



AID AGENCIES CALL FOR STRONG AGREEMENT TO ADDRESS 'HUMANITARIAN SHOCKS' OF CLIMATE CHANGE

(Bonn, 8 June 2009): A group of key UN and non-UN aid agencies attending climate change talks in Bonn this week are calling for the humanitarian impacts of climate change to be addressed in the successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen in December.

Joining forces, the 18 organizations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) argue that the next agreement on climate change has to take the humanitarian perspective into account. It is also essential for the agreement to set out a workable approach to help the world counter the impacts of extreme weather events and environmental degradation on vulnerable communities.

“The scale of the potential humanitarian challenge presented by climate change in the future is huge. This is a defining moment to ensure that the challenge is not insurmountable and human suffering is minimised,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

There are three paramount concerns: First, the total number of people affected by disasters has risen sharply over the past decade with an average of 211 million people directly affected each year, nearly five times the number affected by conflict in the same period.

Extreme and slow-onset climate events – such as floods, storms, droughts, rising sea levels and desertification – are impacting more and more people each year, adversely affecting human lives and livelihoods in many communities. The most vulnerable, including women and children, are those already struggling with poverty, insecurity, hunger, poor health and environmental decline.

Second, climate change is expected to dramatically affect patterns of migration and population movement. While migration is already a form of adaptation for some, the many millions expected to be displaced by prolonged droughts, repeated floods or storms will be especially vulnerable and require significant assistance and protection.

More than 20 million people have been displaced by climate-related sudden-onset natural disasters in 2008 alone, according to a new study by the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“For the first time, we have a solid indication of the scale of forced displacement as a result of sudden-onset natural disasters in the context of climate change”, said NRC Secretary General Elisabeth Rasmusson.

Third, the Copenhagen agreement presents a rare opportunity to shape and guide the international response to the humanitarian consequences of climate change over the next decade. With the right approach, many of these consequences can be averted or reduced over the next decade. The humanitarian community – with its expertise, systems and partnerships – can help to manage these disaster risks.

But adapting to these climatic shocks will need a new humanitarian business model – one that focuses on prevention and preparedness activities and that also strengthens national and local capacities to cope with the future impact of climate disasters.

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