

**INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE ON STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP IN DISASTER RESPONSE:
BRIDGING NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT
Geneva, 25-26 October 2011**

STATEMENT OF THE CO-CONVENORS IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS FOR A PLAN OF ACTION

Introduction and summary

From 25 through 26 October, more than 130 representatives from governments, regional organizations, the UN system, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and non-governmental organizations gathered in Geneva for a results-oriented Dialogue aimed at improving cooperation in international disaster assistance, identifying common challenges, exchanging best practices and lessons learned, and developing new ideas for moving forward.

The Dialogue was conducted in two parts, an open session to which all permanent missions and Geneva-based humanitarian organizations were invited, and a closed session with selected participation.

Participants welcomed the Dialogue as an innovative initiative bringing together national, regional, and international responders with affected states to discuss joint challenges, increase mutual understanding and foster an enhanced complementary approach by all to better meet the needs of persons affected by disasters. This statement reflects the co-convenors' understanding of the shared understandings and key challenges identified by participants, as well as a number of future action steps.

1. Shared understandings

The following shared understandings emerged from the discussions:

- Participants share a common overarching goal: that the right assistance is provided to persons affected by natural disasters at the right time and in the right way.
- The affected state bears the primary role and responsibility to meet the needs created by natural disasters, and to coordinate and implement humanitarian assistance within its territory.
- International assistance contributes to saving lives, safeguarding dignity and spurring recovery following major disasters. International assistance must complement local and national capacity.
- Humanitarian principles remain as relevant as ever and should be kept at the forefront in the organization of international assistance. Humanitarian assistance must address real identified needs.
- Regional organizations are playing an increasingly important role in disaster assistance.
- States, regional organizations, the UN system, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and non-governmental organizations have a shared responsibility to address common challenges. The international community and affected states must therefore work together in a complementary manner, based on continuous and open dialogue.

2. Key challenges

The following key challenges were identified:

- the growing number and variety of international responders to some major disasters;
- parallel (or poorly integrated) national and international coordination structures that work at cross-purposes;
- gaps in domestic regulatory frameworks and procedures for facilitating incoming international assistance in many countries, leading to delays, barriers, and gaps in oversight;
- affected state authorities sometimes lack the capacity to play a primary role in coordination, particularly when these authorities are themselves significantly impacted by the disaster;
- some international actors provide assistance that is of poor quality, ill-suited to the needs of the affected population, and inadequately attuned to building local capacities for future disasters;
- the increasing politicization of international disaster assistance;
- a growing sense of mistrust between affected states, donors and other international actors; and
- the risk that multiple and fragmented regional and international initiatives will neither take sufficient account of the primary role of the affected state, nor of the specific conditions of the affected population, and that they are not aligned in complement to existing structures and other initiatives.

3. Suggested action steps

Participants suggested a number of action steps to address the challenges noted above. Some might be advanced through a continuation of the Dialogue process (as discussed further in point 4 below), while others will need to be addressed by the stakeholders individually.

- ***Building trust through increased mutual understanding and knowledge sharing*** Further understanding and knowledge sharing among actors at all levels through regular dialogue aimed at better understanding the needs and concerns of all key stakeholders involved in operations, in particular those of the affected states and people. This may include use of existing fora and meetings, and engagement with regional organizations and other initiatives.
- ***Legal frameworks and procedures*** Continue the promotion of legal preparedness for international response, including the implementation of the IDRL Guidelines and related tools. This may be supplemented by the development of additional guidance, for example, on pre-registration of foreign non-governmental organizations and standard operating procedures.
- ***Mutual assistance and cooperation arrangements*** Expand cooperation in response operations, particularly among regional partners. One avenue could be to facilitate opportunities for broader participation in UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) missions, and promoting deployments between neighboring countries and regional partners.

- ***Putting learning into practice*** An important element of this is to promote the independent evaluation of disaster response, including both national and international response, led by governments of affected countries. Initiate a peer review mechanism between affected states, potentially facilitated through regional organizations.
- ***Multi-stakeholder preparedness planning*** Encourage multi-stakeholder contingency planning that supports national contingency plans and includes both regional and international contingency planning. This may be facilitated through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) initiatives on contingency planning. Simulation exercises to test contingency plans for large-scale disasters should be conducted in partnership with regional and international responders under national coordination arrangements.
- ***Quality and accountability*** Take stock of existing quality and accountability mechanisms, including those developed by states and humanitarian organizations, and including pre-qualification, certification, and accreditation schemes as well as quality standards. Better understanding and more consistent application of these mechanisms may be among the ways to ensure that disaster assistance is of an acceptable quality and delivered by competent agencies.
- ***Complementary coordination frameworks*** International coordination frameworks should work closely with and in support of national systems – to complement and strengthen local and national capacity.

4. Future dialogue

This Dialogue has begun to fill an important un-met need in that existing consultative and policy-making fora have not provided an equivalent space for frank and detailed discussion between governments receiving and providing international aid and humanitarian organizations about their challenges.

In committing to further the initiative, the co-convenors will examine the opportunity to convene a second International Dialogue in 2013. Our aim for a second meeting will be to expand the participation of representatives from national disaster management authorities and regional organizations – while maintaining the same informal atmosphere and the spirit of open dialogue.

To help prepare for a second global-level meeting, the co-convenors welcome the suggestion to promote and/or organize events at the regional level, and express their willingness to working with interested states, institutions and regional organizations to take this forward.