

**Statement by Hon'ble Mr. C. P. Radhakrishnan, Member of Parliament
and Member of the Indian Delegation on Agenda Item 40(a) to (e):
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and Disaster relief
assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance
at the 58th Session of the UN General Assembly on October 20, 2003**

Mr. President,

We thank the Secretary General for the reports which have been prepared on "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". We associate ourselves with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the G-77 on this agenda item.

Mr. President,

Recent events have clearly demonstrated that the United Nations cannot fulfill the role expected of it in the field of humanitarian assistance if the safety and security of its personnel is not assured. Sergio Viera de Mello and his colleagues who laid down their lives in the terrorist attacks of the UN headquarters in Baghdad on August 19 served in the finest traditions of international civil service represented by the UN. The deliberate targetting of UN personnel involved in the pursuit of peace makes this incident all the more tragic.

Mr. President,

The report A/58/89 has particularly enhanced our understanding of key issues which merit consideration by the General Assembly, particularly those relating to humanitarian financing and the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The report points out that there has been a doubling of overall levels of humanitarian aid since 1990. This is indeed most heartening. It is, however, a matter of concern that the growth in humanitarian assistance has been accompanied by an overall decline in the flows of ODA. The Secretary General has, in another report, referred to humanitarian assistance crowding out the resources required for development. The Economic and Social Council has, this year, reiterated that humanitarian assistance should be provided in a way that is not to the detriment of resources made available for development

cooperation. This is important to ensure as it is development assistance which, in the long term, reduces the need for emergency humanitarian assistance.

The Secretary General's report draws attention to the fact that donor decisions to allocate resources are not driven primarily by objective needs but more by "domestic considerations, traditional patterns of expenditure and geo-political interests". The largest shortfalls in the responses to the consolidated appeals process, ranging to over 70%, are faced by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This pattern goes against the basic tenets of humanitarian assistance contained in General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The Economic and Social Council has, in response to this trend, encouraged the donor community to provide humanitarian assistance in proportion to needs and on the basis of need assessments, with the view to ensuring a more equitable distribution of assistance across humanitarian emergencies, including those of a protracted nature. We do hope that this urging of ECOSOC will be heeded to.

The Secretary General's report A/58/434, which focuses on natural disasters, has attempted, for the first time, to also provide information on the funding trends for natural disaster response. We commend the Secretariat for their efforts even though the information provided is somewhat sketchy. We understand that this is because of definitional problems and the lack of consistency with regard to the bases on which information is compiled. This needs to be addressed as the absence of comprehensive and precise information affects our understanding of an issue to which the international community attaches importance.

Mr. President,

We understand that the Secretariat had set up a Joint Working Group to review a range of UN responses in post-conflict transition situations. Our attention has been drawn to the recommendations of this Group, which are contained in the Secretary General's Report on the reform of the Organisation. We note that the Working Group attached importance to the facilitation of links among the political, peacekeeping and operational wings of the UN and to addressing the variance in mandates for different UN Offices at a given location. This recommendation seems to be based on the premise that the UN response cannot be effective if it is fragmented and, therefore, those dealing with human rights, those dealing with security, those dealing with humanitarian assistance, and those dealing with development should deliver an integrated response. The recommendations of the Working Group also call for strengthening the UN efforts in advocacy and negotiation.

We have always highlighted the risks associated with such an approach. The provision of life saving humanitarian assistance has to be on the basis of the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality. Such assistance should never be used as a bargaining tool by those dealing with political issues. The promotion and protection of human rights is, undoubtedly, important. However, if humanitarian workers were to do so, they would politicise their actions and also compromise their access to those in need.

Similarly, development assistance provided by the UN needs to respect the principles of neutrality and country-driven programming. In a post-conflict scenario,

affected governments may not be best placed to assert their own priorities. The UN, therefore, needs to provide assistance for capacity-building. It should not attempt to take advantage of the situation by bypassing the national government.

The mandate of peacekeeping operations also needs to be defined in a manner that does not result in their being seen as partial. The last regular session of ECOSOC has provided legislative guidance in this regard through its resolution which, *inter alia*, affirms the leading role of civilian organisations in implementing humanitarian assistance. It also affirms the need, in situations where military capacity and assets have to be used to support the implementation of humanitarian assistance, to ensure that such use is strictly in conformity with humanitarian principles.

Mr. President,

We note that transition situations particularly attract the attention of both the Secretariat and of the donor countries. To be concerned about bridging the gap between relief and development and to provide emergency assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development is laudable. The tendency to see transition situations as opportunities to fundamentally transform social mores, recast economic priorities and influence political dynamics is, however, most regrettable. The United Nations will, if it collaborates with such efforts, run the risk of jeopardising its status as a trusted partner of the developing countries. The arguments which we have outlined for clearly respecting the differences in the UN roles in peacekeeping, in the protection and promotion of human rights, in fostering economic and social development and in the coordination of humanitarian assistance also provide reason for approaching any integrated approach for the fulfillment of these objectives, say through an Economic and Social Security Council, with caution and circumspection.

Mr. President,

The General Assembly has outlined the Guiding Principles of Humanitarian Assistance in the annex of its resolution 46/182. While coordinated and intrusive approaches may seem more attractive, the efforts of the Secretariat in the field of humanitarian assistance will be assessed by us in terms of the benchmarks provided by this resolution.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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