

STATEMENT BY MRS. PRABHA THAKUR, MEMBER OF PARLAIMENT AND
MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 71[A] TO [D] AND 72 –
STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN
AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING
SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AT THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 19, 2007

Mr. President,

I come from the land of Gautam Buddha, Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi, all of whom stood for the essential oneness of all human beings, which is the ethical basis for the United Nations and its humanitarian assistance. I am, therefore, pleased to participate in this debate today.

We thank the Secretary-General for the reports that have been prepared for the discussions under this agenda item. We note the factual nature of the reports that identify some areas of improvement. We request the Secretary-General to enhance the analytical content of future reports.

Mr. President,

All countries are vulnerable to disasters. Nations can – and indeed must – cooperate to find collective and cooperative solutions to the challenges that disasters represent. It is, therefore, heartening that in recent years, Member States have come together to promote a more responsive, prompt, fair and need-based humanitarian assistance system.

India welcomes the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as a non-political, collaborative instrument that supports developing countries in times of need. India demonstrated its support for CERF by pledging a contribution of US \$2 million to CERF at its launch in New York last year. These funds have already been disbursed. Our contribution was a sign of solidarity with international efforts aimed at addressing the needs of developing countries for emergency humanitarian assistance. It represented our conviction that, through this reform measure, the UN would be better able to assist developing countries in the aftermath of a disaster by making resources available in a timely and predictable manner, evenly across emergencies. It is through its performance and even-handed approach to request for assistance that the Fund would continue to attract the support of Member States and donors. It is, therefore, extremely important that CERF retains a high degree of performance and credibility.

The report of the Secretary-General on CERF states that the Fund has promoted early action and response to reduce loss of life and that progress has been made towards achieving its objectives. The report provides details of the expenditures made out of CERF. It would also be useful to know the details of all requests received for funding, the proportion of funding provided in each case and the criteria used for the allocations, in a tabular form. We look forward to such detailed and analytical information in the forthcoming independent review that would examine the functioning of CERF over its first two years.

Mr. President,

In handling disasters, it is important to have coherent national strategies and national capabilities to handle both disaster prevention and disaster management. The development of necessary national capabilities must be the starting point of a disaster management strategy.

India has a forward-looking approach to disaster management and mitigation. We have constituted a National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), chaired by the Prime Minister and State Level Disaster Management Authorities. The NDMA has come forward with a new approach to disaster management. The approach is based on moving away from a relief-centric, post event approach to a holistic, integrated and preventive approach. The focus will be on disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation. Improved coordination between various agencies of the Government is a first step in the new approach. Greater awareness among civil society on prevention, mitigation and preparedness, is the next important step bearing in mind that lack of information and uncoordinated responses hamper relief efforts.

Mr. President,

While there is no substitute for effective national efforts, a national response alone can sometimes be inadequate. There is need for more bilateral, regional and international cooperation to deal with disasters and to make effective use of our capabilities. Greater cooperation in relief and rehabilitation, in disaster preparedness, and in setting up and maintaining early warning systems, should be a part of the overall effort to deal with disasters.

Through CERF, we have established a more reliable mechanism for saving lives after a disaster and addressing the needs of under-funded emergencies. However, greater efforts are required for disaster prevention, risk reduction and early warning so as to reduce the lives lost to disasters. Disaster risk reduction should be based on pro-active and pre-emptive action. Small investments in improving the safety of houses, for example, can reduce the risk of damage to life and property arising from earthquakes. Valuable lives and property can be saved through the use of appropriate housing technologies in earthquake-prone areas. India is developing such technologies that are affordable. The international community should address the need for information sharing in such technologies that would help prevent disasters. This will be a useful way of addressing the challenge of risk reduction.

Another intervention relates to low-cost insurance against risk. The penetration of insurance in most developing countries is still very limited. There is need for a pro-active approach in insuring the risk-prone regions through an approach that can spread the costs and ensure the financial sustainability of risk insurance mechanisms.

There is also far greater need for focus on recovery and development after a disaster. A strong recovery effort that 'builds back better', paying due attention to disaster prevention, builds resilience to future disasters. India contributes to the effort of the Group of 77 to highlight this issue by coordinating an annual resolution on the 'International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development'. We hope that greater attention would be paid to post-disaster recovery, which strains the capacities of most developing countries in the post-relief period.

Mr. President,

We note the assessment of the report on improving the delivery of UN's humanitarian assistance, including through the improvement of UN coordination activities at the field level. The report highlights the 'cluster leadership approach' as an effort in this direction. We believe that there is need for an evaluation of this approach to assess its impact on improving delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly its timeliness, the additional expenditure that it entails, and the perspective of the receiving countries where this approach has been

implemented so far. This approach should be implemented at the country level with the consent of and under the leadership of the national government of the affected State.

India believes that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality as contained in the Guiding Principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance contained in the annex to GA resolution 46/182. We recall that the Guiding Principles enjoin that sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected and that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle, on the basis of an appeal by the affected country. All humanitarian personnel, including those belonging to the UN, must observe the national laws of the countries where they are and must remain sensitive to the customs and traditions of the host State. They must function in a transparent manner and carry out their assistance related activities through close consultation and coordination with the affected government. This is essential for the credibility of international humanitarian assistance.

Mr. President,

According to Indian culture and philosophy, we respect all nations and religions. We believe that the world is one family. So, before I conclude, allow me to wish everyone, all my family members sitting here, the very best for the coming festival season from me and my country, India.

Namaskar and Thank you, Mr. President.

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