

Statement by Ambassador Bagher Asadi, Chairman of the Group of 77 (Islamic Republic of Iran), at the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the Substantive Session of 2001 of the Economic and Social Council

Geneva, 11 July 2001

Mr. President,

At the very outset, allow me to express, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, our sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report before us entitled “strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations”. The report, quite a detailed one, can be credited to have captured many aspects of the emergency humanitarian assistance, including the changing humanitarian environment, recognition of the devastating and widespread impact and effects of humanitarian emergencies and crises as well as of the broad presence and involvement of other actors in humanitarian emergencies. The issue, as we all know, is a new and yet quite complex emerging issue, requiring a rather nuanced and cool-headed approach. This statement, representing the common position of the developing countries with all their diversity, should clearly be reflective of the nuance involved. With this approach, we are looking forward to an open and constructive exchange of views across the board on all aspects of the issue and stand ready to continue our discussions, here at the Council session and in the upcoming General Assembly session.

Mr. President,

The nature of emergencies has substantially changed during the past decade. In the post-Cold-War era new dimensions have emerged for such emergencies, in particular the emergence of internal conflicts, which have engulfed a number of developing countries, especially in Africa, consuming most of their human, physical and financial resources and devastating their economic infrastructure and social fabric. Rise in the number of large-scale natural disasters and their impact in the form of massive human casualty and economic loss has been another negative development in the humanitarian emergencies field. As indicated in the Secretary-General’s report, about 90% of disaster victims live in developing countries, which calls for a much higher level of attention and assistance by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and other humanitarian actors in the field. Although the United Nations has become more prepared to respond to such humanitarian emergencies, nonetheless, the challenge of coordination of such activities in the UN system as well as of addressing these emergencies in a timely, adequate and efficient manner still remains to be met.

Before turning to specific issues in the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, I would like to draw attention to a general and yet important observation. In our view, any mechanism or capacity for early warning, prevention, preparedness and response in developing countries, should be, in fact, must be, consistent with the level of development of the affected countries. It also follows that development of such a capacity on a regional and sub-regional basis, where appropriate, would provide an effective framework for addressing the relevant problems since natural disasters facing countries are generally common to the countries within particular regions or sub-regions. Moreover, the high rates of human casualties and economic losses in developing countries as a result of human emergencies are also clearly indicative of the low level of development or general state of underdevelopment in these societies. And regrettably, as we all have to admit, some of the internal conflicts in developing countries have their origins in economic and social factors. This is exactly why humanitarian emergencies should be viewed, approached and addressed within a larger political and socio-economic picture, which also necessitates the joint efforts of all states to create an enabling environment for sustained economic growth and sustainable development in the developing countries and to ensure respect for all fundamental freedoms and human rights, including the right to development.

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China believes that the guiding principles contained in the annex of General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 should continue to be the basis for response to humanitarian emergencies – which you also underlined in your introductory remarks. During the past decade these guiding principles have contributed tremendously to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations as well as other humanitarian actors in the field. Within this framework, the affected state has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance, which makes all the more imperative capacity-building at the national level for better coordination and for closer cooperation with the United Nations system and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Primary responsibility for stronger preventive measures, including early-warning system and preparedness at the national, and regional level, where appropriate, and preparing effective contingency planning, lies with the national government, albeit with the support of regional and UN country team as well as with the participation of civil society and relevant national NGOs. Engagement of the actors just described in defining possible scenarios and strategies for action can greatly reduce the human and economic losses of humanitarian emergencies, particularly in the case of natural disasters. Establishment of Regional Disaster Response Advisors and Regional Disaster Reduction Advisors by OCHA and UNDP are positive steps for providing technical assistance and implementing effective programmes and coordination at the national and sub-regional levels. Coordination between OCHA and UNDP on the geographical placement of advisors as well as in the humanitarian emergencies that they respectively cover is also imperative. Dispatching multi-disciplinary missions to the field could also be a useful mechanism for strengthening coordination within the UN system with a view to facilitating a multi-dimensional intervention of the system, including through providing low-cost inputs for various sectors which could expedite recovery process for the affected communities. The magnitude and duration of many emergencies might be beyond the response capacity of many affected countries, which inevitably calls for international cooperation to address emergency situations and also to strengthen the response capacity. Recent experiences in capacity-building seem to support the conclusion that strong national capacity could better materialize the coordination of response to any humanitarian emergency.

During the past decade, displacement has become larger, more complex and geographically more widespread. And still worse, in the case of internal armed conflicts civilians, especially women and children, have become the principal victims. Having gone through the rather protracted, if not acrimonious, deliberations in the Humanitarian Affairs Segment last year, let me make this point very clear that, from our point of view, the primary responsibility for protection of and assistance to the population affected by internal displacement lies with the governments of the affected countries. There is, of course, a certain important role to be played by the international community in assisting governments of the countries affected by internal displacement. But - this is a very important but - that extension of such assistance should be upon the request of the concerned government and with full respect for the sovereignty territorial integrity and national unity of the states involved. The same applies to the assistance work of relevant humanitarian and development agencies in their efforts geared to developing the capacity of countries affected by internal displacement.

The complex-protracted emergencies resulting from combined effect of prolonged conflict and natural disasters – which unfortunately mainly afflict developing countries, especially least developed countries - are a source of great concern to the Group of 77 and China. These situations often result in massive outflow of refugees to the neighboring and other countries. Special efforts with adequate financial resources are needed to facilitate arrival at durable solutions for complex emergencies, aiming at, most prominently and urgently, resolution of the conflict and rehabilitation of the economy and normal life in these countries. Within this context, it is also incumbent on the international community to provide generous financial, humanitarian and technical support to the neighboring first asylum developing countries that are sheltering refugees and displaced persons, with a view to compensate, even if only partially, for the additional burden they shoulder

in this regard.

Mr. President,

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 designing and implementation of such activities and 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 context, we would like to stress the importance of safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel in order to allow them to perform efficiently their task of assisting the affected population within their respective mandates. We urge all parties involved 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.

Funding for rapid response to humanitarian emergencies continues to be a serious challenge. Central emergency revolving fund has been a useful tool for addressing these challenges. The Group of 77 and China supports more efficient utilization of the Fund including through expanding its use to support, inter-alia, humanitarian assistance for natural disasters. The Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) is a key instrument to coordinate humanitarian strategies and appeal for funds. While expressing satisfaction with the evolution and strengthening of CAP in the areas of assessment, monitoring, improved financial tracking, transparency and strategic and impact analysis, the Group of 77 and China expresses serious concern over continued decline of contribution to the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP). The fact that such contributions have amounted only to 23% of the requested resources for humanitarian emergencies during the first half of the year cannot but be disquieting. Such a trend will have serious adverse impact on the capacity of the CAP. Strengthening CAP would lead to a better and comprehensive response to all sectors and areas of focus of this fund and all phases ranging from relief to development, as well as to a better response to all humanitarian emergencies regardless of their geographical location.

Information is critical for any contingency planning, early warning, preparedness and response to the humanitarian emergencies. Dissemination of information about humanitarian emergencies, especially through the media, also plays a crucial role in mobilizing assistance and ensuring equal attention to various humanitarian emergencies as well as in contributing to a better mobilization of funds for those emergencies. Capacity-building at the national and local levels for gathering and sharing relevant information, which improves the quality of decision-making and response time to the humanitarian emergencies, is imperative. We would also like to stress the pressing necessity for eradicating the root causes of conflict and natural disaster and promotion of the use and transfer of technology and know-how for addressing all phases and aspects of humanitarian emergencies, in particular early warning, prevention, preparedness and development.

Finally, Mr. President, let me draw the attention of this august gathering to a procedural but crucial point in the arrangement of this segment. The Group of 77 and China believes that strengthening the role of ECOSOC for providing policy guidance to the United Nations system for humanitarian affairs activities is vital and can contribute tremendously to the smooth and well coordinated function of the system as well as other major

humanitarian actors in this field. From the very beginning of our discussions on this segment in New York, the Group of 77 and China has underlined the necessity and importance of having an agreed conclusion for the segment. To that end, we have been fully engaged in the process, helped to create a constructive, non-acrimonious environment and provided substantive input for the still on-going discussions. Nevertheless, due to a number of practical constraints, including lack of time, it appears that the segment will end up with a Chairman's Summary. Though not objecting to such an outcome, and I stress, as an exceptional one-time only exercise, the Group of 77 would like to make it very clear that this agreement should not be considered as a precedent for the next year or coming years, for that matter. As a matter of principle, it should be emphasized, that the agreed conclusion is part of the humanitarian affairs segment. It remains our earnest hope that with better preparation – which also implies an early and timely, if not unhampered, release of the relevant documents – we, and I mean the whole intergovernmental body, will be able to reach an agreed conclusion for this segment in the year 2002. In the meantime, we remain willing and fully prepared to continue substantive discussion on this item during the forthcoming General Assembly session.

On this promising note, I close the statement.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.