

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Venezuela to the United Nations, Ambassador Adriana Pulido, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, during the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the Economic and Social Council

New York, 15 July 2002

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I'd like to express the sincere appreciation of the Group of 77 and China to the Secretary General for his detailed and comprehensive report on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, contained in document A/57/77-E/2002/63. The Group finds the report to be an excellent basis for the discussions that will take place among different actors involved in humanitarian activities, during the course of the present segment. Also, we appreciate the recommendations formulated by the Secretary General in his report which have served also as a departing point for our work on the draft resolution to be adopted by the Humanitarian Affairs segment.

Mr. President,

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that the Group of 77 and China is pleased that this year the segment will produce an outcome, in which the views of Member States will be reflected, particularly those of developing countries. Such outcome constitutes the input from Governments to the work carried out by the UN humanitarian machinery and marks an important step into building a better and common understanding among stakeholders on important issues pertaining to the humanitarian assistance.

We are also pleased by the decision to examine the issue of strengthening the coordination of the humanitarian assistance, with particular attention to reaching the vulnerable and the transition from relief to development.

The Group of 77 and China stands ready to engage in a constructive and rich debate on the different aspects that the humanitarian affairs segment encompasses. In this context, you can rest assured Mr. Chairman, that the G77 will participate in this segment guided by a spirit of constructiveness and understanding which we are certain will prevail above the differences we might encounter in the course of our discussions.

Mr. Chairman,

For the Group of 77 and China the guiding principles contained in the annex of General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 are, and should continue to be, the basis for response to humanitarian emergencies. These principles have had and should continue to have a central role in the efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations and other humanitarian actors working in the field.

It is important to highlight that, according to the guiding principles, the primary responsibility to initiate, organize, coordinate and implement humanitarian assistance lies with the affected State, thus making imperative the need for capacity-building both, at the local and at the national levels, allowing for better coordination and closer cooperation with the United Nations system and humanitarian organizations.

Also, it is equally important to highlight that, again in accordance with the guiding principles, States whose populations are in need of humanitarian assistance are called upon to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance, in particular the supply of food, medicines, shelter and health care, for which access to victims is essential.

Capacity-building at the local, national and regional levels will also have a favorable effect on the development of strong early warning and preparedness measures, with a view to lessening the impact of crises and disasters and to transit the road to rapid recovery. In this regard, we concur with the Secretary General's assessment that: "As is the case in most crises, the greatest level of immediate response to disaster comes from within the local community or from the State...it is incumbent on the international community to assist and support local, national and regional preparedness and response capacities".

Mr. Chairman,

It is by all known that today the nature of emergencies is different from previous decades. The emergence of internal conflicts affecting some developing countries, especially in Africa, has been a factor that has consumed most of their human and material resources and devastated their economic infrastructures and social fabrics. This situation has also constrained the capacity of these countries to cope with and be prepared to face natural disasters, and their devastating impact on the populations.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, a very high percentage of disaster victims around the world live in developing countries. This situation calls for a much higher level of attention and assistance by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and other humanitarian actors in the field. We welcome the efforts made by the United Nations to be better prepared to respond to humanitarian emergencies. We also welcome the preparation of the draft resolution entitled "Strengthening international urban search and rescue assistance" and look forward to its adoption in the upcoming General Assembly session.

Despite all these efforts, the challenge of coordination of humanitarian activities in the UN system as well as of addressing complex emergencies in a timely, adequate and efficient manner still remains to be met.

Another serious challenge continues to be funding for rapid response. In this context, the Group finds that the idea presented by the Secretary General in his report, on the development of a global humanitarian financial tracking system can constitute a significant contribution to the improvement of the coordination and accountability of humanitarian assistance.

The Group of 77 and China observes with concern that, despite efforts made in strengthening and improving the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), there has been a drastic decline in flows of humanitarian assistance through it. The Secretary General explains very eloquently in his report that: "While the CAP remains the single most significant mechanism for humanitarian resource mobilization, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of humanitarian assistance channeled through the CAP". This is a situation that should be reversed if we are to respond swiftly and effectively to humanitarian crises. Funding is also a challenge when considering the transition from relief to development. And this is also intimately related to building national capacities of countries affected by complex emergencies and/or natural disasters to be able to respond to their own crises.

Investment on development activities that will allow the promotion of self-reliance and stability of countries affected should be an element to be considered during the planning phase of humanitarian assistance programmes. On this, the CAP offers a viable channel through which relief and recovery activities can be directed under a single strategy. It is therefore of utmost importance that developing countries, among which are the most affected by complex emergencies and natural disasters, donor countries, the UN system and humanitarian organizations work together in order to provide the much needed support in both humanitarian and development fields.

We reaffirm the call of the Millennium Declaration for the strengthening of international cooperation and for the coordination of humanitarian assistance to countries hosting refugees and to help refugees and displaced persons to return voluntarily to their homes in safety and dignity and to be smoothly reintegrated into their societies. We also call on the UN system and the international community to strengthen their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to civilians, in particular those under foreign occupation and

to undertake the necessary efforts to end such foreign occupation so that all peoples of the world could enjoy their fundamental human rights in dignity and peace.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding my statement, I'd like to indicate the Group's appreciation with the sections of the Secretary General's report on women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities. In the particular case of children and older persons, the UN has held this year two major conferences dealing with these issues, calling to pay special attention to their needs in situations of complex emergencies and natural disasters. Attention should also be given to the particular vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities in these situations. As the Secretary General states in his report, in many societies and in most emergencies, old age, disability, poverty and vulnerability are closely intertwined.

Women continue to face particular risks derived from gender discrimination. In particular, they continue to be subjected to sexual violence and abuse as well as to trafficking and other forms of abuse and exploitation. It is important to take into account these specific situations faced by women at all phases of planning and delivery of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China welcomes the efforts carried out by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in mainstreaming a gender perspective into the humanitarian response.

The G77 and China is in favor of all the efforts carried out by the UN system in order to ensure that cases of sexual abuse committed by humanitarian workers against women and children don't happen again.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.