



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON

AT THE

**OPENING OF THE PLENARY DEBATE ON THE
STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF
HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF
ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS,
INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE**

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

NEW YORK

14 NOVEMBER 2005

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special honour for me to open today's plenary debate on the issue of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. 14 years ago I was personally involved in the negotiations and adoption of resolution 46/182, which created the basic framework and several of the main features of the United Nations' coordination of international humanitarian assistance.

During the last year, the world has witnessed natural disasters of unprecedented scope and magnitude, from the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami in late December to the disastrous earthquake that struck South Asia in early October. As of today, the death toll in Pakistan is still rising and thousands of people are in danger of freezing to death as winter sets in. A particularly intense and destructive hurricane season has left many thousands homeless, as countries in the Caribbean as well as Central and North America continue to grapple with the effects of the severe flooding and mudslides these storms left behind.

Elsewhere, conflict-based emergencies continue with varying intensity. Formerly warring parties in southern Sudan have signed a peace accord and entered a period of reconciliation. However, the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. Food insecurity, fuelled by a lethal combination of conflict and drought, continues to affect close to 35 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, underlining the need for innovative and creative approaches to better predict and respond to acute malnutrition while tackling the underlying causes of hunger and poverty.

The complexity of today's crises and the growing magnitude of disasters require that humanitarian assistance remains one of the highest priorities of the work of the United Nations. The 2005 World Summit offered us an opportunity to reflect on the current humanitarian system and engage in serious system-wide reforms. The events of the past year testify that reforms related to coordination and coherence are not only timely, but urgent and critical.

Specifically, the Outcome Document from the Summit reiterates the importance of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It further reinforces the need for safe and unhindered access by humanitarian actors to populations in need. It calls upon us to strengthen the capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters and to improve the use of emergency stand-by capacities under United Nations auspices for rapid response to humanitarian emergencies. Finally, it calls for better predictability of humanitarian funding, notably by improving the current Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

For more than a decade, the Fund has played an important role in providing United Nations agencies with readily available resources to allow them to respond quickly to humanitarian emergencies. However, owing to its limited size and revolving nature, the Fund has faced difficulties in fulfilling its aim of ensuring the provision of adequate resources for use in the initial phase of emergencies. The proposed improved CERF, which will include a grant element, aims to promote early response in sudden onset crises as well as to strengthen the core elements of humanitarian response in under-funded crises.

Today's debate is based on several reports from the Secretary-General, including one on sub-item c) on the Chernobyl disaster. As next year will mark the 20th anniversary of this disaster, we are reminded that both national and international efforts are still required to study, mitigate and minimize its long-term consequences.

There is also a report on sub-item d) on assistance to the Palestinian people. Humanitarian assistance from the United Nations remains an urgent necessity for the Palestinian people.

Three draft resolutions have been submitted for action today: 1) on the South Asian Earthquake disaster, 2) on the Chernobyl disaster and 3) on the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.

I look forward to constructive, creative and compassionate deliberations during today's debate. Behind the issues of today's discussions are hundreds of thousands of human beings in grave need, and in far too many cases in mortal danger. Our solidarity with them must be unwavering.