

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

October 15, 2006

Support for Reform of the Humanitarian System and the United Nations



The United Nations is in the midst of a reform movement that touches on many aspects of its work. As part of these reforms, in August 2005, an independent study of global humanitarian response capacities was commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, the head of the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). This study resulted in a number of important recommendations for changing not just the UN but the wider international humanitarian response system. Additional reforms to the humanitarian system have also been called for in other influential reports, such as creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and improvements to UN Peacekeeping capabilities and performance.

Many reforms of the UN and the humanitarian system directly impact the mission of IRC as we work closely with UN agencies around the world. IRC is an important partner of UN agencies, Intergovernmental Organizations, and National Authorities in saving lives, protecting and helping victims of conflict, and rebuilding societies recovering from war.

IRC endorses the recommendations of the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review and is constructively engaged in this and other important reforms that must take place to fill gaps in services, provide an accountable system, increase reliability, and improve predictability in humanitarian response.

IRC supports the work of the United Nations and seeks an efficient, functioning, and amply supported institution that responds effectively to humanitarian crises and conflict.

A Close Partnership with UNHCR and other UN Agencies

The IRC is a leading implementing partner for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) <http://www.unhcr.org>. In support of this partnership, IRC runs programs in the field and advocates for humane refugee policies, improved protection of people in exile, adequate funding for UNHCR's global mission, and efficient reform of UNHCR's operations and management.

An example of IRC's close partnership with UNHCR is the Protection Surge Capacity Project that is managed by the IRC's Geneva office. Through the creation and maintenance of an effective and dependable roster mechanism, the Surge Project

efficiently hires, orients, and deploys experienced protection staff to UNHCR field programs worldwide http://www.theirc.org/what/surge_protection_project.html.

The IRC also works closely with other UN agencies in the field, in international capitals, and in New York. These include:

- Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) <http://ochaonline.un.org>
- UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) <http://www.unicef.org>
- UN Development Program (UNDP) <http://www.undp.org>
- World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int>
- UN Population Fund (UNFPA) <http://www.unfpa.org>
- World Food Program (WFP) <http://www.wfp.org>

The IRC also actively participates in meetings between UN staff, UN Security Council members, government representatives, European donors, and non-governmental leaders in London, Brussels, Geneva, and other world capitals.

Key Humanitarian Reforms

The recommendations from the 2005 [Humanitarian Response Review](http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2005/ocha-gen-02sep.pdf) <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2005/ocha-gen-02sep.pdf> have become a guidepost for significant reforms of the global humanitarian response system.

The Humanitarian Response Review produced a three-pronged strategy of reform: introduction of the Cluster Approach, improvement of the Humanitarian Coordinator System, and expansion of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The IRC works closely with UN agencies in developing and implementing these reform initiatives. IRC also collaborates with UN-OCHA's Humanitarian Reform Support Unit to provide input and a non-governmental perspective.

The Cluster Approach – In a renewed effort to fill gaps in humanitarian response and improve accountability, predictability, and reliability, the humanitarian community has developed the Cluster Approach to respond to international crises. Under this approach, clusters of UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations and national authorities step forward to handle pre-assigned roles and previously-agreed responsibilities in a crisis.

Some have criticized the Cluster Approach for being too “UN-centric”. In initial attempts to use the Cluster Approach, IRC and others complained that additional meetings and layers of bureaucracy were cumbersome and, at times, did not improve the accountability gap that it was meant to address. Despite its flaws, IRC believes that this effort is a vital reform of a humanitarian system that at times has lacked accountability, predictability, and reliability. IRC has an institutional commitment of “constructive engagement” with the development and roll-out of the Cluster Approach.

The chart below lists the activity areas and the designated agencies that are assigned leadership roles. An additional cluster for leading Education in Emergencies has been proposed but not yet ratified. The IRC supports this additional cluster.

| Cluster | Agency Lead |
|--|---|
| Water and Sanitation* | UNICEF |
| Nutrition | UNICEF |
| Health* | WHO |
| Emergency Shelter | UNHCR (in conflict settings) and IFRC (in natural disasters) |
| Emergency Telecommunications | OCHA |
| Logistics | WFP |
| Camp Coordination and Camp Management* | UNHCR (in conflict settings) and IOM (in natural disasters) |
| Early Recovery | UNDP |
| Protection* | UNHCR |

(The asterisk * designates clusters in which the IRC serves on global working groups and contributes a particular expertise.)

Humanitarian Coordinator System – In a humanitarian emergency, a senior UN staff member in country – often the UN’s Resident Representative – serves as the overall coordinator for the relief effort. This tradition has had uneven success in its implementation. The UN’s Resident Representative can become deeply involved in policy discussions in capitals and this can distract from or compete with his or her role as a leader of life-saving humanitarian efforts and a spokesperson for those in need.

Under this reform initiative, the UN will seek Humanitarian Coordinators from the wider humanitarian community including non-governmental organizations to increase the pool of experienced and effective leaders. The UN wants to select better Humanitarian Coordinators, improve their training and pre-deployment preparation, and hold them more accountable.

IRC also supports the assignment of Humanitarian Coordinators in addition to UN Resident Coordinators in countries undergoing emergencies. IRC believes that this step would ensure full attention to humanitarian needs in a crisis.

Expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) – The expanded CERF was launched in March 2006. This expanded UN funding mechanism will make grants to UN agencies from a corpus of US\$500 million in the early days of an emergency. The expanded CERF will also jump-start life-saving relief operations before traditional sources of funding become available and will provide crucial funding for lesser-known and under-funded crises.

The UN plans to manage the CERF with full transparency and stringent management oversight under the administration of OCHA. Pledges and expenditures will be readily accessible to the public on the Internet.

The success of the expanded CERF will depend on the generosity of donor governments to keep the fund replenished on a regular and timely basis.

IRC supports the expanded CERF on the understanding that governments and other donors will not reallocate money away from existing programs in order to contribute to the CERF. IRC agrees with other institutions that the expanded CERF should be on top – and not at the expense – of existing funding sources.

IRC regrets that international non-governmental organizations do not have direct access to this fund and can only receive support indirectly through partnerships with specialized UN agencies. In an emergency, UN agencies are highly dependent on partnerships with the more nimble NGOs for delivering programs in the field. IRC supports the expanded CERF if it succeeds in responding flexibly and rapidly and maintains a modest administrative cost structure.

For more information on the expanded CERF, see “Update on Humanitarian Reform” <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2006/ocha-gen-31mar.pdf> or <http://ochaonline2.un.org/Default.aspx?tabid=7951> which provides a real-time updates on pledges and contributions to the CERF fund.

Support for UN Peacekeeping

IRC staff work alongside UN peacekeepers in several countries around the world. In some places, UN peacekeepers protect refugees and the displaced and provide a zone of security within which relief operations can be carried out. The UN is exploring use of *integrated missions* that combine the UN’s security, humanitarian, and development roles to facilitate a return to peace and stability in countries recovering from war.

The IRC’s mission is consistent with the UN in this regard and IRC supports robust operations that allow for a return to peace and stability in countries transitioning from conflict.

There have been instances in some peacekeeping operations where peacekeepers have betrayed the very people they have been sent to serve. Instead of being protected, women and children have been occasionally sexually abused or exploited.

The IRC supports initiatives that ensure that alleged incidents of sexual abuse by peacekeepers and other relief personnel are reported, investigated and prosecuted.

Support for UN Peacebuilding Commission

The UN Peacebuilding Commission was developed to fill a gap in the international community's ability to respond to crises. It is intended to help countries emerging from conflict and reduce the long-term need for recurring peacekeeping operations. IRC supports the goals of this initiative.

The UN Peacebuilding Commission plays an advisory role covering such areas as conflict prevention, conflict mediation, peacekeeping operations, human rights, rule of law, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and long-term development.

Specifically the UN Peacebuilding Commission will:

- propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery
- help ensure predictable financing for rehabilitation
- keep international attention on a situation even after the crisis has past
- develop best practices, especially in situations where diplomats, uniformed military, humanitarian workers, and development experts work together

Support from Donors

A functioning, efficient, and effective United Nations deserves the support of its member states. For this reason IRC calls on donor governments to support the United Nations by paying their annual dues on time, increasing support in response to targeted appeals, contributing assets, troops, equipment, and/or training to peacekeeping efforts, and following through with pledges they have made.