



**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CONROD HUNTE, DEPUTY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, TO THE
HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS SEGMENT OF THE 2008 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (New York, 15 July 2008)**

Mr. Vice President,

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I would like to thank you and other members of the Bureau for the organization of this humanitarian affairs segment of the 2008 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council.

We would also like to thank Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his introductory statement.

The Group of 77 and China stresses the importance of the two issues of concern for this year, namely, the humanitarian impact of climate change and of the global food crisis and we support calls for additional study on the implications of both phenomenon.

The report of the Secretary-General tells us that in recent years, a large number of humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters have occurred in the regions represented by the member States of the Group of 77 and China. The severity, frequency and magnitude of these natural disasters, highlight the need to deliver a strong, timely and coordinated response. The theme for this year's humanitarian affairs segment, "Building capabilities and capacities at all levels for timely humanitarian assistance, including disaster risk reduction", is vital to facilitating developing countries' ability to deliver such a response.

Mr. Vice President,

There are many challenges to coordination of the humanitarian assistance activities of the United Nations both in situations of natural disasters and complex emergency, including addressing these situations in a timely, adequate and efficient manner. A single natural disaster can set back development in a developing country by several decades, accentuating poverty and economic vulnerabilities. For these reasons, it is critical that affected States, donor countries, the UN system and other humanitarian organizations work together to provide much needed humanitarian assistance and development support, recognizing the primary role of the affected State.

The United Nations system and the international community have an unique role to play in assisting developing countries to enhance their existing humanitarian capacities, knowledge and institutions including by inter alia, promoting access to and transfer of new technology, funding and expertise to developing countries in order to help them strengthen preparedness; respond rapidly to natural disasters; mitigate the impact of natural disasters; address the long-term challenges of the post-recovery period; and reduce the risks associated with future natural disasters.

Mr. Vice President,

The G77 and China reaffirms the responsibility first and foremost of States to take care of the victims of humanitarian emergencies within their own borders, while recognizing that the magnitude and duration of many emergencies may be beyond the response capacity of many affected countries and therefore international cooperation in this field has special importance.

Humanitarian emergencies, in particular armed conflicts, disproportionately affect civilians, especially women and children and also other vulnerable groups. It is indeed a sad fact that they are subject to many atrocities and violations during the conflicts and simultaneously deprived of resources and necessary services in such situations. Addressing the special needs of these groups and provision of necessary services, calls for a strong commitment and commensurate action. Empowerment of women and children could also contribute to conflict resolution. We note with satisfaction that in the various activities of the United Nations system in the field, the situation and empowerment of women and children as well as other vulnerable groups and mainstreaming of a gender perspective have been considered in the design and implementation of such activities and have become an integral part of these operations.

Furthermore, enabling humanitarian actors to have access to and reach the population needing their assistance is vital for humanitarian operations, particularly in complex emergencies.

In this regard, the Group reaffirms that in countries in which humanitarian personnel are operating, in conformity with the relevant provisions of national laws, international law and international humanitarian law, it is important to facilitate the safe and unhindered access of United Nations and other humanitarian agencies and organizations working with the consent of the affected State, ensuring the respect for the primary role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory and in full respect for the guiding principles contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, which we see as the framework governing the provision of humanitarian assistance.

We urge all parties involved in humanitarian emergencies to cooperate fully with the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and the UN agencies in the country concerned in providing such access and protection in accordance with national law and international law. While expressing serious concern with regard to what appears to be a rather recurrent incidence of killing and kidnapping of humanitarian staff - absolutely unacceptable as it is - we also encourage all States to respect fully their obligations under relevant international instruments, including the 1994 convention on the safety of the UN and associated personnel.

We reaffirm that Member States must comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1949 to protect and assist civilians in occupied territories and call on the UN System and the international community to strengthen their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to those civilians.

Mr. Vice President,

There is a clear relationship between emergency relief, rehabilitation and development and in order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to development, humanitarian assistance must be provided in ways that will support recovery and long-term development. In this regard, there is room for further enhancing coordination between humanitarian and development actors.

Humanitarian assistance must not be seen, however, as a replacement for international development cooperation.

We applaud the growth of the international funding mechanisms for humanitarian assistance, but believe that more attention needs to be paid to gaps in funding, especially for under-funded emergencies. The specific role of the financial institutions, particularly during the recovery phase, should be explored further. We also look forward to the outcome of the independent evaluation of

the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which will be available during the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Vice President,

We are addressing many thorny issues during our deliberations, that take into consideration the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General and we believe that the result will be a series of practical actions that will guide the work of the United Nations and the international community in the provision of humanitarian assistance where it is most essential, for populations in need.

Thank you, Sir.