

**OPENING STATEMENT AT OCHA DONOR SUPPORT GROUP (ODSG)**  
**HIGH LEVEL MEETING**  
**“RESPONDING IN A CHANGING WORLD”**  
**WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND, 13 JUNE 2011**

Thank you Minister James for your chairmanship and all of you for being here.

I am very conscious of the tumultuous world in which we live – [including the] the Christchurch earthquake yesterday, the impact of the ash cloud, and events in the Middle East, North Africa, and Japan.

The next two days are an opportunity for the OCHA team to work with you on the challenges and opportunities facing us – efforts to improve response to emergencies around the world and discuss what we are doing as an organization to improve our own response.

Having been in this job nearly 10 months, I have heard very clear messages from all of you. We needed to place OCHA’s focus back on our core objective: effective coordination to save lives. You also said you wanted greater value for money: I hope that you can already see that we have listened and that OCHA in mid-2011 is already becoming more focused.

It has been an extremely challenging year for us organisationally – not just because of the criticisms we faced in terms of speed of response in major crises, but we were also confronted with the major exercise of cutting our budget. This knocked our confidence, creating uncertainty that was extremely difficult for our staff. And of course, many questioned the need for OCHA, in a world where there are many new actors in the humanitarian field, co-ordination is becoming ever more difficult and where the challenges to the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian work occur daily as a result of the increasing complexity of the global political agenda.

Part of the reason I am in this job is because I think we need OCHA, and the leadership it can bring, more than ever.

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By the year 2025, our planet will be home to 8 billion people. Three in five of them will be crowded into towns and cities, many of them slums, and 2.87 billion will lack safe drinking water. Energy demand will have risen by almost 50 per cent, and food production may not have kept pace with population growth. Climate change will pose an existential threat to many communities.

While economic development and improving education may temper the worst case scenarios, we can be sure of one thing: the scope and complexity of crises will rise.

At the same time, the relative wealth and power of nations will continue to change from west to east, and north to south. And people will demand more – as we are seeing now. More inclusivity – more involvement. The way we work must adapt to these changing realities. The humanitarian response system needs to become more universal and more diverse, but it is in danger of becoming even more fragmented and more challenging to coordinate.

For too long, UN agencies and our partners have seen ourselves acting as the primary responders. We have been criticised for appearing to “take over” when a disaster strikes. Yet we all know that national and local authorities form the first line of response. Where they are unable to cope, their neighbours and regional organizations are increasingly ready to help.

We, the international community, are often only the third tier, and need to be much clearer about where we add value. When we should step in, when we should let others take the lead, and when we should lead.

We must also move beyond our traditional comfort zone and engage new centres of influence – countries, organizations, the media, and multinational companies.

Earlier this year, I travelled to India – laying the ground for a new, closer relationship. In Brussels, we are talking to NATO, establishing clear guidelines as to where we can help each other, and where we should remain separate. We have reached a landmark MOU with the African Union, an essential regional organization.

We have seen a tenfold increase in private sector donations to the Central Emergency Response Fund – thanks to a well-placed investment in better marketing, and our relationship with the UN Foundation. But it is still just a drop in the ocean compared to what is possible.

We worked with the rock band Linkin Park to make a music video on search and rescue in Haiti, which received more than 10 million views online.

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And we have begun to engage a new cadre of information aid workers – mappers, mobile phone experts, IT engineers – to help us communicate with the people we serve. This initiative is in its infancy, but has dramatic potential.

And our donorship base is expanding – I am delighted that the UAE and Russia are here, highlighting our widening circle of friends.

All of this work is important – many of you here have heard me talk of the importance of building a broader constituency of support for our work – and you are helping us to reach out, to explain what we do, and why it is important. But to make that case well, we need you, our friends, to understand our reform agenda and the improvements we want to make.

My first day in this job I went to Pakistan, during the worst flooding in the country's history. I could see that OCHA staff and others on the ground were doing the best they could, but were struggling to respond effectively. It became clear to me that we urgently needed more people to coordinate a massive international response.

We began a major expansion of our field presence – the number of OCHA staff went from 29 to 119 between July and December. In mid September, shortly after my visit, we put together one of the largest humanitarian appeals in UN history, and by the end of last year we had developed a Single Reporting Format, a critical tool to ensure consistent, predictable reporting against agreed indicators. Because even though others spend the money, we raise it – and it is important to account for the way it has been used. Our collective response saved millions of lives.

In Sudan, our team led a system-wide contingency plan for the January referendum – pre-positioning essential supplies, and coordinating with donors and UN peacekeeping to prepare for a worst case scenario.

Thankfully, that scenario did not unfold, but the plan stood – and is now helping us respond to the growing insecurity ahead of Southern independence on 9 July.

In some parts of the world, people ask: 'What value do you add?' In southern Sudan, they ask: 'How would we manage without you?' We need to hear that said more.

My colleagues and I – in the IASC – knew that we needed to do better. In the first meeting I chaired in December last year, we agreed that we needed to make a number of transformative actions to change the way we work.

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That's why we are looking at ways to get the best people into the Humanitarian Co-Coordinator jobs in countries which are a priority for us. Looking at the way we recruit and train – making sure the leadership part of co-ordination is properly understood. We need to deploy inter-agency teams to support in-country teams in major disasters. We need to explore ways to hold those country team members accountable not only for the results of their own programs but also for the response of the team as a whole. We will need your support to deliver this.

Strengthening clusters, and the development of cluster strategies [are also a priority]. Who is in the cluster, what do they bring? All part of making HCTs more strategic and results focused.

### Work in Progress

Within OCHA, we know we need to improve ways of recruiting and deploying people. Our vacancy rate dropped from 20% to 12% between 2009 and 2010. We have strengthened our roster system – pre-clearing people for quick deployment – but we still face challenges recruiting for our most senior field posts – places where we need our best. [We need to be] looking at the balance between field and HQ, and [we] need more flexibility. The priority is to strengthen our field presence and support from HQ to the field.

But there is only so much we can do alone. We need your support, in budget discussions at the ACABQ and beyond, to move us from a Secretariat system designed for conference services, towards one designed for fast-onset emergencies.

You rightfully ask us to improve management. I agree.

But, we have few levers with which to assert the leadership needed across the system. So I would also ask your representatives on our sister agencies' boards to make it clear you expect them to cooperate, and to hold them responsible for collective results. This will be one of our biggest challenges going forward – not because our partners don't want to see it happen, but because the home organisational pull will always be greater than the push for collective responsibility.

Within OCHA, we are also looking at the way we use information. In a fast moving emergency, clear, reliable information is the lifeblood of effective action. And we are living through a communications revolution.

An explosion of new tools has given us the power to gather and share data as never before.

Mobile phones are everywhere. The use of modern communications in Haiti was unprecedented, and has been a defining feature of recent events in the Middle East.

But unfiltered data is overwhelming. Our challenge is to organize, analyze, and share it, in ways that are useful to our colleagues on the ground, to policy-makers, and to the communities we serve.

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Maps, info graphics, and sitreps already rank amongst OCHA's most valued products, and demand is growing by the day.

But this is just a beginning. We are looking at ways to help us better organize essential information, to find new ways of conversing with beneficiaries through mobile communications. Our real time Libya Crisis Map was one effort to better engage citizen volunteers in our work.

These developments are potentially transformational – in terms of how we operate, how we coordinate, how we advocate.

But to use these new technologies effectively, we must commit to shared standards and formats. We have agreement in the IASC to use standard indicators, and are pursuing a common information framework – the 'dashboard' to help us achieve this. But there are still many places where information is not shared quickly enough.

Three quick points before I finish.

The first is on our efforts to better prepare for emergencies. We all share a vision under the Hyogo framework, but I believe we need to put more into practice.

As a first step, we would ask you to do more to back out work with national governments, regional, and sub-regional organisations, to help them implement their commitments.

That includes financial support. As you know, we are working on this in the IASC, and will come back to you soon with concrete proposals.

The second is on the way we continue to differentiate between emergency relief, recovery, and development.

As a matter of practice, humanitarian workers are increasingly drawn into situations of chronic need, caused by long-term poverty and vulnerability. We find ourselves staying too long, creating dependency where people are eager for independence and help to get back on their feet.

We have talked about these challenges many times before, and tried many approaches, yet solutions continue to elude us. We need your help to push the system to address this.

And finally, we need to continue to be ambitious in what we are seeking to do while managing expectations. As donors, your decisions this year will have profound impact on our ability to achieve collective results and change the system. We cannot make this system work without your support – both financially and through your advocacy – and through your critical support.

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This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the General Assembly resolution which founded OCHA. I can think of no better time to continue to make the case for what we do. I look forward to frank discussions in the next two days.

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The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.

**Celebrating 20 years of coordinated humanitarian action**