

STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. MAKARIM WIBISONO AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDONESIA ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, BEFORE THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ON AGENDA ITEM 5: SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

New York, 15 July 1998

Mr. President,

It is my distinct honour to address the Economic and Social Council on agenda item 5, Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Let me begin by appreciating Under-Secretary-General Sergio Vieira de Mello for his comprehensive and insightful introductory remarks and by welcoming the report that has been provided by the Secretary-General on Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations, which comprehensively informs of the progress and obstacles faced in this important area of UN activities.

The Group of 77 and China would like to welcome the step to hold this first humanitarian affairs segment in the substantive session of the ECOSOC, as it affords a good opportunity to fully consider the operational and coordination aspects of relief efforts, to which this session of the ECOSOC should give clear guidance for further consideration in the General Assembly. We also note that the way this first meeting is arranged through the format of the panel discussion and informal dialogue, which include the participation of those involved in the humanitarian activities in its headquarters as well as in the field level, such as the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs, and several Resident Coordinators, provides a good opportunity for comprehensive consideration of this agenda item. This should help the Member States in providing guidance and coordination in aspects of humanitarian issues. Certainly, enhanced coordination of activities among the UN system as well as the relevant funds and programmes would increase its capacity to respond in an effective and timely manner to new and emerging crises.

The Group of 77 and China welcome the efforts that have been made during the past year, which have continued a process of reform of the United Nations humanitarian sector. We would note that since the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 1995/56, a more strategic and coherent approach is being followed.

The adoption of General Assembly resolution 52/12B has brought additional coherence to the process. In this connection, we also welcome the decision by the Secretary-General to change the Department for Humanitarian Affairs into the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which has allowed for a streamlining of the office without loss of essential functions. However, it remains of some concern that the capacity of this office has been further curtailed due to the lack of resources. It is the view of the Group that if we are to bring predictability to humanitarian responses under UN auspices, the question of funding sources and earmarking allocations must be satisfactorily resolved.

The Group of 77 and China further would like to express concern that appeals to the international community for humanitarian assistance, both for victims of conflict and natural disasters, continues to decline. This fact is most acutely reflected the response to the Consolidated Appeals issued by the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which is reported down to 15% from the previous year's figure of 30%. Moreover, the Group finds it particularly troubling that in some instances humanitarian assistance has been hindered because the crisis has not been sensational enough to capture the attention of the international media and thereby merit a response.

We would like to underline that the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) should not be based on the

priorities set by a few donor countries or on any extraneous forms of selectivity, but rather on the genuine needs and merits of each crisis situation. This is essential if the CAP is to be seen as reflecting the entirety of the response strategy, inclusive of rehabilitation and recovery. In this regard, we hold the view that any improvement of the Consolidated Appeals Process requires the involvement of all UN agencies, donors and governments. And that the CAP should demonstrate a long-term assessment and strategy which includes development as a fundamental aspect and is better utilized in support of rehabilitation activities.

The Group would like to express its support for the role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), particularly as the focal point for coordination of humanitarian assistance. We would also like to express our hope that by transferring the various responsibilities to other entities throughout the UN system, the issue of humanitarian relief will benefit from the full range of resources available within the Organization, facilitating the full dimension from relief to development. It does however also underscore the need for coordination among the various entities of the UN system.

In this connection, the Group of 77 and China would like to commend the efforts made to achieve a more coherent coordination structure at field level, while also achieving a clear division of responsibilities among the relevant agencies, which have been undertaken by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). We note from the report that the IASC is attempting to develop a more dynamic and prioritized approach to resource mobilization.

We also welcome the efforts that are being made to ensure adequate monitoring of humanitarian responses, through reporting schedules and common indicators of progress. It is our expectation that this will greatly assist the Humanitarian Coordinator in securing the necessary resources are available and that any shortfalls will quickly be brought to the attention of the donor community. Given the potential for slow responses to humanitarian situations which lack global visibility and thus fail to prompt an emotional response, it should be deemed critical that humanitarian responses are founded in reliable data and sound analysis.

Mr. President,

In addition to, and at times concurrent with, responding to complex humanitarian situations, the United Nations is increasingly called on to respond to natural disasters and environmental emergencies. We note that the Secretary-General has devoted a substantial portion of his report to this aspect of humanitarian relief and the Group joins in attaching importance to it. The Group would like to compliment the work undertaken by the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams, while also noting that the capacity for effective response by the United Nations system must be further strengthened. We therefore welcome the initiative to utilize those capacities which exist in developing countries, which often offer closer proximity to the impacted region and consequently a more cost-effective and timely response. Furthermore, we would agree with the assessment that rules and procedures need to be further developed to enable a timely response and deployment of material.

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 would like to reiterate the critical need to address the development aspects and to establish a comprehensive approach that links relief and development programmes. This calls for the integration of these programmes at the outset, so that clear and coherent strategic frameworks can be formulated, from planning to implementation, including sustainable development. The relief to development gap must be closed.

In concluding, Mr. President, the Group of 77 and China would like to reiterate support for the efforts that are being made by the United Nations to provide a timely and effective response to the humanitarian crises which erupt throughout the world in all regions. We would underline the necessity to avoid responses being taken for political motives or even the perception that this is the case, as it severely undermines the initiative.

Likewise, we would continue to call attention to the gap which exists between relief and development, which must be present from the initial stage of relief, in which humanitarian response is undertaken with the long-term view of rehabilitation. That process must involve all major-stakeholders in developing a common comprehensive strategy.

Thank you.

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