



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**Humanitarian response
to natural disasters:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Seventh Report of
Session 2005–06**

Second Special Report of Session 2006–07

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International Development Committee

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Second Special Report

On 2 November 2006 the International Development Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2005–06, *Humanitarian response to natural disasters*, HC 1188–I. On 9 January 2007 we received the Government’s response to the Report. It is reproduced as Appendix 1 to this Special Report. We are also publishing, as Appendix 2, a letter received in response to the Report from the Office of the UK Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

In the Government Response, the Select Committee’s conclusions and recommendations are in bold text. The Government’s response is in plain text.

Appendix 1: Government response

We welcome the International Development Committee’s report “Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters”.

We appreciate that the report praises DFID’s humanitarian response work, which we agree can help to raise public recognition of and commitment to DFID’s work generally.

We welcome the Committee’s acknowledgement of DFID’s leading role in reforming international humanitarian response mechanisms, particularly those of the UN.

We note the Committee’s disappointment that we cannot give an assurance that DFID’s humanitarian spending will increase in line with our budget. We remain convinced that the level of DFID’s humanitarian assistance should be determined according to need, which cannot be predicted in terms of specific targets for spending. However, as set out in our Humanitarian Policy “Saving Lives, relieving suffering, protecting dignity”, we expect that as UK aid budgets rise so DFID’s humanitarian spending overall will increase.

The Committee calls for DFID to agree a policy framework with the MOD and the FCO for working with the military in disaster response. Since the Committee concluded its inquiry DFID and MOD have formalised an agreement for the use of military assets in humanitarian crises.

The Committee recommends that DFID should “flag” its programmes where appropriate and insist on co-branding with NGOs which DFID funds. We have recently introduced a new branding policy and have arrangements in place for a more proactive media effort in future disasters.

The Committee notes that when the public response to the Asian tsunami proved exceptionally generous the Government allowed the Prime Minister’s public commitment that HMG contributions would match the public’s to “fade away”. We believe our approach to tsunami funding was sensible and have satisfied the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee on this.

The UK's Initial Disaster Response

[Paragraph 25] We conclude that nationally identified search and rescue teams are among the most effective forms of “flagging” available to bilateral donors. However such expenditure should not be at the expense of long term assistance for disaster preparedness which will have much more success in reducing fatalities and injuries when natural disasters occur.

We agree that search and rescue teams can be an important part of disaster response and can raise the profile of bilateral donors. We also agree that search and rescue should not be at the expense either of other essential forms of response or of long term development and disaster preparedness. We deploy search and rescue teams only with the aim of saving life. Most people rescued from collapsed structures are saved in the first few hours by local people, before foreign teams can arrive. Foreign search and rescue teams can supplement local rescue with specialist skills and equipment, guiding the rescue effort more precisely to remaining survivors.

[Paragraph 27] We recommend that DFID gives further thought to ways in which positive publicity for the Department can be gained from promoting the work of CHASE-OT [DFID's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department Operations Team] more widely, potentially through work with the DEC [Disasters Emergency Committee] and media organisations.

Our primary purpose is to help deliver effective and fast assistance in emergencies. However, we agree that we should actively publicise DFID's work in this area to encourage public interest and support. We have recently adopted a new branding policy to this end.

[Paragraph 32] We conclude that established NGOs should see it as their responsibility to provide peer advice and support to new organisations, in order to ensure that the principles and standards they have created are maintained. DFID could take such work into account when making decisions about which NGOs to fund. We recommend that DFID provides on its website advice and contacts for new humanitarian NGOs, as well as for existing NGOs that wish to become involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

We maintain regular, close contacts with humanitarian NGOs. We provide guidelines and advice to NGOs on how to work with us and obtain DFID funding. Material on our website is readily available to new as well as to established NGOs. Our priorities for funding NGOs, however, must continue to be set by humanitarian needs and the ability of NGOs to help meet those needs.

[Paragraph 36] DFID's aim should be to create an open market-place for its humanitarian funding, in which exemplary work is encouraged and recognised through future funding decisions, whereas inadequate work has discernible consequences for the organisation concerned.

Our funding guidelines, advice and contacts are already available to all NGOs. Our funding decisions are based on the ability of applicants to meet needs on the ground effectively. We work with NGOs in a collaborative way, with detailed discussions about their project proposals, close monitoring through implementation and post-completion assessment and evaluation. DFID funding is contingent on good performance.

[Paragraph 38] We recommend that the DEC [Disasters Emergency Committee] explores ways in which its model of collective fundraising could be exported to other donor countries, in order to maximise the availability of funds for humanitarian work worldwide, and that DFID should consider funding such a project.

We are happy to explore this with the DEC.

[Paragraph 46] We recommend that the DEC initiates a process of dialogue between representatives of media organisations and the non-governmental humanitarian sector in the UK, to explore ways in which the reporting of humanitarian disasters and the activities of humanitarian actors could be more mutually productive.

This is a matter for the DEC. But DFID too is very aware of the role of the media in publicising humanitarian need and is working with the media to highlight emergencies. DFID took part in a very useful seminar in December organised by the British Red Cross Society with senior journalists to discuss the reporting of humanitarian issues.

[Paragraph 49] We recommend that DFID and the DEC consider ways in which the key messages contained in the Disasters and Emergencies Overseas publication can be more effectively disseminated.

We are consulting with the DEC on how to take this forward.

[Paragraph 50] We look forward to an update from DFID within the next twelve months on the possibility of using twinning initiatives to support the Department's work in raising development awareness.

We will provide this update. We are also adding a link to the Local Government Association's advice on twinning and other local government initiatives to DFID's website.

[Paragraph 53] We recommend that DFID should take a leading role in engaging the private sector in humanitarian responses. It should formalise this involvement by promoting the establishment of a network of private sector organisations involved in humanitarian response through which information and training on humanitarian standards and principles could be delivered.

DFID already contracts private sector companies to help with humanitarian response, for example airlift brokerage, mines action advice, procurement, stockpile storage, supply of

vehicles etc. In an emergency, we will sometimes liaise with potential private sector donors. And information on humanitarian standards as well as specific emergencies is available through our website and from sources such as the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) and the SPHERE Project (Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response). We do not have the capacity to establish a new private sector network but we will explore how information already available on these issues could be better shared with the private sector.

Reform of the Humanitarian Sector: Co-ordination and Leadership

[Paragraph 63] We support DFID’s view that the UNHCR [UN High Commission for Refugees] should formally extend its mandate to enable it to take on responsibility for internally displaced people resulting from natural disasters as well as those arising from conflict.

We support the approach agreed by the IASC [Inter-Agency Standing Committee] agencies, which established IOM [International Organisation for Migration] as Cluster lead for Camp Coordination and Camp Management in natural disasters and IFRC [International Federation of the Red Cross] as a “convener” of the Emergency Shelter cluster in natural disasters.

The Protection Cluster will be covered by either OHCHR [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights], UNICEF [UN Children’s Fund] or UNHCR [UN High Commission for Refugees] in natural disasters, depending on who is present in the country that the disaster occurs in and upon request by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), as these are the three mandated protection agencies within the humanitarian system.

UNHCR would therefore be responsible for the protection of internally displaced people resulting from a natural disaster if requested by the ERC.

We understand that UNHCR has now issued a letter to the International Development Committee with some comments on their recommendations.¹ We also received a copy of the letter and are considering the comments.

[Paragraph 64] We conclude that the IASC [Inter-Agency Standing Committee] should systematically review organisational aspects of the way the cluster approach was implemented in Pakistan in order to refine the system.

We agree that there was confusion in the cluster approach in Pakistan. It had only just been agreed when the Pakistan earthquake hit and work on developing guidance notes for field staff had not yet started. Following the earthquake, OCHA [UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs] developed guidelines for field staff, including terms of reference for cluster lead agencies in the field. In July, OCHA also set up a Humanitarian Reform Support Unit (HRSU) to work through some of the issues with the cluster

¹ See Appendix 2

approach. The HRSU has recently developed a “Revised Cluster Guidance Note” which gives definitive guidance on the principle of “provider of last resort”. This was discussed and updated at an Inter-Agency Standing Committee meeting on 15–17 November and endorsed by the IASC Principals on 12 December and made public on the IASC website following that endorsement.

The cluster approach was intended to increase accountability and predictability. We think it is making progress. The HRSU and cluster lead agencies are undertaking further work to improve the way clusters work.

[Paragraph 71] We approve of DFID’s decision to support the “four ones” initiative and think that the UK should work with other major donors to the UN to find ways to provide incentives for UN agencies to increase their co-ordination through such mechanisms.

We agree. We are working with other donors and the UN agencies to strengthen incentives and mechanisms to coordinate humanitarian action by UN agencies.

[Paragraph 73] We recommend that UN agencies give particular consideration to prior coordination experience and leadership skills when recruiting staff to coordinate clusters, and suggest that pre-emptive training be provided for staff who are likely to take on such roles in the future.

We agree. DFID supported the 2006 Cluster Appeal which included some pre-emptive training programmes for individual clusters and the development of rapid-deployment rosters for well-trained technical specialists within the clusters. DFID is also supporting an OCHA training programme for Humanitarian Coordinators.

[Paragraph 80] Merely increasing the human and financial resources available to UN-OCHA will not solve the difficulties it experiences in fulfilling its role. We believe that the member states of the UN should press the UN Secretary General to devolve greater powers to the ERC [Emergency Relief Co-ordinator] and his team of humanitarian coordinators, in order to increase their capacity to achieve their coordination and leadership remit

We agree this is an area worth exploring further. At present, Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) rely largely on their powers of persuasion to influence the planning and implementation of humanitarian response. Strengthening the mandate of the ERC and his representatives would help but we recognise that it would be hard to achieve the required consensus among member states and the UN agencies to deliver this. That is why we have been investing in other ways of bolstering the authority of HCs. Improved recruitment and training are needed. And providing HCs with financial resources through Common Funds is also proving effective in strengthening the HC role.

[Para 84] We recommend that DFID urge UN humanitarian agencies to accelerate their efforts to achieve an equitable gender balance in professional staff operating at both headquarters and field level, as well as paying attention to the gender balance within its own humanitarian team.

We will continue to encourage staff diversity, including gender balance, in our discussions with humanitarian partners. Our own humanitarian team already has a good (almost equal) gender balance.

Reform of the Humanitarian Sector: Financing

[Paragraph 89] As unmet humanitarian needs already exist, and overall humanitarian need is increasing, we recommend that the Secretary of State make a commitment to increase the proportion of DFID's spending accounted for by humanitarian assistance in line with the Department's overall budget.

DFID's humanitarian policy states (para 51) that as "UK aid budgets rise, so DFID's humanitarian spending will increase". We remain committed to this. Whilst we do not believe that it is appropriate to establish a target for this increase, we are undertaking an economic analysis to establish better what our level of humanitarian funding should be.

[Paragraph 94] We hope that other donors will follow DFID's lead by contributing to the CERF [Central Emergency Response Fund], forgoing their desire to 'flag' their humanitarian contributions in the interests of facilitating the rapid and equitable disbursement of funds by the ERC [Emergency Relief Co-ordinator].

We agree. DFID is continuing to lobby other donors to increase their contributions to the CERF. The CERF donor conference on 7 December 2006 raised \$343.5 million for the 2007 CERF—a 25% increase over 2006. Although CERF funding does not allow direct attribution of donor funding to any given humanitarian intervention, OCHA does publish a list of donor contributions. This enables donors to estimate their contributions to humanitarian assistance via the CERF mechanism.

[Paragraph 102] We support DFID's commitment to improving the flash appeals system, and request that in twelve months time, DFID reports back to us on its progress on this issue.

We will report back in 12 months. We welcome the new Guidelines for Flash Appeals released by the IASC CAP [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Consolidated Appeals Process] sub-working group in October 2006 as a start towards improving the process. The guidelines state that any changes in the flash appeal made at agency HQ level must show evidence of approval of the Resident/ Humanitarian Coordinator.

[Paragraph 105] We recommend that DFID uses its reviews of its Institutional Strategies for working with International Organisations to emphasise the importance of the way in which funds are disbursed to partner (NGO) agencies

We will incorporate this into our dialogue with the agencies. We remain committed to working with NGOs alongside the Red Cross movement and the UN in responding to humanitarian emergencies.

[Paragraph 107] We recommend that DFID offices in countries prone to natural disasters be encouraged proactively to establish links with, and build the capacity of, national NGOs in the time between disasters, in order to support their ability to apply successfully for DFID funding when disasters occur.

We are already funding international organisations and NGOs who work with national partners to build their capacity to reduce disaster risk at the local level. For example, we have an institutional strategy with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to build up the response capacities of national Red Cross/Crescent societies in disaster prone countries. In the current round of the Conflict Humanitarian Fund we have invited bidders to explicitly set out how they will build up a capacity of national NGOs. And in emergencies, we remain firmly committed to supporting national NGOs, directly where possible, as they are often best placed to respond effectively to local needs.

Reform of the Humanitarian Sector: Measuring Needs and Performance

[Paragraph 112] We look forward to hearing about DFID's progress on benchmarking.

Cluster lead agencies are committed to formalising standards and indicators in their sectors. DFID is working with other donors to improve information systems, with a particular emphasis on improving the quality of mortality and malnutrition data. We will report back further to the Committee on the outcome of this work in 12 months.

[Paragraph 115] We recommend that DFID gives detailed consideration to the issue of how to monitor and evaluate the work of its partner agencies in countries where conflict or other dangerous conditions make first-hand assessments by DFID staff infrequent or impossible.

DFID staff can work in or visit almost all countries where our partners work, sometimes with security measures. In the very exceptional locations where first-hand DFID assessments are impossible we review how to monitor and evaluate our partner agencies' work case by case.

[Paragraph 124] We recommend that DFID clarifies its approach to ensuring the involvement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its humanitarian activities, and affirms its commitment to tackling this issue at headquarters as well as field level. The involvement of beneficiaries should include opportunities for recipient states and populations to input into dialogue on and review of proposals for humanitarian reform.

We affirm our commitment to tackling this. A first step will be to address it through our new guidelines for project funding, which will require our partners to describe their approach. We will consult further with the Humanitarian Accountability Project International to examine other ways in which we can progress this. We agree that all countries—recipients as well as donors—should be involved in discussion on humanitarian reform.

[Paragraph 126] Although DFID’s advocacy for GHD [Good Humanitarian Donorship] is valuable, the Department needs to make sure that it continues to be seen as a sector-wide initiative and not purely as a UK driven agenda. The GHD process also needs to engage NGOs and civil society who could potentially use GHD as a framework for evaluating donors’ work. In future inquiries which touch on humanitarian issues we will consider the extent to which DFID is adhering to the GHD principles it has championed.

The GHD principles have been formally endorsed by the DAC [OECD Development Assistance Committee], humanitarian issues are now part of DAC peer reviews and a new definition of humanitarian assistance has been agreed by its statistics group. These decisions were made by the 23 members of the DAC, and we recognise the importance of continued joint donor commitment to the GHD initiative. We agree that the GHD process needs to engage with NGOs and civil society and have invited them to do so. With the exception of Oxfam, ODI [the Overseas Development Institute] and a handful of others, NGOs have been slow to use the GHD framework fully. Development Initiatives have published an independent analysis of progress against existing GHD indicators (“Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006”). We welcome the decision by the Committee to use GHD principles as a framework in future inquiries.

Operational Issues

[Paragraph 140] We recommend that, in the interests of transparency, DFID publishes any documents relating to its decision-making processes for logistics in relation to the humanitarian response in Pakistan to the South Asia Earthquake and in Indonesia to the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster. We would like to see evidence of the projects costs of the different options which were considered for the transportation and delivery of assistance by the different actors, and the actual costs of the options which were selected, including how much was paid to military agents.

We will be happy to share our working documents on this with the Committee and will write to the Clerk separately.

[Paragraphs 139 & 141] We recommend that DFID uses this opportunity to initiate the development of a joint FCO/MOD/DFID policy framework delineating the respective roles of each department and that of the military, in civil-military operations taking place in the context of humanitarian situations. This framework should be based on existing best practice and guidelines identified under the IASC, and consistent with the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. We support Action Aid International’s recommendation that: “in order to support democratic processes in both rapid onset and complex emergencies the role of the military should be governed by parliamentary oversight”.

We agree. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was agreed in October 2006 between DFID and MOD—in consultation with FCO and Cabinet Office. This sets out the principles and processes for collaboration in major natural disasters. The MOU is consistent with the UN guidelines for the use of military and civil defence assets in humanitarian operations (the so-called “Oslo Guidelines”), the relevant IASC Reference Paper, and other principles of best practice. The MOU will be reviewed as needed and at least 6-monthly.

[Paragraphs 143 & 144] We recommend that DFID reviews its policy on “flagging”. DFID should stipulate that where the UK has provided more than 50% of the funding for a programme of humanitarian assistance to be delivered by the partner agency, that agency should not advertise its own name or logo in connection with that programme without also displaying DFID’s name or logo. We recommend that, wherever possible, labels identifying DFID’s participation in or funding of a project should be translated into the local language.

We have recently introduced a new “branding” policy whereby the DFID logo will be displayed if it is appropriate, practical and safe to do so. We are reluctant to impose DFID branding on our partner agencies, even where we have provided most of their funding, but we do ask them to acknowledge DFID support in their publicity material.

Disaster Risk Reduction

[Paragraph 162] We recommend that, in addition to investing in the development of early warning systems for slow-onset disasters, DFID works with other donors and UN agencies to find ways of improving the predictability of responses to slow-onset disasters, making use of the data produced by existing early warning systems.

We are already working with UN agencies to find ways of improving the predictability of responses to slow-onset disasters. We have been in discussions with the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation on expanding pilot work in this area to drought-prone regions of Africa. We are also talking to other donors about how to develop and use early warning indicators to guide funding decisions.

[Paragraph 171] We commend DFID's commitment to spend 10% of its budget for any specific humanitarian response on DRR [Disaster Risk Reduction]. We recommend that DFID extend this commitment to apply to its total humanitarian budget rather than just specific emergencies.

We agree with the Report's emphasis on the importance of adequate investment in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). DFID is committed to allocating 10% of the funding it provides in response to each natural disaster to prepare for and mitigate the impact of future disasters, where DFID's response is over £500,000 and this can be done effectively. The 10% commitment has proved a useful tool to engage national governments on the need for risk reduction.

DFID's total humanitarian spending is around £650 million a year, although the exact spend varies with the scale and frequency of disasters. It would be difficult at this stage to programme effectively an increase in the resources allocated to DRR to around £65 million a year. But we are planning to scale up gradually in line with the capacity of partners and where we can develop sensible proposals.

[Paragraph 172] We believe that DFID should seek to persuade other donors to follow the lead they have begun to take, and devote at least 10% of their total humanitarian budget to DRR. The UK needs to encourage other EU member states to reflect their growing political commitment to DRR in their funding decisions for DG-ECHO [EC Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid]. We urge DFID to continue its advocacy to persuade the World Bank to increase its investment in DRR.

We agree that other donors should increase their spending on DRR. We have been encouraging other donors to match our 10% commitment. Several donors are writing their own DRR policies and have consulted us on our experience. Gareth Thomas, DFID's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, has encouraged the European Commission to do more in this area. The Commission's Development Directorate has now set up a team to work specifically on DRR in the Sustainable Natural Resources Management Unit. They are developing a policy paper to set out their approach.

We will continue to work closely with the World Bank on incorporating DRR in Poverty Reduction Strategies and other national policy mechanisms, as well as raising the profile of DRR within the Bank.

[Paragraph 176] If DRR is to be effectively mainstreamed throughout DFID's humanitarian and development work, so that DFID staff as well as partner agencies and governments understand the priority which DFID accords to it, the Department is likely to need to increase its staff capacity in this area.

We agree. We are introducing DRR staff training modules in 2007 across disaster-prone country offices. The purpose of these is to increase understanding amongst DFID staff of what DRR is and how to incorporate and implement risk reduction at the country level. We have identified DRR Focal Points in these fourteen priority disaster-prone country

offices to take forward the DRR policy commitments, and we have established a separate DRR team in CHASE.

[Paragraph 177] We recommend that, where appropriate, DFID considers the possibility of funding the HPA [Health Protection Agency] to contribute to the Department's work on public health protection.

The HPA is likely to be involved in epidemiological and virus isolation work if and when the WHO avian influenza alert system reaches Phase IV (i.e. isolated but sustainable human-to-human transmission with the risk of triggering a pandemic). We have discussed DFID's potential operational humanitarian response in case of a Phase IV alert with HPA. HPA is now advising us on their capabilities to help us determine if there are elements that we might wish to call upon in an avian influenza (or other infectious disease) emergency.

[Paragraph 181] The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State recently announced the funding of climate change adaptation initiatives by DFID. We applaud this move and urge DFID to ensure that it funds adaptation work at a grass-roots level, as well as policy-level processes.

We recognise that DRR and climate change adaptation are closely linked. We are encouraging our partners working on DRR at grass roots level, such as NGOs and the Red Cross Movement, to include climate change adaptation in their approach. Many are already doing so.

DFID has provided £20 million over 3 years to the United Nations adaptation funds which are available to partner governments to mobilise community participation on climate change adaptation.

DFID is also funding a research programme of £24 million over 5 years to develop pilot community responses to climate change and use the adaptation knowledge generated to influence policy.

We will also be carrying out joint climate and disaster risk assessments in several countries in 2007 to identify risks and how to address them.

[Paragraph 184] We recommend that, within the next six months, DFID follows up the positive rhetoric on climate change contained within its 2006 White Paper with a detailed action plan setting out specific actions and measurable targets. This action plan should demonstrate how DFID plans to turn its research and rhetoric into action, and enable us to hold the Department to account for its work on climate change.

DFID's strategy for climate change includes work on mitigation and adaptation as described below. Action plans are being developed with the input of other government departments (Defra, HMT and FCO).

Future Action on Global Greenhouse Gas Reduction

DFID is working with the Centre for Clean Air Policy to help developing country climate negotiators. This project with institutions and government officials in Brazil, China and India is considering options for future action to mitigate emissions. Phase 1 of the project analysed emissions projections and estimated how much it would cost to reduce emissions by changing policy and/or adopting new technologies. The macroeconomic implications of these policy options were also assessed. This phase of the project is now complete and its findings were presented at the recent United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Nairobi.

Phase 2 commenced in October and will run until 2008. This will analyse the impact of international policies on emissions and the economies of Brazil, China and India, and implications for international financial and technology transfers.

On targets, the Stern Review commissioned by the Chancellor has moved the debate forward by identifying a range of concentrations of greenhouse gases which we must stay within to avoid dangerous climate change. This range can be used to work out how far current and future emissions of greenhouse gases will have to be reduced to stay within safe limits. We will use this and other recommendations within the Review to inform our discussions and negotiations on future action. Stern describes climate change as a global problem that needs a global framework with an equitable distribution of effort. We need to make sure that developing countries are joint architects of that framework.

Clean Energy Investment Framework

DFID is working with the World Bank to finalise the Bank's Energy Investment Framework in 2007, which will be linked to similar Frameworks being developed by the Regional Development Banks. Together these frameworks should begin to deliver substantial additional public and private investment in alternative sources of energy and energy efficiency. DFID will provide funds to the Banks to help with this work over the next three years.

Adaptation

DFID is contributing £20 million over three years to the UN to help developing countries develop adaptation strategies. We are funding two staff to support the World Bank's work on integrating climate risk management into Bank lending operations. And we have committed a further £5 million over 5 years as part of a wider G8 commitment to improve the management of short-term climate risk in Africa.

DFID is also undertaking climate and disaster risk assessments in selected countries. These risk assessments will provide a basis for our future work with government and non-government partners on adaptation.

The Relationship between Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid

[Paragraph 190] The Department must continue its advocacy to ensure that by 2010 all the multilateral agencies which HMG funds for humanitarian work are allocating at least 10% of their funds to DRR. In the longer term we would like to see the proportion of funds which all agencies spend on DRR rise beyond 10%. We are convinced that such investments will provide a substantial return in terms of reduced costs of responding to natural disasters.

We agree strongly with the Report's emphasis on the importance of adequate investment in DRR. We encourage the agencies we fund to allocate 10% of each specific disaster response to DRR. We do not however agree that agencies should set aside 10% or more of their overall humanitarian budgets. The agencies' humanitarian spending varies with the scale and frequency of disasters, whereas DRR spending can be more planned, enabling the international system to build up a realistic investment in DRR.

[Paragraph 191] Humanitarian actors should be encouraged to plan for the process of transition to development, either working through the transition themselves (where organisations are engaged in both development and humanitarian work) or engaging development actors as partners to deliver the development phase. Such plans must acknowledge that relief, recovery, reconstruction and development are rarely distinct phases and often overlap. Donors, including DFID, should be ready to recognise the value of such integrated planning and reward it with longer term, predictable funding. We believe that this would improve response to disasters by reducing competition between actors, promoting co-ordination and improving working practices.

We agree. Humanitarian and development agencies are forming a stronger understanding of their respective roles, which do indeed overlap. In reality, relief and development activities often run in parallel. It is essential that donors and agencies provide humanitarian assistance in ways that strengthen rather than inhibit longer term development.

[Paragraph 192] We agree with the finding of the OECD DAC Peer Review, that DFID should examine the lessons which can be learnt from the operation of ACHU [DFID's Africa Conflict and Humanitarian Unit] for its programmes in other geographical areas.

DFID examines the lessons from all its programmes, including those operated by its Africa Conflict and Humanitarian Unit (ACHU). We agree that ACHU's experience in Africa is applicable to our wider humanitarian and conflict-related work.

[Paragraph 197] We recommend that DFID works to promote understanding across Whitehall of the need for a rational and needs-based approach to disasters, so that HMG can work coherently to promote appropriate and equitable responses to disasters.

We agree that responses to disasters should reflect real, clearly understood needs so that the “forgotten” emergencies, as well as the higher profile ones, are met with appropriate and equitable responses. DFID will indeed continue to collaborate with others across Whitehall to achieve this objective.

Department for International Development
9 January 2007

Appendix 2: Letter from the UK Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

It was with great interest that I read the International Development Select Committee's recent report on the findings of the inquiry into the Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters.

I share the Committee's disappointment noted in paragraph 63, that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees did not submit evidence to this inquiry. I must stress that we did not ignore the call for submissions based on the notion that our work was not of relevance to the Committee's inquiry. UNHCR's core mandate is to people forced to flee due to persecution and war.

We have assisted in natural disaster-stricken regions, such as in the South Asia and Bam earthquakes and the tsunami-hit region when refugees are present, or when our expertise is sought by the Secretary-General or relevant governments. In his address to the EU's Humanitarian Aid Committee (HAC) meeting in London on 20 October 2005, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres stressed that Pakistan has a history of caring for refugees and truly needed the support of the international community, appealing to donors to combine bilateral aid for Pakistan with multilateral support, as the UN's appeal for immediate aid in response to the South Asia earthquake had then received only a very limited response.

Furthermore, a submission would have been an excellent opportunity to clarify the assertion in para. 63 that UNHCR refused to extend its mandate to include persons displaced as a result of the 8 October 2005 earthquake and, furthermore, that a decision on responsibility for camp management for natural disaster-generated IDPs was not reached in a timely manner.

UNHCR, with the largest number of staff in northern Pakistan, where we care for hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, was on the ground through the entire earthquake and assistance phase.

In a UN interagency meeting on 9 October 2005, UNHCR was assigned lead agency status for camp management. On that same day, UNHCR held a camp management cluster meeting with Oxfam, Concern, Focus, Unicef, the American Refugee Committee, Save the Children and other partner agencies. Within 72 hours of the South Asia earthquake, as head of camp management, UNHCR had provided a rough budget for camp management activities to be included in the UN Flash Appeal.

In addition to dispatching items from our warehouses in North West Frontier and Baluchistan provinces on 10 October, which was widely covered in the international media, relief items were also dispatched from UNHCR's warehouses in Afghanistan. UNHCR also dispatched convoys of goods from our stockpiles in neighbouring Iran. We launched an appeal on 13 October for helicopters to reach remote areas and to help deliver supplies.

UN Refugee Agency staff were reporting on conditions from inside Mansehera by 14 October and sending out reports from Muzaffarabad by 15 October. By 14 October, UNHCR had mounted an airlift of supplies from our stockpile in Denmark. Further items were airlifted into Pakistan from UNHCR supplies stored in Dubai, India, Jordan and Turkey. UNHCR staff, working through partner agencies, immediately began to distribute these items to quake survivors.

In its role as leader of the camp management cluster, UNHCR supported the Pakistani government in running the temporary camps set up for earthquake survivors. With UNHCR's 132 emergency staff and 55 mobile teams funded by the European Commission for Humanitarian Affairs (ECHO), the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), among other donors, the UN Refugee Agency assisted Pakistani authorities at 26 planned camps and 118 spontaneous camps caring for more than 140,000 quake survivors. In all, the UN Refugee Agency distributed more than 21,000 tents, 115,000 plastic tarpaulins, close to 850,000 blankets, 38,000 mattresses and some 25,000 stoves/heaters.

In Sri Lanka and Indonesia following the tsunami disaster, as well as following the Bam earthquake in December 2003, UNHCR staff similarly redirected items from refugee assistance programmes to victims of these disasters. UNHCR relief teams and expertise in shelter programmes played vital roles in these aid efforts which affected many refugees and internally displaced persons of concern.

As you may recall, UNHCR's main function as mandated by the United Nations remains its core assistance and protection programmes for victims of persecution and war. Of the more than 20 million people under UNHCR's care worldwide, including refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons and recent returnees, UNHCR also cares for some 6.6 million persons internally displaced in their own countries due to persecution and war.

Almost entirely funded by voluntary contributions, UNHCR's 2006 budget is £742 million, less than the cost of Wembley Stadium. However, by 30 September 2006 we had received only £508 million, leaving UNHCR unable to fully meet the needs of its core mandate group, much less new populations of concern.

We ask the Committee to support full and early funding of UNHCR's financial needs so that UNHCR may not only give refugees and other persons of concern the protection and dignity they require, but whenever possible, respond to natural disasters when they fall in areas where UNHCR has an existing presence and capacity.

I do hope that this goes some way to addressing the concerns of the Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the Committee has any questions on this matter.

Bemma Donkoh
Representative to the United Kingdom

3 November 2006