



**STATEMENT BY MR. VAYLAR RAVI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND  
MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 39(A) 7 (C):  
STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND  
DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS,  
INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AT THE 59<sup>TH</sup> SESSION  
OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 11, 2004**

Mr. President,

We thank the Secretary-General for the report presented under this item and the useful introduction provided by the Under-Secretary-General for the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance. We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of 77.

Mr. President,

Before making my substantive comments under the agenda item under discussion today, I should like to pay tribute to the memory of President Yasser Arafat, Leader of the Palestinian people for almost four decades. I had the privilege of meeting Yasser Arafat during his visit to India in the mid 80's. Like millions of others around the world, I too was struck by his charismatic leadership. On behalf of India and on my own behalf, I join others in conveying condolences to the Palestinian leadership and members of the bereaved family.

Mr. President,

The number of countries requiring humanitarian assistance as a result of complex emergencies has remained constant over the past year. The overall requirements for humanitarian assistance remain at approximately the same level as in previous years. We note with concern that the pattern of funding humanitarian activities remains uneven, leaving some countries substantially under-financed. The case of the Central African Republic which received only five percent of their requirements in 2003 is the most glaring example. This underscores the importance of allocating resources fairly to all countries in need. The United Nations should be seen to be above 'humanitarian favouritism', and as not forgetting those humanitarian emergencies that no longer have the benefit of the so-called "CNN effect". For this, the UN must avoid regional imbalance or uneven funding of humanitarian needs. Only then the universal trust in the UN system would be preserved.

The allocation and availability of resources for humanitarian assistance remain matters of vital concern. We, therefore, support the Secretary-General's recommendation inviting donors to continue efforts to make available increased amounts of earmarked funding for relief assistance. We also support the need for some predictability in the funding provided for humanitarian activities. However, situations of humanitarian emergencies are mostly unpredictable. How

funding can be provided for such activities on a totally predictable basis remains, therefore, unclear.

Mr. President,

The problems associated with the way humanitarian assistance and humanitarian actors are perceived have emerged as an area of concern in recent years. Continuing attacks on humanitarian workers in some situations of conflict have led these questions to be of growing concern to the UN and the international community. The attacks on humanitarian personnel must be condemned as unjustified.

The report also observes that the warring parties must recognise the neutral and impartial nature of UN humanitarian action. This is understandable; however, for this, UN humanitarian action should not only be neutral, but also be seen to be neutral. We would underscore the need for broad transparency, accountability and democratic inter-governmental process of debate and agreement. Humanitarian assistance should strictly abide by the basic principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality as set out in resolution 46/182. Humanitarian action should also be apolitical and offered at the request of the recipient government. These principles should also hold good for "integrated missions". The concern of the Secretary-General on the question of access in providing humanitarian assistance is well-placed. However, issuance of visas, travel permits or custom clearances fall within the purview of the national governments.

Providing a local face to humanitarian action could be helpful in conveying the right message behind the humanitarian action. Humanitarian assistance personnel should be mainly hired keeping the principle of geographical proximity in mind, and paying attention to the importance of familiarity of the personnel with the location and nature of crisis. This could be done by including personnel who belong to the area or have a prior experience of similar emergencies. Both the efficiency and the perception of the humanitarian action may be improved in this way. The report also speaks of the need for humanitarian personnel to be sensitive to local customs and traditions. Local resources, procured locally or from the neighbourhood, and use of locally hired transport would be seen as a positive measure by recipients of humanitarian assistance, apart from building capacity locally and reducing time-delays. Regional approaches, where possible or applicable, may also be useful.

Mr. President,

For humanitarian assistance to be effective in situations involving a multiplicity of actors, the coordination function should not be allowed to overwhelm humanitarian action on the ground, lest the former should become the most important preoccupation of the humanitarian effort. Where such coordination becomes necessary, the national government would be best placed to coordinate humanitarian assistance. We would also underscore the need to fully respect the principle of national sovereignty.

Efforts are being undertaken by the UN system to assist and support national response capacity through the development of a variety of disaster response tools. We have taken note of the internet-based operational alert system for earthquakes and sudden-onset emergencies, being developed by the UN. Discussions are under way on applying this model to other types of disasters such as cyclone and hurricanes in order to ultimately develop a global disaster alert system.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General, the recovery phase for natural disasters, unlike that for countries emerging from conflict, stands a better chance of benefiting from the support of national authorities able to take the lead in carrying out recovery and reconstruction activities.

We also agree that the international community, led by the UN system, must support the transition from the immediate natural disaster response phase to the longer-term transitional phase. They should boost national structures able to carry out critical reconstruction activities, especially in regions susceptible to recurring disasters.

Developing countries, especially the disaster-prone ones among them, would benefit from assistance in the area of capacity-building in early warning systems. Sharing of technologies such as remote sensing, geographical information systems (GIS), Global Positioning, computer modelling and expert systems and electronic information management would assist developing countries to be better-prepared for dealing with natural disasters and reduce their adverse impacts. We, therefore, agree with Secretary-General on the need for channelling increased resources for capacity-building activities in disaster-prone areas and for strengthening national capacities in disaster prediction and preparedness. A properly trained and equipped national response capacity remains the most effective means of carrying out rapid assessment and coordinating the initial response. Regrettably, funding provided by donors for capacity building in disaster reduction and recovery remains comparatively low, and is particularly meagre when compared with funding for conflict and post-conflict activities. As pointed out in the report, disaster reduction efforts are a key means of saving lives and preserving developmental and financial investments that would otherwise be lost.

Thank you, Mr. President.

**[BACK TO TBALE OF CONTENTS](#)**