

Executive Summary

We have conducted a management audit of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs' (DHA) effectiveness in strengthening the coordination of the United Nations system in complex emergencies. The primary objectives of this audit were as follows.

to assess DHA's mandated role as it relates to complex emergencies and determine if the current mandate provides adequate definition and authority to DHA to enable an effective coordination role;

to evaluate DHA field offices to determine if they are adequately structured and staffed to perform their mandated role and, where appropriate, recommend changes to improve their coordination ability;

to review policies and procedures issued by the InterAgency Standing Committee (IASC) and DHA Headquarters in New York and Geneva to determine if they adequately support field operations, and

to analyze the tasks performed by the DHA field offices to determine if these functions facilitate the fulfillment of their assigned mandate.

To review DHA's coordinating activities in the field during complex emergencies, QIOS auditors conducted site visits in both Sierra Leone and Angola during the fall of 1996. Our methodology included structured reviews with relevant DHA staff and directors of UN agencies, officials of the Sierra Leonean and Angolan governments, representatives of donor countries and over 30 NGOs. The scope of this review did not include DHA headquarters' role nor DHA's responsibilities in coordinating natural disaster relief. Therefore, all findings and recommendations contained in this report relate *specifically* to DHA's role in the field during complex emergencies.

In the absence of any accepted definitions and/or criteria, we needed to define the terms *humanitarian assistance* and *coordination* and to establish criteria to determine what factors either impede or facilitate *effectiveness* in this context

Based on these definitions and criteria, we concluded that the DHA fulfills a vital function and provides a critical service by improving coordination of the humanitarian response during a complex emergency. Although many individual contributions are not quantifiable and often not measurable, the overall impact has been demonstrated, and the value of this function should not be underestimated. DHA's major strength is the ability to persuade people to work toward a common goal such as setting up IDP camps, coordinating procedures for IDP registration and food distribution, conducting joint needs assessments, mobilizing resources to implement a project, developing databases and issuing situation reports.

After five years, DHA is still in the process of defining its role as it relates to coordinating humanitarian assistance in the field during complex emergencies. It has yet to clearly define what is meant by *coordination* and which of the many tasks required of the UN during a complex emergency fall within its mandate.

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DHA field staff are, to a large extent, competent, experienced and committed to performing well under very difficult, sometimes dangerous conditions. However, there are critical structural flaws in the design of the DHA organization which impedes the staff's ability to effectively fulfill their mission. Essentially, when established, DHA was not given the appropriate resources or organisational structure which would enable it to fully achieve its mandate. The report provides specific recommendations for eliminating these obstacles which, if implemented, should significantly improve DHA's effectiveness.

Below we have highlighted key recommendations contained within the report. DHA should

- assess activities to determine which fail within their mandated scope of responsibilities,

- create Memoranda of Understanding between agencies outlining operational protocol;

- define goals and objectives for field coordination units, including performance criteria, and

- encourage rating of Consolidated Appeal proposals by field coordination units.

For complex emergencies, the IASC should:

- assign responsibilities for certain types of activities in advance to the appropriate UN agency in order to allow the timely building of in-house capacities

- declare when a complex emergency has ended to enable transition rehabilitation

- reassess Humanitarian Coordinator position to determine if appropriate to complex emergencies; and

- propose to the General Assembly creation of a reserve fund to be used by DHA for establishing field offices.

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