
STRENGTHENING THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

By

Madeline K. Albright
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

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Mr. President, I welcome the opportunity to address the General Assembly today regarding the pressing subject of humanitarian assistance.

The community of nations should do all it reasonably can to relieve the suffering resulting from natural and human-caused disaster. But meeting this responsibility is growing more difficult. Devastation wrought by nature's fury is more than matched by the fury and folly of humankind. Ethnic and other subnational conflicts have created unprecedented demands for U.N. help. The number of displaced persons and refugees—the international homeless—is at an all-time high. The fabric of the international relief system has been stretched taut.

Over the years, U.N. agencies with a relief role have saved countless lives. There are enormous grounds for pride in what has been accomplished. But when we contemplate current and future challenges, there are no grounds for complacency.

A look around the world tells us that the infectious consequences of conflict continue to spread. Africa alone is home to a dozen ongoing insurgencies and 6 million refugees. Fighting in the Caucasus has prompted Iran to set up refugee camps inside Azerbaijan. Armenia faces a second harsh winter cut off from adequate supplies of food, water, and power. Hundreds of thousands are threatened in Georgia and Tajikistan. More than 2 million Afghans and 1 million Iraqi Kurds remain in need. And in Bosnia the war continues, and the suffering grows worse.

The quantity of resources available to respond to those emergencies has not kept pace with rising demand. There is a risk of donor fatigue and, potentially, even donor collapse. Already, the gap between needs and responses in many locations is enormous.

All this makes efficiency a matter of much more than bureaucratic interest. Let us never forget that the stakes are not statistics or politics or camera placements and news stories. Rather, what is at stake is life or death for blameless children and grandparents and mothers and fathers. Their fate depends upon our choices. My government believes that the U.N. system must choose to become more efficient and professional in coordinating its disaster relief programs.

The effort to reform U.N. humanitarian programs extends back at least to the creation of the U.N. Disaster Relief Office in 1972. UNDRO was supposed to improve coordination, eliminate duplication, and put someone clearly in charge. It didn't. So two years ago, we created a Department of Humanitarian Affairs, or DHA, with new tools to do the same job and more.

Although DHA's efforts have been spread thin by the new wave of humanitarian emergencies, its work has begun to take root. Consolidated appeals have been established. The Central Emergency Revolving Fund has helped speed aid to victims. The Inter-Agency Standing

Committee could become an effective coordinating forum for U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations. The effectiveness of these tools will be enhanced further as the conclusions reached at ECOSOC this past summer are implemented.

As I will describe in greater detail, my government is prepared to help bolster DHA in conjunction with reforms within that department. We are pleased that Under Secretary General Eliasson is taking steps to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of DHA, and we fully support him in this effort. We also believe that DHA capabilities need to be reinforced in three critical areas.

First, DHA must have the recognized leadership role, the authority, and the resources to ensure that the U.N.'s rapid response to emergencies is properly coordinated. DHA must be the party responsible for systems-wide performance in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies.

Second, DHA must have a modern information system encompassing all emergency requirements. This includes providing data on assessed needs and tracking the capabilities and contributions of agencies and donors in response to those needs.

The United States already provides funds for the International Emergency Readiness and Response Information System. As part of a joint initiative with Japan, the United States is now prepared to make two new commitments as DHA implements its reforms. We will give DHA the equipment necessary to establish a modern information network system in New York which can be linked to Geneva and the field. And we will provide five portable satellite communications earth stations for links with field offices in emergencies. The total value of this new U.S. contribution exceeds \$500,000. We are pleased that the Government of Japan is able to join us in contributing to this critical information function, and we invite others to do so as well.

Third, and finally, DHA needs the resources necessary to coordinate a rapid response by the U.N. to an emergency where insufficient capacity exists in the field. DHA must determine when field deployments are required, including its own when necessary, and must be responsible for seeing that sufficient resources are put in place. Accordingly, we urge that DHA be given access to the interest earned by the Central Emergency Revolving Fund for this purpose until a permanent solution is found.

Let me also mention the role Under Secretary General Eliasson has played. He has established a new department in the midst of an unprecedented increase in humanitarian emergencies. He has worked to help those at risk, whether from drought in Southern Africa, from civil violence in the wintry hills of Georgia, or from other forms of catastrophe. So I am particularly pleased to announce today these new contributions to support DHA.

I would also like to address myself to the U.N. humanitarian agencies which I hope are represented here today. As I have said, you all have our gratitude for your dedication and extraordinary hard work. However, the United States believes that DHA is not the only part of the U.N. humanitarian system that needs to be strengthened. We urge the U.N. humanitarian agencies to cooperate with DHA and to accept its leadership in coordinating responses to complex emergencies. That may require some loss of customary independence, but it will result in major gains in overall effectiveness.

It is also vital that the Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs ensure that the humanitarian dimension is incorporated into the planning and execution of political and peace-keeping missions. The delivery of emergency relief is often among the primary purposes of such a mission. It is both necessary and appropriate, therefore, that the U.N. official responsible for humanitarian affairs be involved in developing and implementing the response. Such an integrated

approach should ensure that the peacekeeping, political, and humanitarian elements of U.N. operations do not work at cross purposes.

The role of the Secretary General is also critical. In the end, his leadership will determine whether the U.N. system coordinates smoothly in responding to humanitarian crises and whether it does not. We urge him to take up this challenge forcefully.

The DHA planning effort must also emphasize early intervention. Droughts may be inevitable, but famines resulting from drought are not. Human conflicts are inevitable, but destructive wars resulting from such conflicts are not. Early intervention requires good information, which means U.N. departments and agencies must pool their data. It requires a willingness on the part of the U.N. to respond quickly and appropriately to threatened emergencies. And it requires decisive leadership both from U.N. officials, and from member states.

Finally, planning for disaster relief must emphasize the continuum between emergency help and development. Whenever we respond to an emergency, we should begin preparing for changes from relief to recovery. Today, there is not better example of this need than Somalia. I, myself, saw that relief efforts in that country have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Agricultural lands once ravaged by violence are now under cultivation. Children who seemed to have no futures are now returning to school. Basic health needs are being given attention. Somalia is entering the recovery phase.

The test now is whether Somalis are willing and able to take the steps that will make an enduring recovery possible. The conference scheduled for November 29 in Addis Ababa is a key opportunity. If Somali leaders demonstrate their own commitment to peace, which is the prerequisite for development, international donors will respond. If they fail to do so, the space for effective international action will diminish.

The United States is prepared to lead by example. At the Addis Ababa conference, we will announce an assistance package to Somalia of approximately \$100 million in new and programmed funds. These funds will be used for humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation projects in those regions where progress on political reconciliation and security has been made. These funds will be available if, and only if, Somalis make real progress in creating a security environment and reconciling politically. We urge other donors to participate actively in this effort.

The international relief system is under grave strain. We should respond by strengthening DHA and by emphasizing the kind of comprehensive approach that complex emergencies demand. We must also work together to overcome the obstacles created by political and military conflict to the delivery of emergency relief.

Although it is sometimes difficult to separate the humanitarian from other components of a peace-keeping mission, there is a difference. A combatant force may well refuse to cease hostilities, to disarm or to demobilize out of a legitimate concern for survival. But there is nothing legitimate about using force to starve or freeze innocent civilians. There is nothing legitimate about denying medical aid so that children lie screaming as legs are amputated without anesthesia. There is nothing legitimate about extorting food or other supplies meant for humanitarian relief. There is, in short, nothing legitimate about denying access to the means of human survival.

This issue of access for relief convoys and aircraft will be especially critical in Bosnia this winter. For many, it may mean the difference between mere hardship and certain death. The Bosnian people are weaker today than they were last year. Their capacity to endure hardship has been sapped. If fighting continues, the number in need will be far greater and the gravity of their need far more severe than last winter.

The international community is responding. The Sarajevo airlift has now gone on longer than the Berlin airlift 45 years ago. Pilots from 20 countries have flown more than 6,000 flights over 500 days. America alone has contributed more than \$400 million to the relief effort. The U.S. Department of Defense has developed a new food ration that is high in nutrition; it can survive a 10,000 foot airdrop and requires no water or fuel for preparation. And 80 percent of the airdrops in Bosnia have been from American planes.

U.N. agencies have made plans for this winter. So have the nongovernmental organizations. We are all prepared and preparing to do more. The U.S. is prepared to make a major contribution to address needs during the upcoming winter in Bosnia, and we hope this will encourage other donors to make similar contributions. We congratulate Mrs. Ogata on achieving an agreement between the parties in Bosnia to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance by suspending hostilities and allowing free and unconditional access to those in need.

We must strive to convince those of all factions and nations, in former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, not to interfere with the delivery of emergency aid. One of our great challenges is to establish the principle that the U.N. has a nonviolable right to deliver humanitarian relief and that the victims of violence have an equal right to receive it.

In closing, I want to thank you once again for the opportunity to discuss these issues with you today. Because of the very great challenges we face, it is as important as it has ever been that we work together to advance our common goals. Because the need is so great, our efforts, too, must be great. We must rise above institutional jealousies and move beyond the promise of reform to the reality of change. And we must keep the faith that each child fed, each refugee housed, each family reunited will inspire others to join with us in reducing the toll of tragedy in this troubled world.