

19 August 2010

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki,
President of the 64th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on Agenda
Item: Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster
relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic
assistance**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Ministries,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we meet, an unprecedented humanitarian disaster is unfolding in Pakistan. A staggering 20 million people stand affected by heavy rains and devastating floods. The number was estimated at around 14 million only 6 days ago when I decided to convene this meeting. The pace at which this crisis has escalated is astounding. The resultant human tragedy is heart rending. As they await help, hundreds of thousands of survivors are at serious risk. This is an extraordinary emergency situation. It requires an extraordinary response.

Today's meeting is a part of that response. It is also a direct and timely manifestation of the extraordinary convening power of the General Assembly. The high-level participation reflects the seriousness attached to the situation by the international community. This meeting, I am sure, will send out a strong message to Pakistan and its people that the world stands by them in these difficult times. It is a solemn occasion to express our solidarity and sympathy with the affected populations. More than that, today's meeting is demonstrative of the international community's commitment to act, an opportunity to step forward and show to the people and the Government of Pakistan that we are ready and willing to assist them in every possible way.

Excellencies,
Natural and environmental disasters have also struck recently other parts of Asia and beyond, causing widespread destruction and loss of life. Severe flooding and landslides in China have taken a heavy toll, with more than 1200 people killed and hundreds still missing. There has been significant destruction and loss of life due to floods in India. In Russia, wildfires have killed dozens of people and erased whole villages and city suburbs, affecting thousands more. Let me convey our condolences and solidarity with all the affected populations on these tragic losses.

Coming back to Pakistan, it is there that we are confronted with one of the most challenging disasters in recent years. I commend the efforts and determination of the people and the Government of Pakistan in coping with the situation. However, given the magnitude of the challenge, they cannot do it alone.

International assistance must complement and support the national efforts.

The immensity and scale of this catastrophe is shocking. Over 10% of the population of Pakistan is now affected. An estimated 20% of the land area is reportedly under water. Millions of people are in immediate need of food, clean drinking water, emergency health services and shelter. We are running against time in reaching out to these people with the required assistance. The response so far has not been matching, due mainly to lack of supplies, the relief and rescue work also being hampered by infrastructure damage and continuing rains. To save lives, in particular to prevent the serious threat of waterborne diseases, we must act faster. That is the immediate priority.

It is encouraging that many Member States have stepped forward to help. The United Nations system has led the international response, providing food, clean water and temporary shelter to many but many more are yet to be reached. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was himself on the ground. The UN has launched an initial appeal for 460 million dollars to meet the most immediate needs. To date, barely half of that amount has been pledged. I call on all Member States to urgently bridge this gap.

Beyond this initial phase, a far greater and sustained commitment and support will be required for long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. Displacement of people, wide-scale destruction of homes, standing crops, livestock and other means of livelihood, in addition to extensive damage to roads, bridges, schools, health facilities and other infrastructure means billions of dollars of loss to the economy, with exact figures yet to be evaluated. This will be a huge undertaking.

Excellencies,

The draft resolution that I have presented before you, A/64/L.66, entitled “Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the wake of devastating floods in Pakistan” is in my view, an important and timely response by this Assembly to the situation at hand. It serves three main purposes:

Firstly, it expresses strong solidarity with Pakistan and the people affected by floods;
Secondly; it calls for international assistance in support of the efforts of the Government of Pakistan;
and
Thirdly; it focuses on both the emergency phase as well as the medium and long-term phases requiring rehabilitation and reconstruction.

It therefore provides an excellent framework for the international community to translate the expression of its solidarity by mobilizing and extending tangible support and assistance to Pakistan. Its adoption with your full support and consensus will be but one measure of hope and relief to the affected populations in Pakistan, letting them know that the world cares and that help is on its way.

Thank you.