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(OCHA)**

**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)**

**JOINT UNEP/OCHA ENVIRONMENT UNIT**



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ADVISORY GROUP ON ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

5<sup>th</sup> Meeting

Geneva, 14 May 2003

## **REPORT OF THE FIFTH MEETING**

1. The fifth meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) was convened jointly by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 14-15 May 2003, in accordance with the recommendations of the fourth meeting of the AGEE.
2. The meeting on 14 May was a bi-annual meeting of the AGEE on the review of the Joint Unit work and guidance on areas for development and future activities. It was followed on 15 May by a joint AGEE/APELL (UNEP Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level) meeting dedicated to the implementation of the Partnership on an *Integrated Approach to Prevention, Preparedness for and Response to Environmental Emergencies in Support of Sustainable Development*, launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August 2002. On 16 May, the APELL Senior-Level Advisory Group meeting was held on exchange of experience and finding a way to go ahead with APELL partners.
3. The fifth AGEE meeting was attended by delegations from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, United States of America, and Venezuela.
4. The meeting was also attended by representatives from United Nations entities: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), UNEP Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI), Basel Convention, UNEP Chemicals, UNEP APELL, UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC), UNDP, UNITAR, UN Volunteers; other international organizations and associations including European Commission (EC), Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Chemical and Allied Industries Association (CAIA), European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC), CENTEK, CYPRES, Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), GTZ, International Civil Defense

Organization (ICDO), International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), International Development Center (IDCR), International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA), INERIS, International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA); other non-governmental organizations including the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Green Cross International, Human Ecology and Environmental Research (EURA), IUCN – The World Conservation Union, Planning, Development and Partners Relations (PDPR), World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), Merck, Petrobras, Grupo Apell Barranquilla, Luzenac Group; academia representatives from Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Mexico, United Kingdom, Zambia, Thailand; and consultants from Argentina, Colombia, Jordan, Peru, United States, Germany, Venezuela, France, Switzerland, and observers from Brazil, France, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland.

5. Mr. Fabrizio Gentiloni, Officer-in-Charge, OCHA Geneva, opened the meeting. He welcomed this first joint AGEE/APELL meeting and drew particular attention to the Partnership. He highlighted the successful integration between OCHA and UNEP and the resulting work of the Joint Unit. He stressed that the Unit was a model of collaboration between two UN agencies and emphasized on how much OCHA values this partnership which has brought environmental considerations into OCHA overall management of natural disasters.
6. Mr. Vladimir Sakharov, Deputy Chief of OCHA's Emergency Services Branch and Chief of the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, also made a brief opening statement providing some clarification on the division of the three meetings between the AGEE, the Partnership day and the APELL Programme meeting.
7. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda as contained in document EU/AG/29.
8. The meeting unanimously elected Dr. Alberto Maturana Palacios (Chile) as Chairman, and Mr. Richard Van Hazebrouck (Germany) as Vice-Chairman.

#### **Services provided by OCHA in connection with natural disasters and environmental emergencies**

9. Mr. Vladimir Sakharov, in his presentation on the services provided by OCHA, informed the meeting about a number of OCHA tools, including the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) mechanism, one of the most relevant tools available through OCHA to respond to emergencies such as natural disasters, complex emergencies and environmental emergencies. There are UNDAC teams in major regions of the world. The UNDAC mechanism is at the disposal of the Joint Unit and ensures an impartial and independent assessment as well as a rapid deployment. UNDAC induction courses are being held worldwide and the participants are mostly government representatives or specialists from all major sectors of disaster management. The next course will be held in Quito in June this year.
10. Mr. Sakharov then presented the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit and its role in the mobilization and coordination of international assistance for environmental emergencies. He noted the collaboration between UNEP and OCHA that integrates the disaster management experience of OCHA with the technical expertise of UNEP and its 24/7 capability for responding to requests for assistance. In this regard, the participation of environmental experts in UNDAC missions is increasing and brings an added value in the management of natural disasters. The Joint Unit can act as a broker, issue situation and mission reports, and in special circumstances it can also release cash grants. The Joint Unit also elaborates relevant tools such as guidelines on assessment, contingency planning and emergency response planning.
11. The delegation of Pakistan was interested in knowing what criteria existed for determining what requests for assistance might be considered by the Joint Unit. Mr. Sakharov indicated that the Joint Unit has no specific criteria in this regard and can intervene in both larger and small scale

disasters, on governmental request, particularly if national capacity is insufficient or if additional assistance is needed.

12. The delegation of Sweden expressed its support for the UNEP-OCHA integration and the activities of the Joint Unit and stressed the need for a greater number of environmental experts donated by Governments to be included in the UNDAC roster, and a need for making the environmental profile more visible in UNDAC missions.
13. The delegation from the United States raised a question as to the relationship between Joint Unit and the UNDAC mechanism. Mr. Sakharov explained that the UNDAC mechanism was established and is administrated by OCHA but is at the disposal of all countries and all UN agencies. As a result, the UNDAC mechanism is available for and being used by the Joint Unit and correspondingly, the Joint Unit is also providing concrete support in terms of environmental training and expertise to support UNDAC teams when requested.
14. The Chairman concluded and summarized the agenda item (see at the end of the document Conclusions and Recommendations).

### **UNEP's activities in the management of environmental emergencies**

15. Mr. Stefan Micallef, Chief, Disaster Management Branch, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI), UNEP informed the meeting on UNEP's activities in environmental emergencies and the institutional entities within UNEP and those in particular within DEPI dealing with environmental emergencies. He explained that within DEPI is the Disaster Management Branch which is composed of three units, one of which is the Joint Unit. He briefed the meeting on the outcome of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session of UNEP's Governing Council as it relates to UNEP's work on environmental emergencies. He also informed the meeting that the 22<sup>nd</sup> Session adopted Governing Council decision 22/8 covering "Further Improvement of Environmental Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, Assessment, Response and Mitigation". He noted that the decision requests the Executive Director of UNEP to establish a process, with the participation of governments, for the regular review of UNEP's Strategic Framework on Emergency Prevention, Preparedness, Assessment, Mitigation and Response and to facilitate the implementation of the Agenda for Action. The Strategy aims to strengthen UNEP's capacity to respond to environmental emergencies by enhancing internal capacities and linkages between programme areas and increasing the focus on partnerships with other UN agencies and bodies and in particular its partnering arrangement with OCHA. He suggested to the meeting that the AGEE or a core group of the AGEE, would be a good forum for undertaking the necessary consultations as a starting point in the review process. The meeting concurred with this suggestion.
16. Mr. Stefan Micallef, responded to a question posed by the delegation of the United States regarding DEPI's vision for improving the integration between prevention and response, by indicating that strengthening the work at the regional level, and ensuring partnerships with relevant organizations, can be a way to link prevention, preparedness and response activities in the context of environmental emergencies.
17. The delegation of Sweden expressed its support for developing policies on a regional level and emphasized its own active role in both prevention and response. Furthermore, the delegate of Sweden noted that the management of environmental emergencies should be simplified and that resources should be mobilized at a more regional level.
18. The representatives of the United States, Sweden, Egypt and the Global Fire Monitoring Center, suggested building linkages between existing mechanisms on prevention, preparedness and response and not to create new bodies. In this regard, the Joint Unit is a good example of integration between two UN agencies.

19. The Chairman concluded and summarized the agenda item. (see at the end of the document Conclusions and Recommendations)

### **Presentation of the APELL (Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level) Programme**

20. Mr. Fritz Balkau, Head, Production and Consumption Branch, UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, presented the APELL programme which was launched in 1988 by UNEP, in partnership with industry and governments. Its role is to provide guidance and a framework to local communities to prevent major technological accidents and, in the event of an accident, to help the community minimize the resulting impacts.
21. The APELL programme promotes integration with a wide range of stakeholders and supports the integration between prevention and response activities in order to improve the overall management of environmental emergencies.

### **Major activities of the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit in 2001-2003**

22. Ms. Patricia Charlebois, Programme Officer of the Joint Unit, introduced the document EU/AG/30 and presented an overview of the Joint Unit's activities in the past two years.
23. The main focus of the Joint Unit's activities continues to be coordination and mobilization of assistance. In addition, it is also focusing on the development of training and capacity building, in particular for developing countries.
24. The Joint Unit also promoted the integration of environmental considerations into OCHA's overall response to natural disasters. The Joint Unit enhances the UNDAC mechanism by integrating environmental considerations into the overall management of natural disasters and by developing comprehensive training modules.
25. The Joint Unit is getting more actively involved in response preparedness. In this regard, the Unit is expecting positive outcomes from the portion of the meeting dedicated to the implementation of the Partnership. The Joint Unit recognized the need to better integrate preparedness and response activities in order to improve management capacity.
26. Among other projects, the Joint Unit will continue:
  - To develop new tools such as Rapid Environmental Assessment Guidelines for all types of emergencies and disasters.
  - To develop environmental scenarios with natural disasters.
  - To participate in triplex exercises with United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark and Norway.
  - To follow-up the project of the GC 21/17 decision, to conduct an analysis of causes and impacts of emergencies with the involvement of UNEP and OCHA.
  - To identify potential strategies for future work on the basis of the 10-year-review of the Joint Unit's work.
27. The Unit's role in the recent conflict in Iraq, consisted of raising awareness and sensitizing UN staff on issues related to chemical and biological weapon, to participate actively in both UNEP and OCHA Iraq task forces. A mission to Iran to provide environmental guidance to national level authorities for oil spills and CBW, and to support humanitarian activities in the field was also undertaken.

28. The increase use of Internet and the need to intensify the communication with the relevant partners and countries led to a major redevelopment of the Joint Unit website.
29. The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic shared its experience with participants concerning an OCHA intervention following a dam collapse in June 2002. The delegation commended the UNDAC team for its quick response, and thanked the UNDP, which took over from the Joint Unit in the reconstruction phase of the damaged area.
30. The delegation of Morocco informed the meeting about the Joint Unit assessment mission in connection with an inland oil spill in March 2003 and thanked the Unit and the Swiss authorities for sending high-calibre experts to assess the magnitude of the catastrophe and to propose constructive clean-up measures.
31. The delegation of Djibouti expressed its gratitude to OCHA and the Joint Unit as regards to its intervention following a toxic chemical spill in the Port area in January 2002. An urgent deployment of an UNDAC team was requested by the national authorities to assist them in assessing the impacts of hundreds of tonnes of a toxic chemical leaking from containers which caused a serious threat to human health and the environment and assisting in the overall coordination of activities related to this accident.
32. The delegation of Djibouti raised the issue of the need for guidance in developing regulations and procedures, which constitutes a gap in the management of industrial accidents. The delegation of Egypt noted that the consideration of regulations of transport and storage should be part of prevention and preparedness and emphasized the necessity to link prevention with response activities.
33. The delegation of Nigeria expressed its appreciation to OCHA and the Joint Unit for their assistance and made a presentation on the explosion, which occurred in a munitions warehouse and caused the death of more than 1,400 people on 27 January 2002. An UNDAC team was urgently deployed on 1 February and coordinated the assessment of the situation as well as assisted in the preparation of an appeal for immediate international assistance. He further explained that a fact finding mission composed of UN-HABITAT and UNEP focussing on the state of disaster prevention, preparedness and response coincided with the tragic bomb explosion. The findings of the joint UN-HABITAT/UNEP mission took on board some of the lessons learnt from the event in its programme of action for disaster management proposed to the Nigerian national authorities.
34. The delegation of Brazil thanked the Joint Unit for its offer of assistance during the recent toxic spill. The emergency mechanism is well established in Brazil but the country is looking to strengthen its activities on the prevention side.
35. Mr. Johann G. Goldammer from the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) briefed the meeting on its activities and the increasing development of technical tools, such as satellite maps, available for countries and UN agencies that can help to better identify and improve response in the event of forest fire emergencies. Mr. Goldammer also mentioned the close cooperation established between the Joint Unit and GFMC and their willingness to continue working together in the future.
36. The Chairman concluded and summarized the agenda item (see at the end of the document Conclusions and Recommendations).

#### **Elements of a strategy and work-plan of the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit**

37. Mr. Sakharov introduced this agenda item by referring to document EU/AG/31 prepared by a consultant, which provides a review of the activities of the Joint Unit over the past ten years and

proposes elements for future activities. Reinforcing the role of the AGEE, broadening the emergency response network, establishing closer links between prevention and response, increasing the visibility of the Joint Unit are all elements that have been identified as areas that would improve the Unit's ability to respond to environmental emergencies.

38. The meeting was also briefed on the about the Joint Unit readiness to undertake capacity building activities, such as workshops and training modules, depending on available resources.
39. Ms. Patricia Charlebois, Programme Officer of the Joint Unit, presented the work-plan for 2002-2004 and pointed out that the traditional threats are no longer the same, and that the working environment is in a state of change with new risks and threats emerging. She defined the three main focus area for the coming years: emergency response and mobilization of assistance, better integration of environmental considerations into overall management of emergencies and development training and capacity building.
40. The Joint Unit will continue to develop tools and deliver training, plan and participate in simulation exercises, workshops as well as ensuring its role of monitoring emergency events, and acting as a broker.
41. The Joint Unit will continue improving its response capacity for environmental emergencies by providing specialized UNDAC environmental training course for environmental experts, ensuring UNEP participation in UNDAC course for addition to the roster, and promoting Unit staff participation in UNDAC missions.
42. The Unit will enhance its in-house capacity within UNEP and OCHA by developing Standard Operation Procedures to ensure consistency in its management of emergency events, requests for assistance, and deployment of teams.
43. The delegation of the Russian Federation expressed its satisfaction with the Joint Unit activities and presented the Unit as a model of successful cooperation between two UN agencies. The delegation also noted that the practices and lessons learned by the Joint Unit should be disseminated on a broader scale, and the Unit should increase its cooperation with other organizations such as UNDP, UNHCR, ISDR or IFRC. The delegation also encouraged further support from relevant UNEP and OCHA units whenever the need may arise.
44. The delegation of the United States welcomed the work plan of the Unit and agreed on the new elements considered by the Unit, in particular as regards to the threats of Chemical and Biological weapons. The delegation stressed the importance of the work of the Unit in disseminating information and monitoring the situation concerning these new threats. The delegation also encouraged the Joint Unit to build linkages with other UN agencies such as UNDP, UNITAR, and within UNEP especially with the APELL Programme, underlining the need to link prevention and response activities.
45. The delegation of Sweden expressed its support for the activities carried out to date and for the Joint Unit's proposed activities for 2003-2004. The delegation commended the Joint Unit for organizing a joint meeting, and for promoting a Partnership with the idea of regionalization as a way to lead to better results and efficiencies.
46. Mr. Sakharov mentioned the Joint Unit's intention to further develop partnerships, in particular with the European Commission, in order to ensure that duplication is avoided, as both the UN and the EC are heavily involved in environmental emergencies. He also highlighted the need to modify and update the current list of National Focal Points, to ensure that appropriate focal points are identified and to extend the list to relevant focal points dealing with prevention and preparedness.

47. Mr. Sakharov asked the delegations to consider the possibility of hosting future AGEE meetings or Core Group meetings on selected matters in their respective countries. This would also include financial support in order to pay for travel and related expenses for developing countries.
48. Mr. Sakharov responded to a question posed by the delegation of Egypt regarding the kind of support countries could provide to the Unit, by requesting donor countries to provide expertise and equipment and for all countries to channel moral and political support through appropriate diplomatic channels especially through Permanent Missions in New York, Geneva and Nairobi.
49. The representative of the European Commission's Civil Protection and Environmental Accidents Unit, agreed to further strengthen the relation and to ensure good cooperation with the Joint Unit in order to avoid duplication of efforts.
50. The Chairman concluded and summarized the agenda item (see at the end of the document Conclusions and Recommendations).

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

51. The Chairman summarized the discussions on the services provided by OCHA by stressing the important role of the UNDAC mechanism to respond to emergencies and the integration of environmental components in OCHA overall management of natural disasters. The Chairman also shared with the participants his own positive experience with the Joint Unit in connection with an assessment mission deployment following a river pollution incident in Chile. The Chairman noted that the meeting:
  - expresses satisfaction and support for the continued constructive collaboration between UNEP and OCHA in the mobilization of international assistance for countries facing environmental emergencies.
  - recognizes that through the Joint Unit, UNEP has full access to all of OCHA's disaster response instruments and mechanisms, including the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system.
  - supports broader application of UNDAC to environmental emergencies.
  - calls upon Governments to provide inputs with regard to the inclusion within the UNDAC mechanism of national environmental experts.
  - invites the Joint Unit to explore the establishment of a list of associated environmental experts, which could be involved in relevant UNDAC mission.
52. The Chairman concluded the discussion on UNEP's activities in the management of environmental emergencies by recalling the strategic framework developed by UNEP to improve its role in dealing with the management of environmental emergencies and environmental aspects of complex emergencies. The strategic framework would better integrate emergency prevention, preparedness, assessment, mitigation and response. The Chairman noted that the meeting:
  - asks the Executive Director of UNEP to allocate the necessary resources for the biennium 2005-2006 for the administration and operation of the Joint Unit.
53. The Chairman summarized the discussion on major activities of the Joint Unit in 2001-2003 by recognizing the important role of the Joint Unit in the mobilization and coordination of international assistance to respond to environmental emergencies. The Chairman also emphasized

on the Joint Unit willingness to better integrate preparedness and response activities. He noted that the meeting:

- recognizes the valuable experience gained by the Joint Unit in responding to various environmental emergencies.
- believes that the integration of experience and expertise between UNEP and OCHA is a practical approach that optimizes the use of limited resources.

54. The Chairman summarized the discussion on the elements of a strategy and work plan of the Joint Unit by recalling the three thrusts for the next two years: continue to coordinate and mobilize assistance in the event of environmental emergencies, improve the integration of environmental components into OCHA overall management of emergencies, and develop training and capacity building. The Chairman also noted that the meeting:

- welcomes a result-oriented work programme of the Joint Unit.
- recommends the further extension and improvement of a global network of National Focal Points, that would enable the Joint Unit to contact competent national authorities quickly in case of emergency.
- invites the Joint Unit to prepare specific project proposals and approach potential donors with request to fund them.
- recommends to continue using a Core Group as an important mechanism for conducting more focused consultations on critical issues in between regular meetings of the Advisory Group.
- invites countries to consider possibilities for hosting future meetings of the AGEE.
- recommends that the Joint Unit continue to develop partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other agencies and bodies for a harmonized approach, an in particular supports stronger linkage within UNEP and OCHA.
- recognizes the necessity to link prevention and preparedness to response activities.
- requests UNEP and OCHA Secretariats to inform respective Senior Management on major conclusions and recommendations of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies. The delegations are also requested to channel relevant information and statements to their respective Permanent Missions and Ministries.