we must share our knowledge and the technology we have developed. All countries should also make every effort to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action, and the United Nations should continue to foster cooperation in this area.

In the area of disaster management, it is also vital to facilitate regional cooperation. Japan has been working to this end in several forums. On 24 October 2009, for example, the importance of regional cooperation was taken up at the Third Informal Meeting of Heads of State or Government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, at which Japan offered to host an international conference next year focusing on the enhancement of risk reduction in urban communities. On 31 October 2009, the heads of Government agencies concerned with disaster management from Japan, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea held the first commemorative trilateral meeting on disaster management in Kobe, Japan, and the three countries agreed to strengthen their cooperation. For our part, we want to put the know-how and technologies Japan has developed at the service of the international community and thereby contribute to disaster risk reduction worldwide.

In this connection, I would like to announce that Japan will host the first global meeting of International Search and Rescue Advisory Group in Kobe, Japan, in November 2010 to address policy matters, including the capacity-building of international emergency rescue teams in individual countries. We hope that it will be a productive meeting and that Member States will participate in it actively.

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and we welcome the opening of the office of the International Committee of

the Red Cross (ICRC), guardian of the Conventions, in Tokyo in February 2009. We thank the ICRC for co-organizing the symposium on the theme "Humanitarian assistance in armed conflict" at the end of October 2009, at which we discussed the nature of humanitarian assistance in armed conflict and the challenges involved. Many at the symposium emphasized the need for all parties to comply with the Geneva Conventions and other international humanitarian instruments.

We are extremely concerned about the increasing attacks on humanitarian personnel and United Nations premises worldwide, and we strongly deplore them. Humanitarian access is a prerequisite for assistance to affected populations, and all parties must act to ensure that it is provided. On 19 August, we commemorated the first World Humanitarian Day here in New York with the participation of the Secretary-General and ambassadors and other officials of Member States. We sincerely hope that the commitment made in New York to humanitarian assistance activities will result in fewer victims in this field.

States have primary responsibility for ensuring that international humanitarian law is honoured. At the same time, grave violations by non-State groups, which often operate outside the effective control of Governments, pose an increasingly serious problem. We need to address this through capacity-building at the national level and by assigning legal responsibility, including through the International Criminal Court. Japan wishes to contribute to addressing this problem, and will cooperate with Member States and the United Nations in doing so.

As Japan has been calling for efficient and effective humanitarian assistance, we welcome the progress of such humanitarian reforms as the improvement of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the strengthening of the humanitarian coordinator system and the implementation of the cluster approach. We support all United Nations efforts, particularly CERF, as a product of the United Nations reform enacted in 2005.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri (India), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In addressing the challenges posed by humanitarian issues, Japan devotes particular attention to the protection and empowerment of each individual from the perspective of human security, which we have made efforts to realize, for example, through the

establishment in the United Nations of the Human Security Trust Fund. Japan will continue to work to protect and empower vulnerable individuals and communities who, through no fault of their own, find themselves caught up in humanitarian crises.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is pleased with the important role the United Nations system plays in humanitarian assistance and has taken note of the reports of the Secretary-General on this issue (A/64/84, A/64/327 and A/64/331).

Humanitarian affairs receive special attention from the Government of Colombia. The country has experienced the consequences of natural disasters related to risk factors associated with climatic, seismic and volcanic phenomena in various regions. We have also experienced internal displacement, which, although it has been diminishing thanks to the democratic security policy in effect since 2002, continues to exist, due to the violence generated by those armed terrorist groups that still remain.

In this context, Colombia has shouldered its primary responsibility for initiating, coordinating, organizing and delivering humanitarian assistance within its territory. Among the mechanisms we have established is the National System for Disaster Prevention and Response, which coordinates the work of national, departmental and municipal authorities, private sector and other civil society organizations and international cooperation bodies. For its part, the National System for Comprehensive Assistance to Displaced Persons implements a national assistance programme to which the Government allocates some \$500 million a year.

International cooperation is especially important for consolidating national action. Such cooperation is more effective, coherent and efficient to the degree that it is developed within a framework of appropriate ongoing coordination with the relief and response policies implemented by the authorities of the States affected. To this end, Colombia has implemented a coordination process, the National Humanitarian Plenary. It is an inclusive model, result-oriented and with a regional focus and a thematic approach; it also aims to complement immediate emergency assistance with medium- and long-term recovery activities. We also have the technical panel on emergencies known as UNETE, which under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, has helped organize cooperation between

United Nations agencies in support of the National System for Disaster Prevention and Response. The panel was particularly important during the heavy rains that affected us in 2008 and 2009.

Colombia also recognizes the importance of regional and subregional cooperation on humanitarian issues. In the Andean Community we have participated actively in developing the operational guidelines for mutual assistance on disasters, aimed at strengthening coordination and deployment of assistance where efforts beyond the capacity of individual countries are required.

Colombia considers it essential that United Nations agencies strengthen their coordination, both with one another and with States, in supporting the transition from relief to development. Humanitarian assistance should be framed in a sustainable process of rebuilding the social fabric of affected communities. In this regard, such assistance should, from its early stages, contribute to rehabilitating and developing structures that will ensure stability after the initial emergency as well as lasting solutions. My delegation agrees with the Secretary-General on the need for greater support and funding for early recovery programmes, which as has been remarked, do not always receive enough attention from humanitarian actors and development agencies.

Gender mainstreaming is also essential in every humanitarian action in order to meet the specific needs of women and girls, protect them against gender-based violence, give them greater visibility and, beyond this, to promote women's inclusion in development efforts, increase their empowerment, recognize them as key components of stable social structures, and promote gender equality. Building national and local capacity is also a fundamental factor in improving the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Such capacity-building should include strengthening the authorities' operational coordination of humanitarian assistance. The stronger such coordination capacity becomes, the better Member States will fulfil their primary role in this field.

With regard to humanitarian funding, Colombia acknowledges the achievements of the Central Emergency Response Fund. Since it was established the Fund has supported a number of humanitarian assistance operations in our country. In 2007 and 2009 our national Government also made or has planned

voluntary contributions to the Fund, in line with its financial capability, as an expression of support for the Fund's objectives.

On a different note, we add our voice to others' expressions of condemnation and concern over the violent attacks against humanitarian personnel in various regions of the world. Here again we stress the need to strengthen coordination between the United Nations and Governments, in order to identify risks and define more effective protection measures against potential criminal acts that can affect the implementation of humanitarian action.

The guiding principles set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182 define the fundamental framework guiding humanitarian assistance. The cooperation of the international community in support of States' national efforts and in line with those guiding principles, is crucial to meeting the needs of populations affected by humanitarian situations. Colombia remains committed to implementing the frameworks for action defined by the Assembly, and to promoting, together with all States and the international community, the recognition that humanitarian personnel deserve for the vital work they accomplish every day, all over the world.

Mr. Alimov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation is pleased to participate in today's dialogue on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. While wishing to maintain the non-politicized nature of the discussion, we support the further development and enhancement of such assistance. Of particular importance in this context is the international community's commitment to the guiding principles found in resolution 46/182 on emergency humanitarian assistance. We are convinced that a consistent and comprehensive incorporation of these principles into humanitarian work can help to optimize results when delivering assistance to affected populations.

A results-based approach to humanitarian and disaster response, which seeks in particular to avoid additional loss of life, especially in the first hours and days following a natural disaster, is an important way of ensuring the effectiveness of the work of the entire humanitarian and disaster relief machinery. We have consistently advocated for strengthening coordination in this area and developing cooperation between

affected States, the United Nations system, donor countries and transit countries, as well as border States. The aim here is to ensure timely unhindered access for humanitarian relief assistance to affected populations throughout the whole period of humanitarian relief operations.

When considering the issue of disasters as part of climate change, we wish to stress the importance of a balanced approach, both to climate change mitigation measures and to adaptation measures. In the global financial economic crisis, there has been a sharp increase in the vulnerability, primarily of developing countries, to natural disasters, and thus their dependence on humanitarian assistance. In our opinion, it is important not to lose sight of humanitarian assistance delivery and to strive to maintain the current pace of development of cooperation in this area.

We would like to underline that the Governments of States receiving humanitarian assistance have the exclusive prerogative in terms of assistance coordination, which includes deciding on the means of and routes for transferring assistance supplies, choosing its partners and establishing parameters for the stay and actions of humanitarian organizations in the disaster zone based on national legislation.

An important role in this context is played by so-called humanitarian access, which should be based first and foremost on timely and appropriate humanitarian assistance delivery to the populations in need by providing necessary goods and services. Granting access to foreign humanitarian personnel to disaster-struck areas, in our opinion, is just one part of this important task. We concur with the Secretary-General's idea that the key to improving the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is to build capacity at the national and local levels, which includes preparedness and response to disasters, mitigating the consequences and developing an early warning system, including improving evaluation and forecasting mechanisms. In this regard, it is important to enhance scientific and applied research in these areas.

An important part of improving response mechanisms on the ground is the so-called cluster approach. We consider that this approach should be used thoughtfully, bearing in mind local particularities and situations. Moreover, a decisive role in determining the priorities of the sectors and clusters for

foreign humanitarian response teams should be played by the Government of the beneficiary State. We consider that particular attention should be paid to the efficiency of disaster response of national and international humanitarian agencies. We advocate constructive and coordinated cooperation between humanitarian assistance organizations and non-governmental organizations, with the United Nations playing the leading role.

One of the most significant results of the overall efforts to improve humanitarian response mechanisms has been the effective operation of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The high-level CERF conference, which will take place tomorrow and the day after, will doubtless be an important event in terms of further improving the effectiveness and productivity of that entity. Russia is prepared to work constructively to strengthen that humanitarian financing mechanism.

Ms. Ellis (Australia): As we near the fifth anniversary of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004, it is timely for us to consider the role of the United Nations in responding to natural disasters and complex emergencies.

Regrettably, the past year's events have continued to demonstrate the vital need for international humanitarian assistance. Large numbers of people continue to be affected by natural disasters. Continuing high food prices in many regions, escalating conflicts and the impact of the global financial crisis on vulnerable communities all demonstrate the need for a coordinated, effective and accountable international response.

Australia recognizes the link between climate change and the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters. We have in recent months, in the Philippines, Viet Nam and El Salvador, seen clearly the devastating impact climate-related hazards can have on lives, livelihoods and developing countries. As we approach the five-year anniversary of the Hyogo Framework for Action, we urge all Member States and the greater international community to build on the existing knowledge and momentum in favour of disaster risk reduction, in order to help meet the challenges of climate change.

The potential for disasters to recur in hazard-prone regions that are made vulnerable by factors such as rapid urbanization, poverty or environmental

degradation means that disaster risk reduction must be incorporated into humanitarian action and early recovery efforts. That approach will build the resilience and preparedness of communities and countries for the long term, and most vitally, support the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

We are concerned at the increasing number of persons displaced as a result of conflict and natural hazards. We are staunch advocates of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and welcome the recent adoption of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. We consider that Convention to be a landmark agreement, as it demonstrates the leadership role regional organizations can play in addressing humanitarian issues.

Australia gives high priority to ensuring that the needs of all persons affected by conflict and natural disaster are taken into account, including the needs of people with disability. With over 650 million people in the world living with a disability, we must ensure the world's largest and most disadvantaged minority is included in all aspects of humanitarian policy, planning and implementation.

We also know that women, girls, boys and men are affected differently by conflict and natural disasters. For a humanitarian response to be effective, it is imperative that a gender perspective be integrated into all aspects of the response. We also call for special attention to be given to ensuring that women have access to reproductive health services in emergency situations.

We further stress the importance of integrated measures, as part of humanitarian action, to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The Gender Standby Capacity Project is an excellent example of such measures, and we encourage continued efforts to ensure that well-trained professionals with gender and gender-based violence expertise are deployed to humanitarian operations. We emphasize that protection activities are a critical and vital element of humanitarian response. Australia continues to advocate for the full and effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which, in addition to women's protection, provides for women's full and active participation in peace processes and peacebuilding. In that regard, we welcome the Security

Council's adoption of resolutions 1880 (2009) and 1889 (2009).

Australia is deeply troubled by the increasing number of threats and violent attacks against humanitarian workers and their facilities. Such attacks have a devastating impact on the delivery of humanitarian assistance, ultimately preventing people from receiving the life-saving assistance they so critically need. This trend must be reversed. The need for all actors to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence has never been greater.

In closing, Australia would like to acknowledge Under-Secretary-General Holmes, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the operational agencies of the United Nations for the vital role they play in humanitarian relief, and we express our appreciation for their unrelenting efforts to save lives and alleviate human suffering.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): It is my privilege to participate in this important debate on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. Today, natural disasters aggravated by climate change affect more people than humanitarian emergencies caused by conflicts or internal strife. The number of people requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of natural disasters continues to increase. While the number of people in need will grow owing to diverse challenges, there is a parallel need to improve the level of coordination with the affected State and the provision of resources in a more effective, accountable and need-based manner.

The diversity of challenges faced by the world of humanitarian assistance has been compounded by the ongoing multiple crises of finance, energy and food. While the financial and economic crisis has hit the sources of funds necessary for humanitarian assistance throughout the world, the food and energy insecurity has increased the vulnerabilities of the population in need.

There are no easy fixes to the challenges that we face. Those challenges must be matched with a concerted and effective response through innovative thinking and reinvigorated efforts to anticipate and overcome humanitarian emergencies. While we must continue to explore solutions to those new and emerging challenges to humanitarian assistance, we

should also try to specifically improve upon the following.

First, we should improve the coordination mechanism of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which remains pivotal in providing humanitarian assistance and presenting the situation on the ground to the world. Coordination is of the essence in times of constrained resources to avoid overlapping work by relevant humanitarian agencies. Second, we need to avoid the varying focus on whether the humanitarian challenges resulting from complex emergencies are more compounded than those caused by natural disasters, or vice versa, as the subject of humanitarian assistance should be kept above-board and need not be wrapped in political nuances and expediencies.

Third, the complex nature of humanitarian work requires sensitivity with regard to specific situations and in responding to their needs. We cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach to humanitarian assistance. Fourth, we must tap alternative means such as increased local procurement of material resources and hiring local expertise to save funds. Fifth, there must be a continuous effort to build trust between donors, international humanitarian actors and affected States. Sixth, capacity-building in countries that are most likely to be affected by humanitarian emergencies remains an important element of domestic preparedness.

Seventh, accountability of all humanitarian actors will inspire others to follow. Furthermore, any reporting mechanism should follow facts and remain cognizant of different situations that are not comparable. Undue politicizing of humanitarian relief work has negative implications for the affected population.

Unfortunately, we have witnessed acts of increased violence against humanitarian workers. Pakistan condemns terrorist attacks against humanitarian actors, who render invaluable services to people in dire need of their assistance. While the Member States should continue to take all possible measures for their safety and security, the United Nations system should also provide necessary training and capacity-building for the humanitarian actors so that they may remain aware of their operating environment, including through enhanced coordination with Member States.

Of late Pakistan has suffered from the varying nature of humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters, which have caused dislocation and loss of life and infrastructure. The devastating earthquake of 2005, heavy rains and floods in 2007 and 2008, and the recent dislocation of the people in the north-west of the country have added to the challenges faced by our country and also provide us with the valuable experience in dealing with humanitarian situations. We have gained such experience especially in the 2005 earthquake rehabilitation phase and the process of helping dislocated people in the north-western part of the country.

Based on our earthquake experience, we envisaged a devolved and decentralized mechanism for preparedness and management. That helped create necessary institutional, infrastructural and legislative framework, including the establishment of an Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority to be the focal point for all reconstruction and rehabilitation activity, a National Disaster Management Commission and Authority under the guidance of the Prime Minister, a Provincial Disaster Management Commissions and Authorities, and a National Disaster Risk Management Framework.

Those institutions and the infrastructure and legislative framework have helped us in managing the current dislocation and subsequent rehabilitation of returnees in the north-west of the country. Disaster preparedness and capacity-building is an ongoing process; the measures being taken by our Government are a work in progress that needs help and support from the international community.

Building on existing mechanisms, the Government of Pakistan has taken the following important steps for assistance and rehabilitation of the dislocated people and returnees. First, there is a Special Support Group to provide for relief and coordination efforts at the federal level. Secondly, an Emergency Response Unit has been established at all provincial levels. Thirdly, cash grants are being provided to affected families under the Bedazir Income Support Programme, which also includes provision of relief on gas consumption and electricity free of cost for a limited number of units. Fourthly, a return policy for dislocated people has been formulated to ensure safe, secure and sustainable returns. Finally, a relief package to write off farm and non-farm agriculture loans owed by small farmers has been introduced.

At all times, the primary role of the concerned State in the initiation, identification, coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance remains central. Respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must remain the overarching parameter in all coordination, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

The Acting President: I call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): For decades, international assistance to the Palestinian people has been indispensable and has been one of the main factors of Palestinians' perseverance in their struggle to end Israel's oppressive military occupation, which has dragged them deeper into poverty and dependence on aid. That assistance has been the only source of survival and sustenance for thousands of Palestinian families through endless periods of instability, crisis and uncertainty, and has helped alleviate their hardships and suffering.

The Palestinian people and their leadership are deeply grateful for that invaluable assistance. But today, as we convene to discuss this matter, we believe it is imperative to ask important questions. How much have we helped this assistance reach its full potential? How much sabotage to its sustained assistance efforts has the international community endured? How many more internationally funded projects and efforts are we willing to allow the occupying Power to undermine and decimate as it continues to pursue its illegal policies and practices, deepening the humanitarian crisis and thus forcing the diversion of assistance from development and State-building to relief and crisis management? How much longer will the international community be willing to pay for the illegal actions of the occupying Power by alleviating the consequences of those actions rather than bringing them to an end?

The Israeli figures on the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are astounding and tragic. In fact, all recent reports have documented the enormous burden that international agencies are carrying in trying to address the continually emerging needs of the Palestinian civilian population and to alleviate the entrenched crisis. That is because Israel's illegal actions and measures have turned back the clock on Palestinian development. So, despite the Palestinian people's desire to pursue development with a view to

the birth of their future State, Israeli policies and practices have continued to mire a sizeable portion of the Palestinian civilian population in abject poverty.

The latest report by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) sums up the bleak situation as follows:

“The occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the use of arbitrary detention, the disproportionate use of force, house demolitions, severe mobility restrictions, lack of building permits and closure policies continue to intensify the economic and social hardship of the Palestinian residents of the occupied Palestinian territory.” (A/64/77, *Summary*)

Moreover, ESCWA concludes that “The Israeli closure system remains a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory” (ibid.) and is contrary to the Geneva Conventions and other norms of international law.

The recent report on assistance to Palestinians by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) concludes that

“Of the twenty-five years that UNCTAD monitored and investigated the performance of the economy of the occupied Palestinian territory and the policy environment affecting it, 2009 represents without a doubt an all-time low. ... the Palestinian economy today faces a real challenge to its integrity, solvency and indeed the very viability that it must enjoy for the two-State solution to become a reality.” (TD/B/56/3*, *Executive Summary*)

The picture is, of course, most bleak in the Gaza Strip, where Israel’s illegal and inhumane siege has managed to bring the area to the verge of collapse in all aspects of life. That most brutal form of collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population by the occupying Power, which constitutes a war crime, has not been ended, despite ongoing international expressions of concern and calls for its cessation

Instead, in addition to its illegal blockade, Israel launched a brutal military aggression against the population that has wreaked death, destruction and possibly permanent damage on the environment there. The onslaught left Gaza’s infrastructure and electricity, sewage and water systems utterly devastated. It

destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes and economic, agricultural and business properties, including food production facilities and other industries, as well as hundreds of public institutions, including hospitals, schools and even United Nations facilities aiding the population. The efforts to repair the destroyed homes, infrastructure and institutions have been totally obstructed by the Israelis’ continued intransigence.

Israel’s blockade has also severely restricted and reduced the amount and quality of goods allowed into Gaza and has completely prevented all exports from Gaza. That has put Gaza’s once-thriving agricultural exports at the top of its most endangered economic sectors. And the noose Israel is tying around Gaza’s socio-economic life is only getting tighter. Most industries and economic sectors are on the verge of collapse, forcing the vast majority of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip into utter dependence on international aid.

And as if siege, death and destruction were not enough, the occupying Power also obstructs relief and assistance. International donors pledged \$5.2 billion in aid to war-torn Gaza at a conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in March, but these funds have yet to reach Gaza for its reconstruction. Israel continues to brazenly defy Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and General Assembly resolution ES-10/18, which call for the immediate opening of Gaza’s border crossings.

As for the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel continues to flagrantly breach international law and the United Nations resolutions that call on the occupying Power to cease its illegal settlement activities, confiscation of Palestinian land and collective punishment of the civilian population. Israel continues to pursue those illegal policies and practices by continuing to construct and expand its illegal settlements at an unprecedented rate, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem, as well as ordering the demolition of the homes of thousands of Palestinians in the city. That is in addition to the ongoing illegal construction of the wall, which is severely obstructing Palestinians’ access to jobs, schools, agricultural land and health care and is causing grave damage to their socio-economic life.

That colonial regime is guarded and maintained by a multilayered matrix of roadblocks and movement

restrictions, with more than 550 checkpoints and roadblocks firmly in place.

That is why, despite the Palestinian Authority's remarkable achievements in law enforcement, financial transparency and development efforts, socio-economic indicators have continued to show significant decline. In five years the Palestinian economy has lost \$8.4 billion in potential income — twice the value of the Palestinian economy today. That should alarm all, as the loss of that potential income, combined with the losses incurred by the destruction or sabotage of internationally funded projects and efforts, shows the grave trap Palestinian development efforts and international assistance have fallen into.

Over the past few years, international aid to the Palestinian people has increased significantly. Yet this increase has had little effect on the grim reality on the ground because of the incessant military aggression, siege, and colonial expansion that Israel continues to inflict on the population. That is an unacceptable trend that the international community must seriously address and bring to a halt. In order for international assistance to the Palestinian people to achieve its intended results, the international community should focus on helping the Palestinian Authority to implement its State programme. Funding is crucial, but it is not enough. There must be serious efforts and action to remove the tremendous obstacles Israel is placing on the ground to undermine the programme. Without that, international assistance and the crucial role it plays will end up only covering the cost of the Israeli occupation rather than achieving development and building the institutions of the independent Palestinian State, which is the only guarantee of peace in the Middle East.

On 25 August 2009, the Palestinian Authority, headed by Dr. Salam Fayyad, presented a programme entitled "Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State", which envisions the establishment of an independent State within two years. The donor group for the Palestinian Authority — the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, or AHLC — welcomed that programme, which has received wide international support.

We thus reiterate our call on all United Nations Member States to join us in our efforts to build our independent State, to establish justice and peace in our

homeland and to uphold the principles that this Assembly stands for. This is undoubtedly a test of our resilience as an oppressed people and equally a test of international credibility. Indeed, the international community must shoulder its moral and legal responsibilities by compelling the occupying Power to cease its violations and put an end to its crippling siege of all of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

The cause of the utter destitution Palestinians now suffer is known to all of us. It is the 42-year Israeli military occupation. Thus, as numerous international organizations agree, full economic recovery and rehabilitation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which are the goals driving international assistance, will be possible only when that occupation ends.

The Palestinian people will not allow Israel's insistence on pursuit of hegemony, colonization, wall construction, wanton violence and destruction and discrimination to stand in their way. They will continue to rebuild that which the occupation destroys, to preserve the life and society the occupation attempts to shatter and to replant what the occupation razes and uproots. Our commitment to exercise our inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and full sovereignty over our natural resources is unwavering. Our empowerment to establish a sovereign, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only option, the only way to achieve peace in the region.

Our goal is to stand before the Assembly, soon, to announce that through sovereignty we have overcome dependence, and that any international assistance we might seek would be to complete our recovery from the occupation, rather than to continue coping with its devastation. But to do that, we need the assistance of the international community, to protect its investment in peace. Make sure that it is not in vain.

Mr. Pérez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a country that periodically suffers from the impact of natural disasters, Peru is aware of the need to be prepared to confront the unpredictable consequences. Clearly our efforts, channelled through the national civil defense system, have been fundamental in confronting any adversity of that type. However, when we have faced serious natural disasters, the immediate national response and subsequent recovery would not

have had the same results without the effective response of the international community, which included humanitarian action by many States, the United Nations system, the Red Cross and other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

Given that our territory has suffered many humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters, Peru can testify to the great importance and value of international humanitarian cooperation in support of national efforts and to the role of that assistance in saving human lives when any natural or complex emergency strikes.

In his report on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/64/84), the Secretary-General has underscored the growing scientific consensus that the increase in the severity and frequency of natural disasters not caused by earthquakes or volcanic eruptions is more than 90 per cent likely to be a result of climate change. That statement is particularly relevant to Peru, which for some years has been experiencing reoccurring severe frosts in the higher altitudes of the country. That phenomenon, which every year overburdens the natural-disaster efforts developed by the Peruvian Government, affects the national economy and the quality of life of the communities that suffer from the ravages of nature. But above all, it causes loss of human life. What is happening in Peru is yet another example of how climate change is increasing the demands on international humanitarian cooperation.

We also agree with the Secretary-General that the effects of both natural disasters and complex emergencies generate much greater risk in the areas of the food crisis, shortages of water and energy, extreme poverty, population growth, unplanned urbanization, pandemics and migration. Those situations can generate new types of emergencies and cyclical crises and can aggravate the humanitarian emergencies we already have. Therefore we believe that the Secretary-General has made a correct assessment, that humanitarian assistance should address emergency situations from a new perspective that links it with non-traditional actors in this field, such as the development, financial, legal, scientific and private sectors, among others, in the search for long-term solutions to prevent and deal with disasters.

One of the most valuable elements in humanitarian work and dealing with disasters is early warning capacity and, above all, preparedness systems for disaster risk and reduction at the national, international, local and regional levels. For this reason we believe it important that Member States speed up implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, putting an emphasis on exchanging knowledge, expertise and best practices, as well as transferring technology and providing financial assistance, so that we can avoid new risks and reduce current ones.

In the area of early warning systems and humanitarian assistance, it is important that there be appropriate coordination between the actors working on those tasks, at the national, regional and international levels. The work of national and humanitarian coordinators is extremely useful. At the national level, it is the State's job take charge of the humanitarian coordination process and at the same time to shoulder the responsibilities that that implies: ensuring fast, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian personnel and their equipment and supplies, so that they can carry out their work of providing humanitarian assistance to the people affected in the most efficient way possible. Unfortunately, as the Secretary-General's report points out, the worst obstacle to effective delivery of humanitarian aid, whether goods, equipment or workers, continues to be the existence of excessive red tape aimed at controlling such aid, which only exacerbates victims' suffering, distancing the State even further from what should be its principal aim.

My delegation would also like to express its concern over the increase in threats to the personal safety of United Nations personnel and humanitarian assistance in general, including some who have been the object of speeches inciting violence and deliberate physical attacks on them. It is essential that States take the necessary measures to prevent such acts. It is also important to underscore that disaster situations also require that greater attention be paid to promoting and protecting human rights. Within this focus, emphasis must be placed on women, children and elderly people, who are among the most vulnerable groups.

At a time when the international community faces an increase in the severity of natural disasters and in the intensity of conflicts — as well as in the negative effects of the world economic crisis and other global trends that drive the increase in world demand for

humanitarian assistance — the work of the Central Emergency Response Fund is even more necessary, along with other funds aimed at rapid response for disaster relief. These contributions continue to be one of the most concrete demonstrations of political will in aiding disaster victims. Without such political will, little can be done to produce the humanitarian assistance that our peoples need.

We should not lose sight of the fact that the central goal of effective humanitarian assistance should be to help human beings. To this end, States should focus their efforts on alleviating and improving the situation of affected populations in a timely manner, and the international community should be prepared to support them in that task.

Mr. Al-Barout (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Secretary-General's reports (A/64/84, A/64/327 and A/64/331) indicate that the challenges facing the United Nations in the field of humanitarian assistance have doubled in the past few years, owing to an increase in natural disasters caused by climate change, as well as the growing numbers of persons displaced as a result of armed conflict, which in turn has increased the numbers of those needing humanitarian relief assistance, particularly in poor and developing countries. In addition, the global financial and food crises have exacerbated the negative effects of such disasters in these countries, and led to a drop in national and international responses to them.

Such developments require redoubled efforts by the United Nations and its relevant partners to meet increased humanitarian demands and to supply the Organization with the financial and human resources it needs to discharge its growing responsibilities. These needs require Member States to cooperate with the Organization in every way possible, particularly by financing those agencies concerned with humanitarian activities. They also underscore the need to facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance to those affected and to remove any obstacles that prevent humanitarian personnel from doing their work. It is also essential to ensure that all States and parties to armed conflicts protect civilians involved, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, and take preventive and effective measures to bring those responsible for violations of such laws to justice.

The United Arab Emirates emphasizes the essential role of the United Nations in mobilizing and

coordinating humanitarian efforts to provide emergency relief assistance for millions of people in the affected areas. We also recognize that international partnerships and cooperation with the Organization are the most effective ways of achieving the best outcomes for humanitarian activities throughout the world.

The United Arab Emirates has therefore focused on coordinating many of its humanitarian initiatives and contributions with the United Nations and its related agencies, in order to implement emergency and long-term relief projects in countries affected by natural disasters or armed conflict. As a member of the Donor Support Group of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), we have contributed to enhancing the humanitarian work of the Organization in order to achieve the greatest efficiency possible in that area. In 2009, we were proud to be the first country in the Middle East to launch the United Nations Consolidated Appeal, which took place for the first time in our region.

Besides fulfilling our financial commitments to the United Nations entities concerned with humanitarian and development activities, the Government of the United Arab Emirates, in concert with a number of charitable foundations, led by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent, contributes to international relief efforts to assist people in affected areas all over the world. In the last two years, our contributions have grown 300 per cent, to a total of \$156 million in 2008, compared to \$45 million in 2007. United Arab Emirates humanitarian relief assistance over the past three years totalled \$3 billion, including contributions to reconstructing countries emerging from armed conflict, both directly and in collaboration with United Nations major funds and programmes, to finance and coordinate the implementation of relief and development projects in those countries. To alleviate the burden of rising food prices in global markets, we have sent millions of tons of wheat and food products to many countries affected by this crisis.

The United Arab Emirates also plays a major role in coordinating and strengthening international relief efforts, by providing highly efficient logistic facilities within our country, such as the Dubai International Humanitarian City, the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent and the Office for the Coordination of Foreign Assistance, which is the first of its kind in the

Middle East for coordinating humanitarian relief assistance at the national and international level.

The United Arab Emirates emphasizes the importance of implementing the recommendations and resolutions of all international conferences on national and international strategies on how to deal with natural disasters and their aftermath through all stages of recovery. We have worked with some recipient countries to help build their national capacity to predict natural disasters and contain their effects. At the national level, we have launched a “Crisis Management and Emergency Response” project aimed at developing an integrated response mechanism for emergencies and environmental disasters.

The United Arab Emirates attaches special importance to providing support and assistance for the Palestinian people and their Government in their humanitarian plight resulting from Israel’s occupation of their lands. We have translated our political and moral solidarity with the Palestinian people into ongoing financial and economic support, which includes emergency humanitarian relief and long-term development and technical assistance amounting to more than \$3 billion. In March 2009 we pledged \$174 million in Sharm el-Sheikh for the reconstruction of Gaza.

In that regard, we urge the international community to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately lift its blockade on the Palestinian people in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to them; comply with international law and resolutions, the principles of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention; end its occupation of Arab territories; and resume peace negotiations on the basis of the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Furthermore, we urge donor countries to continue their assistance to the Palestinian people and Government to help them meet their daily requirements until the end of the Israeli occupation of their land and the establishment of an independent State, Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Until a final solution is reached, we reaffirm our support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and emphasize the vitality of its role. We demand that its personnel and assistance be able to reach Palestinian refugees in all areas of its operations.

We stress the need to provide adequate financial support for the agency to allow it to fulfil its commitments to all refugees. We have doubled our annual contribution to UNRWA in order to help it discharge its responsibilities towards Palestinian refugees.

Ms. Rovirosa (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico has taken the floor once again to express its concern about the increase in seismic and hydrometeorological events, which have been affecting our society as a negative impact of climate change. In that connection, my delegation would like to reiterate its appeal for a redoubling of efforts to reduce the loss of human life and material costs associated with such events. Increased drought and floods, less ice and snow, more heat waves, increased torrential rains and the potential reduction in harvests are but a few examples of the gravity of the consequences of climate change, with some parts of the world being more vulnerable to those changes than others.

Mexico would like to express its solidarity with all victims who have succumbed to the terrible consequences of such natural events. We would like to underscore the importance of the need for the international community to step up its efforts aimed at consolidating a genuine culture of prevention. Against that backdrop, Mexico would like to recall that the 2005 to 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action constitutes a resolute step in that direction, as it provides a specific focus for what should be done at the various levels in terms of risk management. That mechanism establishes a list of minimal steps for strengthening preventive measures, including, among others, conducting studies, drafting vulnerability maps, establishing early warning systems and raising community awareness.

We also hope that the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, which is beginning just today, will produce timely and lasting solutions in line with the pressing needs of today’s world. Mexico would like to reiterate its belief in the need for better understanding of the frequency of natural disasters and climate change, phenomena that need to be addressed in a holistic manner while making use of the advantages and opportunities provided by the agenda for climate change adaptation and of disaster risk reduction efforts.

Mexico is certain that the current diversity in the humanitarian field illustrates the level of maturity of

the international community when it comes to focusing on disasters. Galvanizing that advantage in a lasting way so as to benefit our communities, in particular those affected by disasters, entails that we have to have the appropriate tools to coordinate such an approach adequately. Making progress in strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance requires a commitment to participate actively in political dialogue at all levels in order to create institutional and human capacities and to ensure that financial resources are available.

Today we can count on the efforts of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and in particular on specific instruments to address emergencies and the experts of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team. Adequate coordination of humanitarian assistance also requires that we have available to us financial tools commensurate with current demands. In that context, the Central Emergency Response Fund responds in a predictable, transparent and, most importantly, timely and immediate manner. The Fund is a very important initiative in the context of the reform of the United Nations, as it strengthens the international community's capacity to respond immediately to humanitarian emergencies. Mexico supported the establishment of the Fund and, in line with its capabilities, has sought to increase its contribution to it year after year. In spite of the effects of the international economic and financial crisis, which have led my country to put in place a very strict policy to control expenses, our contributions will remain at a level similar to this year's.

Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance requires firm commitment on the part of the international community. Our various experiences in recent years should make it possible for us to consider appropriate solutions for current and future needs, so as to facilitate requests and deliveries of humanitarian assistance. Mexico would therefore like to underscore that it is important that there be common rules for such activities. In that regard, we believe that the Organization has an important role to play in providing technical assistance to States.

Mexico has already underscored the need to avoid the duplication of efforts and the waste of resources on work already being done by existing mechanisms. In that connection, Mexico advocates a

focus on the coordination of humanitarian assistance that is based on synergy among existing mechanisms at the international, regional, subregional and national levels. Expanding dialogue in order to improve the humanitarian response to disasters is in the interest of the entire international community.

In that context, Mexico was pleased to pioneer the series of regional meetings held in Latin America and the Caribbean on the subject of international humanitarian assistance mechanisms. Held in cooperation with OCHA, the purpose of those meetings has been to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences in that field and to consider ways of improving cooperation between States and the United Nations. That initiative, which began in Mexico in 2008 and continued successfully this year in Brazil, will be further strengthened in 2010 under the auspices of the Government of Argentina.

Mexico would like to reiterate its concern about the fact that restrictive and inappropriate interpretations of everything labelled humanitarian weaken the rights of victims to receive timely humanitarian assistance. In times of emergencies, States have to consider the limits of national capacity and exercise the prerogative of asking for assistance and receiving it under the appropriate conditions and modalities. Of that there is no doubt. Nevertheless, those who lecture us in emergency situations about humanitarian assistance while placing sovereignty above the needs of affected populations merely imperil the lives, dignity and health of the affected.

In conclusion, Mexico would like to emphasize its commitment to the efforts of the United Nations and of the members of the Inter-Agency Committee to improve the coordination of humanitarian assistance. We would also like to reiterate our support for the work of OCHA and Under-Secretary-General John Holmes.

Mr. Sul Kyung-Hoon (Republic of Korea): I would like first of all to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, which chart out the direction for effective humanitarian action. Also, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and to his staff for their unwavering efforts in mitigating humanitarian crises across the world. We reiterate our

firm resolve to work with the United Nations to help those in dire need.

As has been well illustrated in the Secretary-General's reports, the global need for humanitarian assistance continues to grow. Increasing numbers of people face displacement due to violent conflicts, natural disasters and climate change-related calamities. Dramatic exposure to vulnerability has been further aggravated by high food prices and the scarcity of energy and water. While the demand for action is on the rise, the global economic recession constrains the capacity to respond effectively to those challenges.

In joining the international effort to address looming challenges and crises, the Korean Government echoes the call for stronger United Nations coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, as called for in resolution 46/182 of 1991. We reiterate our strict adherence to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

As noted in the Secretary-General's reports, we have seen that humanitarian actors have proliferated at a tremendous rate over the past two decades. While that numerical increase can be viewed as a positive sign, in the sense that it reflects the growing compassion and sense of responsibility of the international community towards humankind, it also poses serious dangers of fragmentation and overlap in conducting humanitarian assistance. Without doubt, the proliferation of players calls for greater efforts to coordinate among different actors to improve delivery and achieve effective results. It will be critical for the United Nations to play a leading role in the process of coordination. The United Nations system should effectively introduce existing coordination mechanisms to new players and, at the same time, actively promote awareness of humanitarian principles and codes among humanitarian actors.

Another aspect related to the proliferation of players in the field of humanitarian assistance is the importance of coordination at the regional level. While efforts to reform the United Nations system have successfully strengthened humanitarian coordination at both the national and international levels, coordination at the regional level seems to require further improvement. We believe that regional cooperation mechanisms should be fully integrated for local response to disasters. In that regard, the United Nations

needs to engage more vigorously in the coordination of regional mechanisms.

In that connection, I would like to note the fact that, in the Asia-Pacific region, the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been instrumental in leading the discussion on regional cooperation and in developing guidelines and systems for disaster management cooperation at the regional level. It also is encouraging to note that regional efforts to cooperate in the area of disaster response are being discussed in forums such as the ASEAN+3 group, the East Asia Summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. The Korean Government hopes that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will further increase its proactive engagement with those regional processes. Regional responses based on good coordination will be vital to saving more lives in time-critical emergencies.

As we strive to bolster coordination, it will be critical for the United Nations to intensify its efforts to secure access to affected populations while ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The recent events in Afghanistan, Central Africa and the Philippines indicate that humanitarian workers are more and more at risk of hostile attack. During 2009, complex emergencies in the Gaza Strip, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Yemen, the Sudan and many other places have demonstrated how limited access to victims can impair humanitarian action.

In that respect, we commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to reinforce the United Nations security management system and place high priority on the security and safety of humanitarian personnel. Furthermore, we believe that the United Nations needs to engage local non-governmental and regional organizations such as ASEAN and the African Union to bolster security networks in the field. That will enable the United Nations to protect humanitarian personnel more effectively and provide more options for safe, unhindered and timely access to victims.

Efforts to strengthen disaster risk reduction and preparedness will be as important as conducting humanitarian assistance itself. In cooperation with United Nations humanitarian assistance efforts, disaster risk reduction strategies can play a bridging role between disaster relief and development. The disaster risk reduction framework needs to

mainstreamed into reconstruction plans so that post-disaster activities can treat the aftermath and establish preventive measures, such as early warning systems, to minimize or avert the effects of future disasters.

Finally, in order to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, the United Nations needs to incorporate the gender perspective into the broader spectrum of humanitarian affairs. Women and children are the most vulnerable among those who become the victims of humanitarian crises.

Let me take this opportunity to briefly introduce our humanitarian policy and efforts. The Government of the Republic of Korea has steadily strengthened its system for humanitarian assistance. In 2006, we became a member of the OCHA Donor Support Group. The Overseas Emergency Relief Act, a comprehensive legal foundation for our response to international emergency actions, was introduced in 2007. The first comprehensive policy document on our humanitarian and disaster relief assistance was adopted in 2008. This year, we acceded to the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative and, starting next year, we will become a full member of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our firm support for the United Nations humanitarian effort. As an emerging donor, Korea is committed to its growing responsibilities in the humanitarian community. The Republic of Korea will continue to uphold its contribution in this field, including our support to the Central Emergency Respond Fund.

Mrs. Pérez Álvarez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a consequence of climate change and ecological imbalance, which have increased the occurrence of natural disasters, we have noted with great concern the growth in the number of humanitarian emergencies in several parts of the world. These are exacerbated by the humanitarian consequences of conflict situations, the food crisis and the current global economic and financial crisis.

Cuba reaffirms the fact that humanitarian assistance must be carried out in full respect for the principles set out in the hallmark resolution 46/182. We also reject the imposition of ambiguous concepts that have not been agreed upon, which can be easily manipulated to justify any action contrary to the

principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

It is a fundamental tenet that States in need must request and consent to receive humanitarian assistance, in line with the purposes and principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations. The Charter must be respected in every situation, including humanitarian emergencies. Its purposes and principles cannot be rewritten, distorted, restricted or conditional.

The Cuban State takes very seriously its central role in initiating, organizing, coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance on its territory when our country is affected by natural disasters, pursuant to the resolutions of the General Assembly. In that context, Cuba reiterates the importance of implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 and, in particular, the concept of disaster preparedness.

Over the course of less than three months in 2008, Cuba was affected by five extreme meteorological events — two tropical storms, which caused major flooding, and three hurricanes, the first of which was the most devastating of the past 50 years. The second cut across the entire country and caused considerable damage to the Cuban economy. The losses resulting from those climatological events amounted to \$9.721 billion. In that regard, 2008 was the most destructive year in the history of our country.

Preventive measures taken by the Cuban authorities and people ensured the safe evacuation and protection of more than 4 million people in secure shelters and the preservation of valuable economic assets. The effectiveness of Cuba's civil defence, entrusted with the implementation of civil defence measures and the international regulations and covenants on civil protection to which Cuba is party, was crucial to protecting human life and property. That effort included the use of mass media and coordination with governmental and non-governmental institutions.

The lessons we have learned in the course of years of being lashed by major meteorological phenomena have enabled Cuba to strengthen its regulatory, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction. Likewise, disaster reduction issues have been included in national teaching syllabuses, providing the civil defence system with a wealth of scientific research, investigation and knowledge.

Cuba believes that it is crucially important to continue to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction as a mechanism for coordinating efforts in that area of international concern. Our country is also committed to continuing to work with the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team.

We regret the loss of human life and material damage as a result of the meteorological phenomena and complex emergencies that have affected thousands of people throughout the world during the past year, in particular in the countries of the South. In that regard, we reaffirm the importance of honouring official development assistance commitments and of promoting United Nations programmes aimed at effectively supporting the efforts of the countries of the South.

We stress that the United Nations system has an important role to play in helping developing countries to improve their existing humanitarian capacities, know-how and institutions. In so doing, the Organizations should, among other things, help them to gain access to new technologies, financial resources and technical knowledge.

Cuba reiterates its willingness to continue to support countries in need that have been affected by natural disasters in a disinterested manner and in a spirit of solidarity. An example of that support is the work undertaken by the Henry Reeves International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disasters and Serious Epidemics. The initial goal of the Contingent, which was established in Havana in August 2005, was to help people in New Orleans affected by Hurricane Katrina. The Contingent now has extensive reach in

disaster areas, having established comprehensive field hospitals capable of providing a broad range of assistance to affected populations. The Contingent has carried out missions in seven countries with the participation of 4,156 participants, of whom 2,840 were doctors.

Cuba is also carrying out several health care cooperation programmes in numerous countries. That effort includes the Latin American School of Medicine, which has graduated 8,283 students from 24 countries in its 10 years of existence. Throughout our country, 23,749 students from 100 countries from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, North America and Europe are currently studying medicine. Our country has also implemented a comprehensive health programme. Forty-four countries are currently benefiting from the programme, which has deployed 2,920 Cuban doctors to provide services free of charge in rural areas to all people, irrespective of their race, creed or ideology. Cuba reiterates its resolve to continue to provide, to the extent of our capability, the support of our main resource — the human capital created by the Revolution and our best experiences.

Lastly, for our country, the only way to face humanitarian emergencies and the devastating fury of nature is to place the infinite resources of the planet available to the most affected, without petty commercial interests or national selfishness. Solidarity and international cooperation should always be foremost among our concerns in providing humanitarian assistance.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.