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Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 2816 (XXVI) of 14 December 1971, by which it established the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, 3243 (XXIX) of 29 November 1974 on the strengthening of that Office, 3440 (XXX) of 9 December 1975, in which it provided, inter alia, for measures to be taken in support of the activities of the Office, and 3532 (XXX) of 17 December 1975 on the financing of emergency relief assistance and technical co-operation activities of the Office,

Recalling also its resolution 31/173 of 21 December 1976 on financial arrangements for the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator,

Recalling further the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade,

Recalling the report of the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries containing the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least Developed Countries, in particular the section concerning disaster assistance for least developed countries,

Deeply concerned about the increasing number of natural disasters and other disaster situations, the economic burden borne by disaster-stricken and affected countries, particularly the developing countries, and the disruption thereby caused to their development process,

Also recalling its resolution 35/107 of 5 December 1980,

Further recalling Economic and Social Council resolution 1980/43 of 23 July 1980 regarding international efforts to meet humanitarian needs in natural disaster and other disaster situations,

Fully cognizant of the sovereign interests and rights of affected countries and of the primacy of their role in caring for the victims of natural disasters and other disaster situations,

Anxious that the international community should respond speedily and effectively to calls for emergency humanitarian assistance,

Recognizing that the quality and appropriateness of material and other assistance provided by the international community should

meet the particular needs of the populations of disaster-affected areas,

Recognizing the contribution made by the United Nations system to the relief of suffering and provision of humanitarian relief in natural disasters and other disaster situations,

Recognizing that the primary responsibility of administration, relief operations and disaster preparedness lies with the affected countries and that the major part of the material assistance and human effort in disaster relief comes from the Governments of those countries,

Recognizing also the importance in international relief of the contribution of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and appropriate voluntary organizations,

Recognizing further that, in order to attain an effective co-ordination system of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, it is essential to strengthen and improve the capacity and effectiveness of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and the United Nations system as a whole in order to enable the Office to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations speedily, efficiently and effectively, and thereby ensure prompt delivery of concerted relief,

Recognizing that a major constraint for the United Nations system to respond effectively to natural disasters and other disaster situations has been the shortage of resources,

1. Takes note of the reports of the Secretary-General and other reports on international efforts to meet humanitarian needs in emergency situations, as well as on measures for strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations and of the statement made by the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator before the Second Committee on 5 November 1981;

2. Reaffirms the sovereignty of individual Member States, recognizes the primary role of each State in caring for the victims of disasters occurring in its territory and stresses that all relief operations should be carried out and co-ordinated in a manner consistent with the priorities and needs of the countries concerned;

3. Reaffirms the mandate of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, established by the General Assembly in resolution 2816 (XXVI) as the focal point of the United Nations system for disaster relief co-ordination and calls for strengthening and improvement of the capacity and effectiveness of the Office;

4. Endorses the approaches outlined by the Secretary-General in his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit concerning the role of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in the various phases of disaster assistance;

5. Requests the Secretary-General to continue to take the necessary steps to strengthen the management operations of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator;

6. Stresses the need to take full advantage of information provided by existing early-warning monitoring systems that have been developed to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system in responding to natural disasters and other disaster situations and to co-ordinate, as far as feasible and useful, all the relevant early-warning systems, and stresses, to this effect, the capability of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in information collection and dissemination should be further strengthened and improved;

7. Urges the appropriate organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and other appropriate bodies, to co-operate closely, in their respective areas of competence, with the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in disaster relief activities and other disaster situations, to respond effectively to the needs of the situation and to comply promptly with the requests of disaster-affected countries;

8. Decides that, in response to a request for disaster relief from a disaster-stricken State and, as necessary, in particular in disaster-prone countries, the United Nations resident co-ordinator shall, with the full concurrence, consent and participation of the Government, convene meetings of the concerned organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to plan, monitor and take immediate action to provide assistance; the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and appropriate voluntary organizations may be invited to participate in such meetings with the approval of the host country;

9. Decides that, following a request for disaster relief from a disaster-stricken State and whenever required to deal effectively with complex disasters and emergencies of exceptional magnitude, the Secretary-General or his representative, who would normally be the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, shall convene meetings of the concerned organizations of the United Nations system in order to develop a concerted relief programme and conduct ad hoc consultations with the heads or representatives of the agencies concerned with disaster-relief questions, with a view to ensuring speedy and efficient delivery of goods and services to the disaster-stricken areas, and decides that these ad hoc consultations should draw on information provided by the Government concerned, as well as on the assessments of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, the resident co-ordinator and representatives of other United Nations organizations in the countries concerned, and take into account advice offered by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and appropriate voluntary organizations in the field; all agencies with responsibilities for natural disasters and other disaster situations should be involved at the appropriate level in such consultations;

10. Decides that, once it has been determined - on the basis of the above-mentioned information and consultations - that an exceptional or complex natural disaster or other disaster situation requiring system-wide action exists, the Secretary-General shall designate, at the international level, a lead entity from among the United Nations organizations, agencies and bodies, including the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, and, at the country level, the appropriate entity of the United Nations system to carry out relief operations, taking into account the specific requirements of the situation and in consultation with the host Government, and calls on all organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to co-operate closely with one another in their relief operations;

11. Invites the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to examine urgently the role of the lead entity and participating organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in complex disaster situations, taking into account decision 1981/2 of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a report, through the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1982, to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session, on the deliberations of the Committee;

12. Strongly calls upon all States to respond positively and

expeditiously to the Secretary-General's appeals for contributions to meet natural disasters and other disaster situations;

13. Reiterates, in particular, its appeal in resolution 35/107 for increased contributions to the trust fund of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, in particular to the subaccount for humanitarian emergency relief;

14. Stresses in this regard the need to strengthen the operational capacity and the human, material and financial resources available to individual agencies and organizations, in order to enable them to play their respective roles more promptly, efficiently and effectively in natural disasters and other disaster situations;

15. Requests all States to ensure a full flow of information to the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, especially regarding relief actions, and also to provide the United Nations system with the necessary personnel and logistical support;

16. Urges Governments in disaster-prone countries to explore further, with the assistance of the donors, appropriate organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, the possibility of improving storage, communication and transportation facilities, as well as measures to ensure disaster preparedness and prevention;

17. Also urges the international community to assist disaster-prone countries, upon their request, with the establishment of effective national and early-warning systems, the development of contingency plans for disasters and the strengthening of assessment capacity for relief requirements and for distribution and monitoring of relief supplies;

18. Calls upon organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to establish emergency units or focal points if they are not already in existence;

19. Reaffirms the need for the international community to respond fully to requests for emergency and humanitarian assistance, in particular through increased financial contributions for affected developing countries, bearing in mind the relevant provisions of the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, the Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least Developed Countries, as well as those of the trust fund of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator;

20. Requests the Secretary-General to submit a preliminary progress report on the implementation of the present resolution to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session through the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1982, and a comprehensive report to the Assembly at its thirty-eighth session through the Council at its second regular session of 1983.