

STATEMENT BY MS. CHOKILA IYER, FOREIGN SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, ON AGENDA ITEM 20: STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AT THE PLENARY OF THE 56TH SESSION OF GA ON NOVEMBER 26, 2001

Mr. President,

We thank the Secretary General for his report A/56/95 on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

2. India attaches the highest importance to the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need. This is why, in spite of our resource constraints, we provide substantial humanitarian assistance to those in need, in the true spirit of South-South cooperation.

3. We have announced economic assistance of medicines, medical assistance, quilts, tents and blankets and committed 1 million tonnes of wheat for the needy in Afghanistan and those displaced from that country. These would be provided through the UN agencies, including the World Food Programme. We have also declared our intention of extending a line of credit of US\$ 100 million for post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. As a country in Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood and with an association that goes back into history, we are ready to do more. We shall make every effort to contribute to bringing about lasting peace, stability and development of Afghanistan.

Mr. President,

4. Contributions to the consolidated appeal process have been steadily declining. As of May this year, six months after the consolidated appeals were launched, only 23% of the US\$ 2.8 billion requested had been funded. There is a pressing need to ensure the provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance. Such resources, however, should be additional to, and not diverted from, the already scarce resources for development. This point has also been emphasised in the report of the high level panel on Financing for Development which was chaired by H.E. Ernesto Zedillo, former President of Mexico. As we have repeatedly said, development assistance, in the long term, reduces the need for emergency assistance by making the socio-economic system resilient to the impact of hazards and disasters.

5. The report of the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has noted that funding for humanitarian emergencies is uneven. There is quick and generous donor support for some emergencies but little for others. We welcome, in this context, the intention of OCHA to carry out an analysis of donor funding and patterns to identify ways to address imbalances. We are also concerned with the increasing tendency in the use of

bilateral agencies and international NGOs for delivering humanitarian assistance; we are of the view that multilateral mechanisms are the appropriate channel.

6. In a climate of shrinking resource flows, it is also essential to ensure optimal and effective utilisation of available funds. Capacities existing in developing countries that are often available closer to the site of a natural disaster could provide a viable means for extending limited resources. This was one of the main recommendations emanating from the Agreed Conclusions of the First Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC held in July 1998, and reiterated by the Second Humanitarian Affairs Segment in July 1999. We look forward to follow-up action by the Secretariat.

7. We are aware there is considerable pre-occupation with the need for incorporating a long term perspective into the response to humanitarian crises, particularly by having mechanisms for funding the smooth transition from relief to development. We agree that this needs to be addressed. This, however, calls for donor attention and not institutional attention. The creation of new windows or expansion of existing ones in the Funds and Programmes of the United Nations cannot be the solution to the problem.

Mr. President,

8. The Secretary General has noted that access by humanitarian actors to affected populations is one of the key challenges facing humanitarian operations, particularly in complex emergencies. He also makes the point that many humanitarian emergencies are prefaced by escalating human rights violations. While this may be so, it is, in our view, imperative to maintain the distinction between the political, peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights aspects of the work of the United Nations if the trust which the UN system enjoys in the field of humanitarian assistance is to be maintained. We recognise that the dilemma of reaching humanitarian assistance to populations at risk, in areas of conflict and where a UN peacekeeping operation is deployed, can be agonising. However, as we have often said, it is necessary to recognise that humanitarian assistance cannot be provided and certainly not sustained under fire.

9. The issue of humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons is contentious. The Secretary General's report refers to advocacy efforts to raise the profile of the guiding principles on internal displacement. We note, however, that these principles which were developed only by a team of legal experts in collaboration with international agencies and NGOs do not enjoy inter-governmental approval.

Mr. President,

10. We would, in conclusion, like to refer to the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance which have been so clearly outlined in section 1 of the annexe to resolution 46/182. These notably are those of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, with full respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. Primary importance is recognised for the consent of the affected countries in the organisation, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. These principles are valid,

time-tested and their continued application would contribute towards success in relieving pain and suffering.