Early Preparedness, Predictability, Enhanced Coordination, Essential for Effective Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance, Speakers Tell Economic and Social Council

Citing Increase in Chronic, Acute Vulnerability, Top Emergency Relief Official Warns Paradigm Shift May Make Traditional ‘Humanitarian Toolbox’ Obsolete

With natural disasters increasing in frequency and complicated, multiparty conflicts hampering the delivery of humanitarian assistance and endangering relief workers, senior United Nations officials joined diplomats today in stressing the urgent need for early preparedness and timely, predictable and coordinated efforts to respond to growing demands for effective humanitarian assistance.

Opening in the Economic and Social Council’ annual humanitarian affairs segment, John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said chronic and increasingly acute vulnerabilities caused by climate change, natural disasters, global crises, and armed conflict had significantly amplified humanitarian assistance demands. The traditional humanitarian toolbox was becoming increasingly insufficient to tackle complex and ever-evolving situations, and as that was the case, the humanitarian system must keep up with the paradigm shifts.

“We need to get ahead of the curve and identify where humanitarian need is imminent, and how we can avert the crisis, rather than focusing just on shock-driven, after-the-fact responses,” continued Mr. Holmes, who is also the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator. Such a shift required more emphasis on prevention and preparedness, as well as strengthened partnerships with government, development, civil society and other actors to engage in knowledge transfer and early analysis of potential implications.

Considering challenges to the delivery of assistance, he noted that access to those in need — a central element of humanitarian work — had become constrained, and violent attacks on humanitarian personnel were increasingly frequent and brutal. In that regard, the international community must be ready to engage in dialogue with armed groups in order to promote their compliance with international humanitarian law.

“Engaging with Hamas in Gaza, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, with the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with Al-Shabaab and other armed groups in Somalia, is essential to ensure that we can reach all populations in need of humanitarian aid,” he declared. At the same time, however, he cautioned that negotiating access should not and must not be confused with political negotiations, nor should it confer respectability or legitimacy.

In the general debate that followed Mr. Holmes’ presentation, all speakers agreed that natural disasters and global food, economic and financial crises had put pressure on the humanitarian assistance workload, and most called for rapid efforts that could be adapted to individual situations on the ground.

Members of civil society were often the first to react in emergency situations, providing assistance
and care to those in need, some delegates said. Thus, enhanced coordination among all humanitarian actors — including Governments, civil society, humanitarian institutions, the international community and the private sector — was urgently needed. Many speakers also highlighted the need for strengthened funding mechanisms which would enable timely and effective responses to emergencies.

The representative of Yemen, on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, underlined the primary role of the concerned State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian responses and assistance strategies. Elaborating on that point, representatives of the Russian Federation, Chile and Uruguay noted the importance of States’ commitment to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence while providing humanitarian assistance.

In an afternoon panel discussion on humanitarian operations in unsafe environments, panellist Gregory Starr, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS), said the world body was increasingly being asked to operate in conflict situations, as witnessed by the 2009 suicide bomb attack on a guesthouse in Afghanistan. Noting that threat analyses would be of no use unless information was shared, he said there was a moral imperative to share information with those tasked to decide whether to send people into situations that risked their lives.

Turning to the issue of funding, he said United Nations and non-governmental organizations must ask for funding appropriate to the situations they worked in. At the same time, however, States and donors must recognize that operating costs in high-risk situations would be high. His department, among others, must undergo an attitude shift, recognizing that its role was to enable the other United Nations operations to advance, he stressed.

Addressing challenges, Ramiro Lopes da Silva, Deputy Executive Director of External Relations for the World Food Programme (WFP), said the roles of humanitarians and the military were often blurred, causing confusion on the ground. For instance, international military forces in Afghanistan had sometimes directly provided humanitarian assistance, while some major donors of humanitarian aid were also parties to a conflict. Those factors, he said, posed risks to perceptions of WFP’s neutrality.

Furthermore, humanitarian personnel constantly needed to strike a balance between the expected humanitarian impact of their activities and the risks those activities implied for their beneficiaries and their own safety, said panellist Dominik Stillhart, Deputy Director of Operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Highlighting three broad categories of security incidents, he pointed out that politically-motivated attacks against humanitarian workers had become markedly more frequent. Such violence could point to an unprecedented crisis of credibility and acceptance of the humanitarian sector, he warned.

As to the need to enhance the ability to engage with local populations and analyze contexts, he agreed that, in some cases, there had been success in that regard. In the large operation in Darfur, undertaken with the ICRC, actors had engaged with communities not part of internally displaced person populations. That was one reason the World Food Programme (WFP) believed it could continue working elsewhere, in Somalia, where a large majority of the WFP’s distribution points were located in Al-Shabaab-controlled area.

At the same time, he conceded that the agency had “totally misread” signals in Somalia. “We trusted too much” relations established with local communities and never believed that what had been perceived as an isolated group could kill colleagues. However, it was a must to remain in such contexts. “You learn on the job; by doing and engaging populations,” he said, noting that humanitarians must also re-engage in robust dialogue with military staff, which generally had broken down in 2003.

Also participating in the general debate were representatives of Belgium (on behalf of the European Union), Canada (on behalf of Australia and New Zealand), Pakistan, Japan, China, Ghana, Brazil, Kenya, Ethiopia, Switzerland, Cuba, Republic of Korea, and Norway.

Council Vice-President Octavio Errázuriz of Chile made an opening statement.
The Economic and Social Council will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 14 July, to hold a panel discussion on "strengthening preparedness for humanitarian emergencies and the coordinated provision of humanitarian assistance, in particular, addressing the humanitarian needs of the affected populations and the factors that increase susceptibility to humanitarian emergencies."

**Background**

The Economic and Social Council today opened its humanitarian affairs segment with an opening statement from the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs followed by a general debate, and an afternoon panel discussion on "humanitarian assistance operations in highly hazardous or insecure and unsafe environments".

**Opening Statements**

Kicking off the humanitarian segment, Council Vice-President Octavio Errázuriz (Chile) said providing humanitarian assistance was an increasingly complicated and complex endeavour exacerbated by global challenges, including climate change and extreme poverty, as well as by the rising level of threats and attacks on aid organizations.

The Council's humanitarian affairs segment provided Member States with a range of opportunities for deliberating on how best to respond to traditional and emerging crises and for identifying response priorities in an informed discussion with the international humanitarian community, he continued. It also provided a forum to jointly deliberate how humanitarian responses could be improved and how future challenges could be addressed.

**JOHN HOLMES**, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that lately, humanitarian assistance demands had grown owing to chronic and increasingly acute vulnerability caused by global trends such as climate change, the recent global food crisis, demographics, and changes in key ecosystems. Humanitarian needs continued to rise, sustained and triggered by armed conflict, natural disasters and global structural challenges.

In the first half of 2010, there were massive earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and China. The Haiti earthquake — the second deadliest in the last century — required one of the "largest and most complex international relief operations mounted in recent years". Six months on, the country was still in full "emergency mode", with 1.3 million people in temporary and unsatisfactory shelters, completely vulnerable to the continuing rainy and hurricane season. While his visit there over the last two days had confirmed how much had been achieved in six months, it had also revealed how much still needed to be done.

Turning to other matters, he said that slow-onset disasters, somewhat less high profile, were also very significant in terms of their humanitarian impact. In South and East Asia, Africa and Central America, unpredictable and unprecedented weather patterns had become the "new normal". Many of the countries in which the United Nations worked had been deeply affected by climate change, often in development settings, he said. Floods and droughts were more frequent and increasingly unpredictable. Rains no longer arrived in large parts of Africa when they should, he added.

Many countries had been hit by the combined effects of the global financial crisis and economic downturn, extreme poverty, resource scarcity, population growth, rapid urbanization, and volatile energy prices. "These factors threaten to create chronic acute vulnerability on a scale we cannot readily imagine now", he stressed. The actual or potential drawdown of peacekeeping missions in several contexts would pose further challenges to affected communities and humanitarian operations. Humanitarian needs arising from conflict had also persisted as new internal conflicts had appeared, with particularly serious impacts on civilians caught in the middle.

The good news, he said, was that the humanitarian architecture put in place in recent years was helping the international community cope. Yet he cautioned that the traditional humanitarian toolbox would become increasingly insufficient to tackle complex and ever-evolving humanitarian situations. To stay relevant and effective, the humanitarian system must keep up with the paradigm shift caused by global challenges. "We need to get ahead of the curve and identify where humanitarian need is imminent, and..."
how we can avert the crisis, rather than focusing just on shock-driven, after-the-fact responses.”

Introducing the Secretary-General’s report on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (document A/65/82-E/2010/88), he said Governments and international development institutions had to be major actors in taking on global challenges and fighting against poverty and underdevelopment. New ways of working closely with others — particularly those Government and development actors — must be found, he said.

Above all, the underlying structural causes of symptoms humanitarians attempted to treat must be dealt with at the same time, and with the same urgency, as the short-term life-saving needs. The shift from shock-driven to needs-based response required a humanitarian system that was able to contribute to reducing vulnerability through improved risk reduction and preparedness and improve modalities for identification and monitoring of acute humanitarian vulnerability. It must also be able to strengthen partnerships with government, development, civil society and other actors to engage in knowledge transfer and early analysis of potential implications.

To achieve that, more emphasis must be placed on prevention and preparedness, common needs assessment and analysis of acute vulnerability across multiple sectors, and better monitoring and evaluation of responses. As global needs continued to grow, humanitarians’ ability to reach those in need had become constrained in many places. Violent attacks on humanitarian personnel were increasingly frequent and brutal, he said, calling for frank and constructive debates on the issue.

For the effectiveness and safety of humanitarian operations, as well as for the sake of access to those in need, the international community must be ready to engage in dialogue with any and all armed groups in order to promote their compliance with international humanitarian law. “Engaging with Hamas in Gaza, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, with the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with Al-Shabaab and other armed groups in Somalia, is essential to ensure that we can reach all populations in need of humanitarian aid.” However, negotiating access should not and must not be confused with political negotiations, and must not confer respectability or legitimacy, he stressed.

Access to those in need was also restricted or complicated by bureaucratic delays or impediments. Highlighting several examples of such restrictions, he underlined the necessity of full and timely access for humanitarians. Parties to conflict were obliged by international humanitarian law to provide for affected populations under their control, and, if unwilling to do so, to allow and facilitate the passage of impartial aid.

Despite the scale of challenges and difficulties faced, overall efforts to ensure a coordinated, predictable and accountable humanitarian response capacity were reaping results, as seen during the Haiti response in January. Haiti had proved the worth of the resources invested in the cluster approach, although the work was by no means complete. More cluster management capacity and better inter-cluster coordination were needed to ensure cohesion between the strategic and operational levels of the response operation. Joint rapid needs assessment was still inadequate despite a new trial of methods.

“Greater understanding of the socio-economic environment and the community-based urban context we were operating in, and better communication and collaboration with local actors […] would have led to better targeted assistance, and will do so elsewhere, too,” he said. In addition, better ways to include major bilateral players, military actors and the private sector were needed in coordination mechanisms.

He said that one area of particular focus in the year ahead would be joining up the related but often separate activities of needs assessment, joint planning, resource allocation, and monitoring and impact evaluation. The humanitarian community continued to move towards better common, coordinated and harmonized assessments, particularly in the early states of a crisis. An agreed assessment tool would help to prioritize the wider planning process in CAP (consolidated) and flash appeals, and orient funding managed through the Central Emergency Response Fund and country-level pooled funds.

WAHEED AL-SHAM (Yemen), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said the humanitarian challenges resulting from complex emergencies and natural disasters continued to increase,
especially in developing countries. Such challenges were compounded by the effects of the global economic and financial crisis, as well as crisis in food security and energy supplies. He emphasized the primary role of the concerned State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian response and assistance strategies.

He urged the international community to support the efforts of developing countries in building humanitarian capacities through the transfer of technology and expertise, and extending multisectoral cooperation. Funding remained a big challenge, he went on to say, and the Group of 77 believed it was vital to strengthen financial mechanisms for humanitarian assistance and to ensure timely and predictable funding to allow for an effective response to emergencies.

JAN GRAULS (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that despite achievements in the provision of humanitarian aid, particularly the “unseen scale” of the response to the Haitian earthquake, more work was needed to address the growing number of countries where access had become more difficult and where the security situation was worsening for beneficiaries and aid workers. To adequately respond to such challenges, the humanitarian system must be flexible, efficient, predictable and coordinated and he expressed particular support for four evolutions that were strengthening agencies’ capacities.

In that context, he said the cluster approach had improved needs coverage and built stronger partnerships among United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors. As such, clusters must be more closely linked to national actors and other coordination mechanisms. The European Union also supported efforts to develop a framework for common needs assessments, as the current lack of coordinated cross-sector assessments hindered effectiveness. The United Nations should strengthen its ability to recruit and deploy experienced staff quickly and flexibly, and to procure emergency relief material in a cost-effective way. Finally, he lauded the Central Emergency Relief Fund for mobilizing funding.

In other areas, he urged all States and parties to facilitate the unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and supplies to affected communities, voicing concern at the growing numbers of internally displaced persons. The Union strongly condemned attacks on aid organizations. Finally, he said global challenges like poverty and environmental degradation could cause chronic needs to escalate into acute needs and the humanitarian system must stand ready to provide an effective and timely response.

JOHN A. MCNEE (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said the last year had seen unresolved protracted conflicts, a deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen, emergence of a new crisis in Kyrgyzstan and natural disasters in countries like Haiti, Chile and the Philippines. “Ensuring humanitarian assistance reaches those in need is critical”, he stressed. Efforts relied on addressing the safety and security of those providing such assistance. His delegation supported the Department of Safety and Security in implementing new security mechanisms, a test of which would be the impact for those working on the ground. Advocacy also was critical to bolstering security by supporting agencies’ efforts to pursue “policies of acceptance” in the long run. Lessons from Haiti showed how vital such functions were for broader engagement.

On the need for the humanitarian system to shift from being “shock-driven” to “needs-based and vulnerability-led”, he supported developing a clearer approach to respond to situations of acute vulnerability. Efforts must be redoubled in the areas of risk reduction and preparedness and strengthening governance. More attention must also be placed on strong leadership and effective coordination, as the right leadership capacity must be present on the ground to provide strategic guidance from the start, especially in sudden-onset crises and catastrophic situations, such as Haiti. Coordination was pivotal, but often faced the biggest challenges, notably related to cluster coordination. Clusters must be able to establish themselves quickly, prioritize resources and communicate purpose. In sudden-onset crises, agencies must ensure that in deploying cluster leads, expectations of roles and criteria for involvement were established. Evaluations and lessons learned had helped humanitarian agencies to course-correct in the last five years, efforts that must become common practice.

VASSILY NEBENZIA (Russian Federation) said global crises — of food, finance, migration, terrorism and water, to name of few — could change the understanding of the nature of humanitarian assistance: rather than being undertaken in separate emergency humanitarian operations, assistance could
now be associated with the need for a permanent response to chronic needs arising from such crises. In that context, States’ commitment to the principles of providing humanitarian assistance, contained in General Assembly resolution 46/182, was of notable importance. Assistance could only be provided if there was access to affected communities, which, in some cases, had been impeded by armed attacks. To ensure security of humanitarian personnel, organizations should use “flag protection” tactics.

Moreover, humanitarian organizations should refrain from activities that created a “wrong perception” among local communities, he said, urging them also to promote the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. They should cooperate with recipient Governments as the main actors for the provision, organization and coordination of humanitarian assistance. Mechanisms for common needs assessment and mobilization of financial resources for humanitarian purposes should be improved. At the same time, the Central Emergency Response Fund had been instrumental for the predictable and adequate financing of operations. Underlining the civil nature of humanitarian assistance, he said the use of military contingents should be a last-resort measure, and if used, be aligned with the principle of independence.

AMIJAD HUSSAIN SIAL (Pakistan) said climate change, more than conflict or international strife, was the primary trigger to natural disasters. Indeed, the number of people affected by those disasters continued to grow. There were no easy fixes, however, and the challenges must be met in a concerted manner that encompassed innovative thinking and reinvigorated efforts. Leadership played an important role, as shown in the steps outlined in the Secretary-General’s report. However, the report did not shed any light on any steps taken for equitable geographic representation in the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, nor did it contain any comments on the accountability of the United Nations’ humanitarian work.

To address new and emerging challenges, he suggested a number of solutions, including improving a coordination mechanism driven by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, tailored approaches that abandoned the “one-size-fits-all” attitude, and tapping into alternate means, such as increased local procurement of material resources and hiring local personnel to save funds. Given his country’s experience with natural disaster, he envisaged a devolved and decentralized mechanism for disaster preparedness and management. He hoped the international community would contribute to the Government’s efforts regarding dislocated populations in the north-west. He also pointed out that Pakistan was hosting 2.5 million Afghan refugees, which was straining its economic infrastructure in terms of declining international material assistance for this population.

SHIGEKI SUMI (Japan) said the response to the Haitian earthquake had revealed a number of problems, noting, by way of example, that the cluster approach did not work as effectively as had been expected. Key issues to address included ensuring security for operations in a country that was unable to maintain security; organizing cooperation between military and civilian organizations and effecting a smooth transition from the emergency relief to development stage. Importance must also be attached to disaster risk reduction and preparedness. Calling on States to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action, he stressed the importance of agreeing on a policy to protect against disasters.

For its part, Japan had established a disaster drill day with the aim of enhancing awareness, he said, and was working to develop cooperation in the region. Japan would co-host, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the inaugural International Search and Rescue Advisory Group Global Meeting in September. The most effective way to address violence against civilians by non-State armed groups was to promote the political process among all parties concerned. To ensure humanitarian access, humanitarian activities should be governed by the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. In other areas, he said Japan this year decided to double the funding provided to the Central Emergency Response Fund.

WANG MIN (China) said the world was facing multiple global challenges at a time when there was, among other things, a sharp increase of non-State humanitarian actors at national and regional levels, and the importance of disaster reduction and preparedness was becoming increasingly vital. Given that situation, the international community needed more than ever before to re-establish solidarity and take concerted actions. The sole purpose of humanitarian relief was to save lives and prevent human suffering. It was imperative to adhere to various humanitarian principles and the highest standards of conduct and discipline, she said.
China supported the United Nations capacity-building in humanitarian and development fields. Lack of capacity had long been a constraint on the ability of developing countries to deliver relief effectively and to engage in disaster reduction. The United Nations system should further strengthen its existing humanitarian capacity, expertise and institutions and transfer technology and expertise to developing countries to better help the disaster-stricken countries. China called on the United Nations system to further enhance accountability and transparency, to improve the financing for “low visibility” humanitarian programmes and to work hard to secure adequate, stable and predictable resources and to reduce the over-reliance of the United Nations on just a few donors. As a disaster-prone developing country, China had to tackle tasks of disaster prevention, reduction and relief, and was willing to do its part in helping disaster-affected countries to overcome difficulties, she said.

LESLIE KOJO CHRISTIAN (Ghana), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, recognized that humanitarian assistance was a “very complex enterprise”. It went beyond disaster relief to include difficult tasks such as protecting refugees and internally displaced persons, securing humanitarian aid, and restoring civil order. In that regard, he acknowledged the important role the United Nations and its agencies played in global humanitarian crisis response despite resource constraints.

A strong and robust coordination system was needed to more effectively respond to humanitarian emergencies, he said. Such a system required adequate and predictable resources, and called for leadership and accountability at all levels. To improve coordination, the humanitarian architecture and leadership in the field should be further strengthened through improved preparedness. Such response preparedness should involve a range of activities at the local, national and global levels.

Noting that “prevention is better than cure”, he recommended that local and national capacities be strengthened through advisory services, training, knowledge exchange and networking. It would be worthwhile, he said, if humanitarian actors could invest considerable amounts of time and resources in the promotion of their mandates. They should also adhere to humanitarian principles and deepen their analysis of conflict dynamics. Lastly, he underscored the importance of investment in security risk assessment tools to track and analyze incidents and share security information among relevant stakeholders.

REGINA MARIA CORDEIRO DUNLOP (Brazil) voiced concern that appeals relating to natural disasters continued to be under-funded as compared to complex emergencies. At the same time, Brazil had been impressed by developments in Haiti regarding the provision of assistance in the areas of water, sanitation, shelter and medical services. She looked forward to the conclusions of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the global response to the earthquake. While the issue of access to humanitarian assistance was complex, it could be addressed by ensuring national ownership over humanitarian efforts, fully respecting the principles of non-intervention and non-indifference. In that context, she expressed concern at persistent armed conflict in many regions and called on all such parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law.

She went on to say that humanitarian assistance was intimately related to sustainable development and food aid was a case in point, as it was based on combining emergency relief with structural policies that aimed to foster socio-economic development. On education, a powerful tool in preventing and responding to natural disasters, Brazil supported the provision of school feeding and educational material. Vulnerable populations also needed more attention and she urged humanitarian actors to better combat all forms of violence against women in situations of humanitarian emergency. The United Nations must lead humanitarian efforts and, with that in mind, Brazil had increased its contribution to the Central Emergency Response Fund. She also welcomed the enhancing of regional and subregional arrangements to provide humanitarian assistance.

NAOMI SHABAN, Minister of State for Special Programmes for the Office of the President of Kenya, aligning with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said the negative impacts of natural disasters could be reduced through collective, decisive and focused response. Many Kenyans had become susceptible to humanitarian emergencies — particularly crop failure, loss of livestock and a lack of basic needs — due to the effects of climate change. Nearly 10 millions Kenyans had been assisted under the emergency relief programme in the last two years, she said,
noting that continued reliance on imported food could lead to dependency.

To improve community capacities, her Government, with the support of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other partners, had been promoting innovations in social mobilization and harnessing new knowledge and advances in information communications technology. The 2007 post-election violence in the country had led to the displacement of about 663,000 persons. That displacement presented Kenya with many additional challenges, including food and financial start-up assistance, among others.

In light of those challenges, she emphasized the importance of creating and strengthening early warning systems to identify, monitor and track potential emergencies, and incorporating re-disaster preparedness and training into institutional frameworks. Moreover, donor bases needed to be broadened in order to make available needed resources. Highlighting several institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks her country had put into place after the 2007 elections, she reaffirmed Kenya’s support of and contribution to the international community’s efforts to provide humanitarian assistance.

AMAN HASSEN BAME (Ethiopia), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said the recent global crises, coupled with the ongoing effects of climate change, had limited developing countries’ ability to respond to humanitarian emergencies. Therefore, strengthening the international community’s humanitarian response capacity to provide timely, predictable and coordinated interventions had become even more critical than before.

He noted that some content within the Secretary-General’s report was “factually incorrect” with regard to humanitarian assistance in his country, stressing that there had been no restriction on access to aid nor internal displacement and community-level conflict. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations agencies and other humanitarian partners working in Ethiopia were aware that the Government had done its utmost to smoothly facilitate humanitarian operations all over the country.

The “Hubs-and-Spokes” system — designed to enhance logistics capacity in the Somali region — was evidence of the Government’s proactive role in addressing access issues and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions in the country. Emphasizing the critical importance of response funding, he called for contributions to funding mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Common Humanitarian Fund to be further strengthened. Doing this, he said, would ensure predictable, timely and need-based access to resources.

TONI FRISCH (Switzerland), discussing humanitarian access, voiced concern at the growing restrictions on the access of humanitarian actors to conflict zones, saying that it was the foremost duty of States to protect and assist their citizens. In that context, humanitarian actors must be granted rapid, full and unimpeded access to victims. They were increasingly being called on to operate in high-risk environments and efforts made to deal with security threats impacting the deployment of humanitarian operations must be undertaken with respect for the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence.

He went on to say that environmental emergencies often called for a level of expertise beyond that of the countries concerned and it was important to focus on both preparing a response to emergencies and increasing disaster risk reduction efforts. The integrity of humanitarian aid depended on the professionalism of the actors and with that in mind, the Swiss Humanitarian Aid would continue to develop professional standards through a certification process. Above all, it was the joint responsibility of donor and recipient countries to ensure actors were professionals, and he appealed to States in question to reflect on that question and develop a common approach.

EDUARDO GÁLVEZ (Chile) said the Secretary-General’s report was based on consultations with the humanitarian community and it invited delegations to reflect on how to confront challenges in a coordinated and effective way. Emergency humanitarian assistance — with the specific aim of helping people in need — was centred on the people and their rights, and therefore should be based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

There was a growing need for humanitarian assistance from the international community to face emergency situations, particularly those arising from natural disasters. States were tasked to provide...
assistance to those in need living in their territory, including vulnerable groups such as women, boys and girls. Considering its legitimacy and effectiveness on the ground, the United Nations could play a vital leadership role in support of national authorities. It was no doubt that the work of the Organization, together with the international community and humanitarian entities, had the ability to transform the lives of millions of people, he said.

However, all efforts towards that end must consider existing local capacities, he continued. Furthermore, civil society and the private sector could play a major role in country effectiveness. Civilians were normally the first to mobilize and assist the affected population in times of emergency. The private sector, on the other hand, could work to mobilize resources, provide services and equipment, and promote rehabilitation, recovery, job creation and economy recovery. In that regard, he underscored the necessity of close and adequate coordination between all sectors involved.

JOSÉ LUIS CANCELA (Uruguay), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said Assembly resolution 46/182 provided a framework for United Nations humanitarian assistance activities. Rapid and secure access to populations in need was crucial to such activities, he said, noting that his country condemned acts of violence against humanitarians and appealed to all States to take necessary measures to prevent it.

Numerous obstacles to access still remained, despite the provisions of international humanitarian law. Such norms needed to be carefully considered in order to avoid or relieve the suffering of civilian populations, including women. There was, indeed, a need to intensify efforts to tackle the struggle against violence and sexual exploitation, which should take into account the re-integration of victims.

Natural disasters had significantly increased demands for humanitarian assistance, thus all efforts by the United Nations and the international community must consider the effects of climate change carefully. The food crisis had also scaled up demands for assistance, so it was a necessity to attempt to tackle the many factors which generated it, he said, noting that the consequences of food security differed between countries and regions.

RODOLFO ELISEO BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba) said that in view of the growing number of natural disasters caused by climate change and ecological imbalances, humanitarian assistances must be carried out in full respect for the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. Any manipulation of an emergency situation or the assistance that would be provided was unjustifiable and unacceptable. For its part, Cuba had achieved advancements in fulfilling goals set in the Hyogo Plan of Action, seen in its response to recent natural disasters that included the evacuation and protection of millions of people ahead of violent hurricanes, and in the preservation of economic assets. Cuba's civil defence forces were key in protecting human life and property, he added.

Lessons learned had enabled Cuba to strengthen its regulatory, legislative and institutional frameworks for disaster risk reduction. Evaluating and monitoring risks as well as early-warning systems at national and local levels had also been strengthened. Last month, Cuba had hosted the International Congress on Disasters. The country also believed in the importance of continuing to strengthen the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction as a mechanism for coordinating efforts in that area of international concern. The United Nations system and the international community had important roles to play in helping developing countries to improve their existing humanitarian capacities, he said. The only way to face the devastating fury of nature and other events that sparked humanitarian emergencies was to make the resources of the planet available to the most affected, without petty commercial international or national selfishness.

KIM SOO GWON (Republic of Korea) said given the growing complexity of natural disasters and humanitarian needs, the response to the earthquake in Haiti last January had revealed the importance of coordinated and concerted action, with clusters of actors joining to quickly start operations and civil society and the private sector playing significant roles in providing timely emergency relief to victims. Civil society provided services but also passionately mobilized resources. In view of that, a mechanism should be put in place to include a wide range of these non-traditional actors as key United Nations partners in a formal humanitarian platform.
The cluster approach was an exemplary, effective mechanism that aligned with national policies and maximized efforts, he said. The global humanitarian platform was another asset that forged a broad partnership among actors through dialogue of common concerns and strategies. Strengthening the humanitarian coordinator system was even more crucial to consolidate a wide range of actors at the field level. Korea encouraged the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to reach out actively in order to recruit highly qualified individuals for this purpose. The humanitarian community should strive to deliver an equitable response to all types of crises. In addition, timely and predictable funding should be made available. He called on the United Nations system to conduct a credible evaluation on the outcomes of pooled humanitarian funds in terms of practical impact.

ASTRID HELLE AJAMAY (Norway) said that operations in high-risk environments were a challenge for all humanitarian actors. How could humanitarians remain efficient and effective given the circumstances, she asked? In that regard, she called for the international community to work to minimize security risks, even if such obstacles could not be totally eliminated. In addition, it was vital to ensure the engagement and support of senior management in the field and at Headquarters, and to provide them with training that emphasized soft skills.

Natural disasters, having had severe impacts on rural communities, reminded the world of the need to focus on prevention, preparedness, and the adaptation of measures to alleviate suffering to local needs. The role of humanitarian assistance, she said, was to facilitate capacity-building, support the sharing of data and lessons learned, and support cooperation between various levels.

It was especially important, and also difficult, to ensure the safety of women, girls and boys. Sexual abuse and gender based violence remained major issues, and continued efforts to ensure women's full participation of women in recovery was key. A rapid, flexible and effective response was needed for emergency situations, she said, noting that 17 new countries were now listed as Central Emergency relief Fund donors and 22 Member States had increased their contribution to that mechanism last year.

Panel on Humanitarian Assistance in Insecure Environments

Council Vice-President Octavio Errázuriz (Chile) chaired the panel on “Humanitarian assistance operations in highly hazardous or insecure and unsafe environments”.

Moderated by John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the panel featured presentations by: Gregory Starr, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS); Ramiro Lopes da Silva, Deputy Executive Director of External Relations, World Food Programme (WFP); Fyras Mawazini, Executive Coordinator, NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI); Martin Mogwanja, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator of Pakistan; Dominik Stillhart, Deputy Director of Operations, International Committee of the Red Cross; and Alexander Aleinikoff, Deputy High Commissioner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Introducing the panel, Mr. HOLMES said the ability to obtain and maintain access to populations in need was fundamental for humanitarians. That access, sadly, was being jeopardized by attacks on aid organizations. Over 100 relief workers had been killed in 2008 and 2009. This year, at least 30 humanitarians had been killed and it was the national staff of organizations that bore the brunt of casualties — about 80 per cent. Important questions centred on how to deliver on mandates to provide humanitarian assistance in situations where humanitarians themselves were the targets of attacks.

He went on to underscore the importance of making clear to affected populations and parties to conflict alike the impartial nature of humanitarian operations. Relief workers posed no threat, it was reasonable to expect that they would not be harmed in return. Because they operated in sensitive military and political contexts, they could be “contaminated” by those circumstances if not very careful. “We need to be building confidence”, he said, and it was important to analyze those contexts, understand them, relate to them and have dialogue with all those in them.

Efforts to gain acceptance must be complemented with security measures to minimize risks, he said, which required long-term investments and resources from Member States. The panel aimed not to single out particular countries or situations, but rather to describe general policies and lessons learned to...
enable humanitarians to carry out their work.

Launching the panel, Mr. STARR said the United Nations was increasingly being asked to operate in conflict situations, as the 2009 suicide bomb attack on a guesthouse in Afghanistan had made clear. In the past year, significant progress had been made regarding staff safety and security in the field. His Department had asked for and received funding from the General Assembly for placing high-level threat analysts around the world.

Continuing, he said that a new security level system would replace the current security phase system, and a standard incident reporting mechanism was being examined, as there was a lack of understanding between the United Nations and other organizations about the world’s entire security threat situation. Better systems were needed to examine that scenario, which would allow for measuring the problem and allocating resources.

In other areas, “criticality reviews” were being undertaken, he said, explaining that after any attack, an evaluation would be made to determine whether a person had lost his or her life in pursuit of a worthy programme. Threat analysis would be of no use, however, unless the information was shared, and the United Nations security system could play a role in that work with its humanitarian partners. In that context, he cited the “Saving Lives Together” programme, saying there was a moral imperative to share information with those who decided whether to send people into situations that risked their lives.

On the issue of funding, there must be a recognition that the United Nations and non-Governmental organizations must ask for funding appropriate to the situations they worked in. At the same time, States and donors must recognize that the costs of operating in high-risk situations would be high. There must also be a corresponding attitude change, starting with his own Department, which must understand that it had one essential role: to enable the United Nations operations to advance. That was often a sea change for security officers accustomed to saying “no”.

Next, Mr. DA SILVA said the World Food Programme’s main message was that hunger in complex environments was worsening. As a result, any attempts to improve stability in such situations or attempts to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal of cutting hunger in half were jeopardized. Hunger and malnutrition had long-term implications for such countries and put pressure on economic and development priorities.

Food security and hunger issues that were now worsening amid complex and volatile emergencies had led WFP to spend 80 per cent of its operational expenditures in conflict-affected countries or those that were in transition. The agency assessed and defined programmes on the basis of need, and viewing the path of the supply chain to meet those needs showed clearly how deliveries were affected in conflict zones.

Among the major growing challenges was the changing character of conflicts, particularly the lack of understanding of the strategies and goals of parties in the same conflict. In addition, he said that the blurring roles between humanitarians and the military, with approaches such as “hearts and minds” campaigns, complicate the WFP position. In Afghanistan, for instance, the fact that international military forces sometimes directly provided humanitarian assistance, and the fact that some major donors of humanitarian aid were also parties to a conflict, all posed risks to perceptions of WFP’s neutrality.

To address those and other challenges, he said WFP had developed innovative approaches, including prioritizing local engagement by working more closely with national non-governmental and community-based organizations, including religious leaders, and encouraging them to take part in programming and decision making. In Afghanistan, WFP coordinated with community development councils (shuras) or community leaders or elders to ensure the security of its envoys.

Outsourcing monitoring capacities was another approach, he continued. In United Nations “no go” areas in Afghanistan, for example, WFP had trained consultancy companies and civil society groups to carry out assessment, monitoring and field-level negotiations. They reported to WFP but were able to move around provinces freely because they were known, respected and trusted by communities, authorities and traditional elders. Finally, he said the agency’s Executive Director, Josette Sheeran, had
recently convened a high-level expert group meeting on risk management to explore humanitarian supply chain controls, and to learn from techniques used by other organizations and the private sector operating in similar environments.

Next, Mr. MAWAZINI, describing the operating context for non-governmental organizations in Iraq, said that despite increased security over 2006 and 2007 levels, violence persisted. High political instability had not allowed the Government to address challenges like the ongoing withdrawal of foreign troops and political disagreements over disputed territories. Without addressing those concerns, stability and security would not be guaranteed.

There was also a risk of confusing humanitarian and military roles, he said, underscoring that most non-governmental organizations in Iraq regarded the military and humanitarian roles within the United States forces as a serious operational constraint that only confused people. Another concern centred on the limited United Nations operations in the field, particularly as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs office was still based in Amman, Jordan, and lacked a viable presence in the country, which had critical implications for its ability to accurately assess the situation on the ground.

In terms of numbers, he said there were 70 international non-governmental organizations in the country, along with between 10,000 and 12,000 national organizations. The engagement of international organizations was essential, as Iraq still could not address some of its huge humanitarian and development needs. They did not use armoured protection. Most Iraqi non-Governmental organizations appeared when many international organizations had started to withdraw, between 2003 and 2005. They had accepted the high risks and had adapted to deteriorating conditions and changing needs.

Generally, many civil society organizations had the advantage of streamlined approaches for quick responses to changing needs in volatile contexts. They believed that staff security without access achieved little or no humanitarian impact, he said, noting that those organizations operating in enclosed compounds lost meaningful access to communities, due to the way their affiliations with security actors were perceived by local populations. On the other hand, non-governmental organizations also believed that access without safety was unsustainable.

To succeed, it was vital for civil society groups to understand the security context, he said, which affected whether communities perceived them as neutral. That must happen before they developed their humanitarian and other operations. In that work, a “do no harm” approach must be taken by an experienced staff that was flexible and mobile. To be accepted, networking and community participation were essential. All that would provide better access only if information was shared, which, at the moment was weak, as people believed they would be more at risk by doing so. However, such sharing was vital for the success of needs-based programmes.

Mr. MOGWANJA agreed that complex security environments impacted relief operations. In many emergencies, humanitarian challenges were triggered by fighting, insecurity and any number of other complications, including deliberate and direct attacks on humanitarian workers and envoys, random attacks on public institutions, kidnapping, the creation of “no go” zones by the conflict parties, and the presence of multiple parties with diverse agendas. Steps could be taken to remedy some of those challenges, he continued, noting that the lack of respect for humanitarian principles continued to jeopardize operations, so one approach could be, for example, obtaining consent of all parties to provide safe access to vulnerable populations.

Operations were also hampered by situations where extremely violent parties were involved, adherence to humanitarian laws was constrained, and where donors imposed restrictions concerning which vulnerable populations could receive. He added that the humanitarian community sometimes increased security protection measures, which could also hamper contact with target populations. Frequent suspension of assistance operations stymied the aid’s impact and raised costs for these projects. Increased human and financial costs of supporting assistance operations were yet another result of complex security situations.

He went on to highlight several mitigation measures that could be adopted, such adhering to local customs; not using highly visible logos; dressing like local populations; and sustaining contacts with local
community workers. However, it was unethical to transfer tasks to local partners when it did not lead to a reduction of risks.

Changing modalities or priorities was another option, he continued, but cautioned that it was difficult to leave vulnerable populations' needs unmet. Methods could also be changed, using a low-profile approach, such as door-to-door aid distribution. Training local rapid assessment teams could also be effective. Advocating and negotiating with all parties, including establishing codes of conduct and principles of engagement, were some additional ways that humanitarian principles could become embedded in the behaviour of all parties, he said.

Mr. STILLHART said the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operated in challenging security environments, and staff needed to constantly strike a balance between the expected humanitarian impact of their activities and the risks those activities implied for their beneficiaries. Ensuring their own safety was also a part of that delicate equation. Amid the growing number of security incidents, three broad categories emerged: exposure to collateral damage in volatile environments; criminal acts for economic gain; and politically motivated attacks against humanitarian workers, the latter having become markedly more frequent, which could point to a trend of an unprecedented crisis of credibility and acceptance of the humanitarian sector.

Since 11 September 2001, with the return of Western armed forces to a variety of battle zones, a debate had ensued on whether humanitarian agencies were sufficiently distinct from political and military agendas. The bombing of the ICRC office in Baghdad in 2003 and the execution of a colleague in Kandahar were incidents that had forced the ICRC to take major security-related decisions. Those included strengthening its identity through the demonstration of the added value or neutral, independent action in the field, maintaining a decentralized security management concept based on acceptance of the agency by all warring parties, and reinforcing its dialogue with all those involved in the various contexts where the ICRC was present.

However, he said the determining factor was the ICRC’s capacity to “walk the talk”, to demonstrate the specific added-value of neutral, independent and strictly humanitarian action over time, as well as the relevance of international law. He noted that since 2003, the agency had not been victim of any deliberate attacks. The ICRC’s approach could hardly be a blueprint for the humanitarian community at large, nor was it a panacea for obtaining access in all circumstances and addressing all humanitarian needs in safety, he said. The approach was also deeply rooted in its clear, albeit limited, mandate to act in the midst of armed conflict, including as a neutral intermediary between conflicting parties.

While he welcomed the increased involvement of States in providing aid to their own populations, he urged Governments not to use that aid for political or military agendas. If humanitarian organizations were perceived as implementing partners or as acting under a State’s orders, their staff’s security may be at risk. The ICRC had learned a hard lesson that acceptance could never be taken for granted. It needed to be nurtured continuously through dialogue and the difference the ICRC could make in humanitarian terms.

Rounding out the panel, Mr. ALEINIKOFF said refugees and forced migrants increasingly had come to reside, and remain in, dangerous situations. To do their work, relief agencies were increasingly in situations that placed them at risk. However, to await the movement of migrants to safe places would be unconscionable. New weapons and tactics were being used by conflict participants, with attacks on humanitarians part and parcel of such struggles. To do their work, humanitarians must balance access, on one hand, and security on the other.

Underscoring that those responsible for security were appropriately conservative, he also noted that over-caution could lead to difficulties in facilitating movement and gaining trust from affected populations. He had seen that dynamic at play in one recent experience in which humanitarians had to travel in convoys and be locked in a compound by 6:00 p.m. Another conundrum was that in implementing a “One UN” approach, there was, at times, an over-identification of the humanitarian with the political, which could create security problems.

Moreover, the closing of humanitarian space created difficulties. “It’s not that people mistake us
for who we are”, he said, but there could be a perception that humanitarians were serving the goals of those doing the attacking. Changing that perception proved very difficult.

Describing UNHCR’s work, he said that in Kenya, that agency would work with the Government to enhance security along one of the borders. In situations where there were ongoing hostilities or absence of a ceasefire, UNHCR advocated a distinction between security and political mandates, on one hand, and humanitarian mandates on the other. While dialogue was necessary, all parties must understand that humanitarian assistance would not be subsumed to political imperatives. He echoed the call that, at every point, the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality must be respected. Whatever the risks to humanitarians, they were dramatically magnified for civilians, on whose behalf UNHCR worked.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates highlighted their concern that the humanitarian space was shrinking. Many were concerned that it was getting increasingly difficult to reach vulnerable populations, and others called for increased coordination between humanitarian agencies and local authorities. The involvement of the military in humanitarian contexts was another concern raised.

A delegate speaking for the European Union said it was clear that interaction between the military and humanitarian agencies should be based on existing Oslo guidelines. She asked how much risk was acceptable and whether the United Nations needed to ascertain higher risk levels than humanitarian actors. She also suggested context awareness training for aid workers in line with the principles of partnerships.

Australia’s representative asked the panel if it was possible to establish a security risk management policy at Headquarters that could be adaptable on the ground. She also asked what was being done to share best practices in a timely manner, and was enough being done to build up capacity of local actors.

The representative of Iraq spoke about the 2003 attacks on international organizations in that country, saying that the difficult situations in Iraq in the past had improved greatly. The International Committee of the Red Cross had met with officials in Iraq this month to discuss many issues. He stressed that the Red Cross had not left after the attacks, but had persisted in providing assistance to vulnerable populations. After 2003, life had returned to normal in civil society and peace had started to prevail.

As to whether a different approach was at play, Mr. STARR responded that yes there was, and the Department of Safety and Security had a wide and diverse staff that included officers from all United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, among other actors. As to how much risk was acceptable for personnel to take, such decisions depended on what any department was charged with doing. By way of example, he said that in Mogadishu, the risk was high for the United Nations Children’s Fund, World Health Organization and others working on the ground, but the rewards were that they were feeding 1.7 million people a year in the southern region of Somalia. “You take higher risks when the pay-off is higher” — something that had to be measured individually in every circumstance.

Mr. STILLHART, noting that when the ICRC office was attacked in 2003 in Iraq, questions had arisen about whether there was too much risk to stay. Every case had to be assessed in its own context and, given the humanitarian needs in Iraq, the organization decided to stay. After a rebuilding process, it now had a meaningful humanitarian presence in the country. As the third-largest ICRC operation worldwide, “we believe the risk we are taking in Iraq is a risk we can responsibly take”.

Fielding another query on information sharing, Mr. MOGWANJA said practical measures were being used by humanitarians to ensure that best practices were documented and shared. Since 2005, a cluster system had brought together various humanitarian actors into thematic groups to respond to events on the ground. Cluster networks allowed for sharing best-practices. In terms of building capacity, clusters were also a mechanism by which capacity development could take place. They had been used to train members of non-governmental organizations in gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Responding to a query about the balance to be struck between a centralized versus decentralized policy for security, Mr. DA SILVA said management teams on the ground had to make the calls. Traditionally, some agencies were more centralized than others. A daily read of events must be the
decisive factor, as feedback from Rome or Geneva was not always feasible.

As to the need to enhance the ability to engage with local populations and analyze contexts, he agreed that, in some cases, there had been success. In the large operation in Darfur, undertaken with the ICRC, actors had engaged with communities not part of internally displaced person populations. That was one reason the World Food Programme believed it could continue working elsewhere, in Somalia, where a large majority of the WFP’s distribution points were located in Al-Shabaab-controlled area.

At the same time, he conceded that the agency had “totally misread” signals in Somalia. “We trusted too much” relations established with local communities and never believed that what had been perceived as an isolated group could kill colleagues. However, it was a must to remain in such contexts. “You learn on the job; by doing and engaging populations,” he said, noting that humanitarians must also re-engage in robust dialogue with military staff, which generally had broken down in 2003.

Mr. ALENIKOFF said training and tools should be provided, but most of the training should take place on the ground.

Responding to another question, Mr. MAWAZINI said risk assessment required a case-by-case approach. Experienced personnel were needed, and training before reaching the field was important. Local staff capacity for risk analysis was important. At the local level, different actors could build relationships with local leaders in the communities. On building capacity, he said in Iraq, and in his experience in Sudan, some of the non-governmental organizations in the field were aligned with political parties. Such organizations should understand clearly what their role is, he added.

On information sharing, the civil society community in Iraq shared information freely. For instance, when one group travelled from Baghdad to Mosul — “a risky road to take” — the security situation or conditions along that route would be shared among groups and with the United Nations.

Responding to the Iraqi delegate’s comments, Mr. Mawazini acknowledged that the security situation today was not the same as it was in 2003. However, security issues differed from one place to another. In the south, he said, there was security, but in the central or northern areas, the situation was different.

Commenting on whether or not a Headquarters-shaped security policy could work on the ground, Mr. STARR said, simply, yes. Most of the work was done on the ground, and information was gathered there. Security policies should be created so that people on the ground felt fully supported by Headquarters.

When the floor was opened again for discussion, the representative of the United States asked if, in light of that fact that 80 per cent of humanitarian agency victims were national staff, using remote-control management was ethical or not. Colombia’s representative said there must be mechanisms to draw humanitarian agencies and Governments into a dialogue and he asked panellists what could be done to enhance these relationships, especially when operating in high-risk situations. For his part, the representative of Ghana asked how to approach differences in agendas between Governments and humanitarian agencies.

Responding, Mr. MOGWANJA voiced concern at the number of humanitarians being killed, underlining that approaches proposed and institutional mechanisms put in place to ensure security must be applied to both the national and international community at large. Situations must be thoroughly analyzed and investments would be costly. The question must then be asked as to whether there was a possibility to implement a life-saving action in a complex security situation using alternative methodologies, like relying on civil society organizations. He encouraged that basic humanitarian principles be accepted by all working in a humanitarian activity.

Regarding the use of innovative technologies, he agreed that there was no universal coverage for such technologies. People in conflict situations were among the poorest populations, and a lack of access to modern technologies reflected that fact. Technology use, however, should be expanded and included in an integrated response to humanitarian situations. Indeed, there were mobile technologies for data
collection and collation, with inbuilt software for correction, which would improve the quality of vulnerability assessments, among other things.

To another security query, Mr. STARR said it was well established that host Governments were obliged to ensure security for humanitarian actors. It was also known that Governments had varying degrees of capabilities to do that. In war, it was often difficult to protect citizens. For the United Nations, he was not sure the Organization had done its part as completely as possible to entertain a dialogue with host Governments. Security risks assessments had not always been shared. To change that, the new security-level system had been designed from the ground up to share analysis with host Governments and police services. Moreover, Ministries of the Interior were immensely powerful, and “we must be talking with them” if the United Nations expected Governments to provide certain services.

Mr. DA SILVA, responding to a query about engaging with local partners, said one technique used in needs assessment was the triangulation of information received from different sources. New technologies could be used in that context. For example, in Somalia, villages with distribution points understood their entitlements and hotlines had been set up for villagers to contact the Programme with cell phones. Similarly, when there were signs that food assistance might be diverted, bags had been marked with bar codes. Other technologies could be employed.

Responding to a query on natural disasters, he said it was important to contribute to the resilience of livelihoods in vulnerable populations. Drawing on lessons from Port-au-Prince, he said the Programme’s contingency plans must be more focused on urban centres. Events in Haiti provided a “totally different scenario” than others in which he was accustomed to operating.
Mr. STILLHART said two trends were noticeable. First, there was an emergence of local actors willing and capable of carrying out effective humanitarian operations. Local knowledge, better analysis and other elements could only better humanitarian services, he said. Second, in extreme contexts, such as Somalia, one had to find ways and means that were not standard, and operating through local organizations was one way to continue to respond to the needs of that country. When that was being done, the risk analysis was exactly the same as when international staff were employed.

Concerning what authorities can do to boost safety, he said it was important to have open dialogue with authorities, including military and police. Regarding the gap between international and local actors, he said, for example, that long discussions with the Afghan Red Cross had covered civilian populations and other issues, keeping vulnerabilities and resilience at the centre of the response.

In reply to the question of technology, Mr. ALEINIKOFF said it could be possible to rely less on local staff by using technology. For instance, video remote health care could be done in lieu of face-to-face meetings. In addition, in the Afghan corridor population census, door-to-door canvassing was replaced by an aerial census of shelters and statistical methods, producing a much better population estimate.

Norway’s representative asked about gender issues, as well as about how armed groups were dealt with, especially those bordering on terrorist actors, and how could these groups be “won over” to secure safety for humanitarian groups.

Responding, Mr. STILLHART said that in order to safely deliver humanitarian materials all groups must be dealt with. No distinctions were made between groups. The ICRC believed it was extremely important to establish a strong sustained dialogue with groups that would enable the organization to deliver assistance and protection. If one did not have acceptance from all forces on the ground, it was difficult to provide humanitarian assistance.

Mr. MOGWANJA said Pakistan’s earthquake aftermath saw a number of groups coming together to provide help. Similarly, in 2009 a large number of organizations had come forward, indicating a strong commitment to humanitarian aid. The humanitarian community supported collaboration and cooperation with as many local actors as possible. But some were suitable for the short-term while others for the longer term.

Regarding women’s organizations, these groups would be most suited to deal with women and girls needs, he said, adding that examples of women’s organizations setting up responses for women and girls showed how helpful these groups could be especially in areas.