

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) seeks to strengthen the coordination of the disaster and humanitarian relief efforts of the international community, in particular the UN system. It has three major roles: developing humanitarian policy, acting as an advocate for humanitarian concerns, and coordinating the humanitarian response to both complex emergencies (conflicts) and natural disasters. OCHA is headed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland of Norway, who is also designated as the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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OCHA's Headquarters are split between New York and Geneva allowing close collaboration with both the political and peace-keeping departments of the United Nations in New York and with the humanitarian agencies based in Geneva. The New York office has primary responsibility for policy

planning and coordination and early warning functions. The Geneva office, directed by Ross Mountain of New Zealand, focuses on providing support for field coordination during natural disasters and complex emergencies. OCHA has field presence in 38 locations.

The UN's main goal in humanitarian action is to help civilian victims of conflicts (often referred to within the UN as "complex emergencies") and natural disasters, by providing food, shelter and other forms of assistance. Typically, multiple United Nations agencies are involved, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, and other agencies. When a major crisis breaks out, such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998 in the Caribbean, or when assistance is needed for refugees fleeing a conflict such as in East Timor or Kosovo, OCHA coordinates the international humanitarian response. More recently, OCHA took the lead in coordinating international response to the crises in Afghanistan, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, while continuing to coordinate assistance for some 20 other complex emergencies.

OCHA's predecessor, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), was created in 1992 to address the need for a coherent framework for the coordination of humanitarian aid. As part of the UN Secretary-General's reform program, the department was renamed in 1998 and given a sharper focus on inter-agency cooperation and streamlined procedures for supporting field coordination.

In 2002, OCHA staff spearheaded or supported coordination efforts in 20 complex emergencies and 67 natural disasters, including the earthquake in Goma, the drought in southern Africa and the continuing food crisis in the Horn of Africa as well as in troubled regions of the world such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, West

FOCUSING ON ASSISTANCE FOR IDPs

The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) forced from their homes within their own countries as a result of war and civil conflict has grown in recent years to over 25 million. It is estimated that a further 25 million may be displaced as a result of man-made or natural disasters. These groups are of rising concern to the humanitarian community since they do not fall into the traditional category of “refugees” who by definition have crossed a national border. Within the existing international system, there is no one agency mandated to help IDPs, and they often do not have access to international assistance or support. Given the scope and magnitude of the displacement phenomenon, different agencies are called to assist and protect the internally displaced on the basis of their mandates and comparative advantages when they are located in regions that are inaccessible due to on-going conflicts. In the worst cases, warring parties in a civil conflict may deliberately prevent delivery of aid, or even abduct displaced civilians as forced labor, army recruits or sexual slaves.

OCHA created an Internal Displacement Unit in 2002 and has made progress in ensuring that the needs of IDPs are addressed. For example, the unit has begun conducting a series of workshops and training sessions to promote awareness of IDP issues and support for them in the field. Following a workshop held in Indonesia in May 2002, the Government of Indonesia announced a new IDP policy addressing the needs of 1.2 million internally displaced persons. OCHA has conducted or supported similar workshops in Cote d’Ivoire, Yugoslavia, Liberia and the Sudan where participants included key actors in humanitarian response, as well as government authorities.

Africa and Iraq. OCHA’s Geneva office also includes the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).

The Emergency Relief Coordinator chairs the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), comprising the heads of the United Nations agencies engaged in humanitarian relief (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, FAO and WHO), as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and three coordinating bodies representing non-governmental organizations.

CONSOLIDATED APPEALS PROCESS (CAP)

An important coordination mechanism is the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) whereby OCHA issues inter-agency appeals for humanitarian assistance on behalf of the entire UN system. To this end, OCHA undertakes activities to enhance inter-agency commitment, develop strategic approaches and promote donor response. In 2002, OCHA issued a total of 22 appeals for a total of \$4.3 billion to assist beneficiaries worldwide. OCHA also publishes regular situation reports to help donors and agencies dealing with disasters mobilize resources and channel them to stricken countries.

OCHA manages the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) which is a revolving cashflow mechanism to provide advances to organisations of the UN system for emergency assistance. In 2002, the use of the fund was expanded to include funding for natural disasters, new requirements in protracted emergencies, and for emergency staff safety arrangements for UN and associated personnel.

Through its Relief Coordination Branch in Geneva, OCHA maintains a 24-hour monitoring system to provide pre-disaster advice to governments and immediate operational support should a disaster strike. The UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system – managed by the Emergency Services Branch with support and participation of donor governments – can provide standby emergency teams for immediate deployment to a disaster area to help local and national authorities determine relief requirements and ensure on-site coordination of international assistance. OCHA works with national organizations on programs aimed at improving disaster prevention and preparedness in over 70 countries.

BUDGET

At the outset of 2003, OCHA's budget was \$79.3 million, including regular budget requirements of \$9.5 million. Because of recent developments in Angola, the DRC, West Africa, Iraq, and the drought in the Horn of Africa, 2003 extra-budgetary requirements have increased to close to \$80 million. The U.S. was the second largest contributor to OCHA in 2002.

OCHA

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