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Under-Secretary-General for the Office of Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Pressing Humanitarian Challenges from Darfur to Afghanistan

Maxine Isaacs:

Good morning. I want to welcome you to the Women's Foreign Policy Group's UN Study Visit. I'm Maxine Isaacs, Chair of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, and I'll be your host for the day. We are just delighted that so many of you were able to join us today for our second annual UN Study Visit at the United Nations. We're going to have a day-long series of briefings, as you know, on the new leadership of the United Nations and the pressing issues and challenges that are facing the United Nations. And we have a group of very distinguished senior-level UN officials as speakers, the first of whom we're going to hear from very shortly. We have a wonderful turnout, representatives from the UN missions, consulates, UN family, foreign policies organizations, think tanks, NGOs, foundations, corporations and the media.

Before I turn things over to our moderator, I'd like to issue a special thanks to the UN Foundation for their support of the event, and I would like to introduce the Women's Foreign Policy Group President, Patricia Ellis, who puts these wonderful programs together and does so much else for us. We also have some Board members present whom I would like to introduce to you, Dawn Calabia, who will be our moderator this morning, Donna Constantinople, Gillian

Sorensen and Isabel Jasinowski.

It's now my pleasure to introduce our moderator, Dawn Calabia. She is the Secretary-Treasurer of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, a senior advisor for Refugees International, served ten years with the UN as Deputy Director of the UN Information Center in Washington, and as Senior External Relations Officer with the UNHCR in Washington, D.C. So Dawn, the floor is yours, and thank you very much everybody for being with us.

Dawn Calabia:

I want to particularly thank Maxine, whose leadership of this organization and also her generosity and support of our good causes, and particularly this event, has made a lot of things possible. We're really grateful that all of you could join us today and we have a very full schedule. We will have very brief introductions of our speakers since Patricia Ellis and her staff have put together a wonderful folder with the speakers' complete biographies.

It is now my great pleasure to introduce our first speaker of the day. This is the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, a man on the spot 24 hours, ready to go wherever duty calls. He's head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and was appointed by the Secretary-General on March 1st. He's a career diplomat with the British Foreign Service and served as the British Ambassador to France for six years and he was a British Ambassador to Portugal. He also has a very distinguished diplomatic career with British Missions and served at the UN earlier in his career, but he was still willing to come back to the UN, which is saying a lot. Under-Secretary Holmes is here. You've heard him probably on the news speaking about Darfur and Somalia. You've heard him concerned about the ability to try to protect refugees and displaced persons and also to protect staff: UN staff, NGO staff, that are trying to protect and

take care of people in need around the world.

Under Secretary-General John Holmes:

Thank you very much and thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you. I will try not to speak for too long so we can have plenty of chance for discussion and questions. Thank you also for reminding everybody just how long my career has been and therefore just how old I am. And maybe the reason I came back the UN is I only spent a very short time there first time round. Anyway, I'm very pleased to be here and to be working for the United Nations now rather than the British government, which makes quite a considerable change, as you can imagine.

I've only been doing this for two months, so you have to forgive me if I am not an expert on absolutely every aspect of it, but I thought what I'd try to do is say a little bit about the nature of the role as I see it and as my predecessors have seen it and then a bit about some of the big issues which arise from it and some of the issues which will arise in the future in order to perhaps stimulate discussion and questions.

First of all, on the nature of the role, I mean why does it exist, why do you need an Emergency Relief Coordinator or a head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs? I should say that the role applies both to natural disasters and to conflict situations. There are wonderful bits of jargon to refer to these. There are sudden onset emergencies and complex emergencies. Sudden onset emergencies tend to be earthquakes and volcanoes or whatever and complex emergencies normally means civil wars. But that's just the jargon we use. Why do we need someone like me and my organization? I think the reason is essentially that the international humanitarian community is very fragmented. What I mean by that is you

have a very large number of organizations trying to do humanitarian work both within the United Nations system and outside it, and they tend to have overlapping objectives and mandates.

They are all independent. They all have their own constituencies, their own clients, their own supporters, their own donors, their own sponsors. So I say you have a number of agencies within the UN system dealing with usually different things in theory, but of course they overlap because if you have an agency for refugees, that will overlap with what an agency to look after children does, just to give two obvious examples between UNHCR and UNICEF. Outside the UN system you have the Red Cross family, International Red Cross and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which is a complicated system in itself, but I won't go there for the time being. And then of course you have the NGO world where you have very large numbers of NGOs, a growing number of NGOs, very many small ones obviously but some very large ones. But even the large ones, there's probably 20 major NGOs around the world which are very international, have very large resources and are very occupied in trying to deal with humanitarian relief in emergency situations, as well as doing development, which is a separate part of it.

So trying to bring all these separate actors together and make them operate in a coherent and coordinated way is why the job was invented, if you like, why the office was invented fifteen years ago, and why it's gone on developing since then to try and bring a degree of coherence to a system which is by -- I mean it is not a system. It has grown up by accident. It's haphazard, but it's very hard to change that. No one is going in for mergers and acquisitions in the NGO world or even the UN agency world without tackling a huge problem, so we need to deal with this fragmented world as it is and try to bring it together. That is what lay behind the

creation of the office 15 years ago, and I think it did a good job in beginning to produce more order and coherence in the way that humanitarian emergency relief was delivered. But it became clear in the last two or three years that we needed to go further, and two particular events provoke that further reflection and further reform of the system if you like.

The first is Darfur. When the initial international efforts to bring humanitarian relief to Darfur in early 2004 were not satisfactory, shall we say, because there were gaps and there were duplications and there were three people, three agencies doing water and sanitation here and nobody doing shelter over there -- I mean that's not a real example, but that's the kind of thing that was tending to happen. So this produced much more demands again for more coherence, and then secondly the tsunami of early 2005. When faced with a very chaotic situation the international response was, at least initially, very chaotic because you had very large numbers of agencies, huge numbers of NGOs, large numbers of bilateral donors all turning up in the same place, all wanting to do the same thing. And again, the need to try and bring some more coherence to that was obvious, and that again stimulated the idea of more reform. I won't go into what that kind of reform consists of, but it's basically in two directions if you like. One is to try and make clear who is the lead agency responsible in particular areas like food, of course, water and sanitation, shelter, protection of civilians and management of refugee camps, whatever it might be, who is the agency who is in the lead of that particular sector and who are the other actors, whether they be NGOs or other agencies or the Red Cross, who have expertise and who can then work together? So that's one area of trying to identify that more clearly so that the response is more predictable and more accountable and more coherent. And the second is to try and reform the financing of humanitarian relief, to make that more predictable and more equitable, because at the moment it depends on the decisions of a lot of individual countries and

of course a lot of individual people too. And it usually works out roughly okay, but it's a bit of an accident if it does.

There's an attempt to make that more reputable, not the least by creating a new fund, the Emergency Response Fund, which I control, which is able to respond rapidly to crises but also to ensure that money is given to so-called neglected or forgotten crises, because everybody knows about Darfur and one or two others, but there are lots of crises going on in the world, which are not in the CNN spotlight, but which still need money and which don't tend to get it because political donors respond to what's on the television like everybody else does so that the distribution is not always ideal. And we can try to fill in some of those gaps.

I think the other big change there has been in this business, if I can call it that, is that in addition to the obvious provision of food and other relief items to emergencies, whether they be, again, natural disasters or conflicts, there's been a shift of emphasis over the last few years to the protection of civilians. In a way, it's always been there because that's always what relief agencies have been doing, trying to protect civilians. But that concept is now written in to what we're trying to do in a much more explicit way than it ever was before. And it's also an area where you can see, the humanitarian agenda and the human rights agenda, coming at it from slightly different angles, are beginning to converge in the essential business of protecting civilians, protecting their rights and freedoms as well as protecting their ability to eat and survive and have shelter and so on. The obvious point here is that in conflict situations, the civilians are, as always, the main victims of the conflicts. Usually the most vulnerable parts of society are women, children and older people, and therefore protecting them has to be at the heart of everything we're trying to do. As I said, this is now much more explicitly written into everything we're trying to do than it was before. It means that NGOs and agencies are not just

trying to deliver physical help to people on the ground, but they're trying to speak out on their behalf. Advocacy is the jargon term that's always used; to raise abuses, to try and address abuses and to make sure that people are being treated as they should be. Which raises a tricky issue because we talk about protecting civilians and people assume that means, from the outside as it were, that means we can actually protect them physically. But actually the humanitarian community does not protect people physically. We don't have weapons and we don't guard camps or people, and this can sometimes raise misleading expectations about what we can do.

The presence of humanitarian workers, NGOs or UN agencies, can be an inhibiting factor of the violence against civilians and abuses. Speaking out about them can create an atmosphere in which it's more difficult to carry out abuses, but physical protection is more difficult and we cannot protect people all the time from people who are trying to abuse them in whatever way. And that raises problems of expectations and accusations of inadequacy when sometimes things go wrong as they do from time to time.

This idea was taken further in 2005 at the world summit when there was an acknowledgment by the international community as a whole that there was a collective international responsibility to protect people from, in particular, the most heinous abuses, i.e. genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and other crimes against humanity. And this led to the adoption of a principle called the responsibility to protect. This is essentially defined as it is the responsibility of every national government to protect its civilians, and that responsibility should be recalled to national governments at every possible stage and that is their fundamental duty to their own civilians. Where they are having difficulty in doing that for whatever reason, there could be many reasons for that, then the UN has a responsibility to try and help them protect their own civilians. And, if all else fails, the international community, acting through

the Security Council, has a responsibility to take its responsibility seriously and act to protect them from these particular crimes.

Now this is actually a huge issue at the moment, which is going to come back to haunt us in various ways. It's a huge issue in what I might describe as the post-Iraq, post-9/11 world. Our challenge is to make that principle, that responsibility to protect, an operational principle, but it's under difficulty from two directions, even though it's only two years since it was -- less than two years, 18 months since it was agreed in September 2005, I think.

First of all, in the post-Iraq world, there is an obvious reluctance by countries with the resources to intervene in other countries to do that because of the reaction to what's happened in Iraq. I mean not only Iraq, but intervening in other people's countries is difficult anyway, but it's come to be seen as more difficult and people are more reluctant to do it. And of course there is a reaction from the other side of the equation if you'd like, from some of the countries who fear that they might be intervened in, a reaction about the possible violations of their own sovereignty, their own right to conduct their affairs as they see fit. So although they signed up to the principle of responsibility to protect, they're not necessarily keen to see it turned into practice in case they become, as it were, victims of it at some stage. So this question of how to make this principle operational is a real one, and a dilemma which we have not yet resolved and one which the international community will have to come back to, to deal with situations like Somalia or Darfur.

I think meanwhile there's also a renewed emphasis correctly in various areas on prevention not cure. The international community can respond to natural disasters, can respond to conflicts by pouring in resources and pouring in people and trying to help the victims of either the disaster or the conflict, but obviously it's much better if you can -- either, you can't

stop natural disasters happening, but if either you can mitigate the consequences of the natural disaster before that happens or, in the case of conflict, you can prevent the conflict before it happens.

One of the things that struck me particularly, having made a first field visit myself to Darfur and to eastern Chad and the Central African Republic was that when you look at the enormous humanitarian effort being made, and being made very successfully in most respects, at least in terms of keeping people alive, it brings you very forcibly back to the politics, if you like, that what's needed here in Darfur or Chad or wherever, is political solutions. Without political solutions -- keeping people alive is a worthwhile activity in itself, but it doesn't solve anything. What you have to do is solve the underlying problem. Therefore you need the political solution. Therefore you need the international mediation effort at a very early stage, preferably before the conflict happens but very quickly after it happens to try and produce a fundamental solution. And that's even more fundamental in a way than providing peacekeeping forces because peacekeeping forces can only keep the peace if there is a peace to keep, in other words, if there is a political solution in place which enables them to operate successfully.

There is a similar approach on the natural disaster side, a whole new agenda if you like called disaster risk reduction. You can't actually prevent the natural disasters happening, but there is a fear that number and intensity of natural disasters are going to increase in the future because of the effects of climate change but also because of the nature of development in some countries with large mega-cities growing, often in coastal areas, means that populations at risk are growing and therefore the risk of the impact of disasters is growing.

Therefore, as I said, there's an emphasis on disaster risk reduction. What does that mean? Essentially it means preparing populations, local populations essentially, for what to do

in case of disaster. I mean an obvious example was the tsunami: if people had known what a tsunami looked like before it happened, and in one or two islands actually in the area they did know because they had a folk memory of what to do when the sea receded, you run for the hills. If people had known that, then the human loss would have been hugely reduced.

Another example is Bangladesh, endemically, chronically prone to flooding. It happens every year more or less badly. Twenty years ago when there was a very, very serious cyclone season, very, very serious flooding, something like half a million people died as a result, and two years ago when there was an even worse cyclone season and worse flooding in a sense, about 60 people died because in the interim people had put in place shelters, evacuation plans, people knew what to do in the event of flooding, the local authorities knew what to do, knew what to do, and the difference was absolutely enormous, both in terms of the human cost and the economic cost. So there are things which can be done which are not necessarily expensive. This is not massive investments in equipment or concrete. It's mostly education and preparedness, but it can make an absolutely enormous difference.

One other issue which I might mention before I finish, it struck me from the visits I was making, and I'm not just raising it because you're a group of mainly women, the question of sexual violence as a weapon of war. I mean I had assumed slightly naively before I started this job that rape and sexual violence was a sort of byproduct of conflict and war, but it's clear when you visit some of these places that it's more than that. It is used deliberately as a weapon of war in some circumstances and that the climate of impunity which reins around that is really absolutely appalling and devastating. Darfur is the latest example of where this has been happening, although it's not necessarily the worst example, I should say. It's happened on a larger scale, perhaps before in the Balkans, in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, particularly in the

Democratic Republic of Congo, still going on in very large scale. And here is something which we need to try to address in a much more fundamental way than we have before. There is an obvious link between this and what happens in camps, in camps for displaced people or refugees. Most of you may have heard of the link between firewood collection and sexual violence. Women go out to collect firewood to cook and they're very vulnerable when they're outside the camps and often are attacked.

We've been trying to tackle this in a sort of basic way if you like by providing, trying to provide, and finding people who will provide much more fuel efficient stoves as a start. If you use less wood, you need to collect less wood; therefore, you reduce the risk. There's also the question of providing so-called firewood patrols by the African Union peacekeeping force. We had some success I think on the stove front, but it's not a straightforward issue even there, because one of the things we've discovered in one of the camps I visited for example, that if you provide the stoves, which are low tech, appropriate technology kind of stove, burn a third less wood for the same effect than before, so if the women and families need to use less firewood, it doesn't mean necessarily they collect any less because they collect the same amount and sell it to somebody else for money, which is a good thing in itself, but the problem that you were trying to address in the first place has not necessarily gone away. I simply wanted to say that this question of tackling sexual violence is a very important issue for us. And it's not just against women by the way, it also happens against men and boys as well because it's also a humiliating, deliberate weapon of war in that sense too.

There is a new initiative called the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, which ten UN agencies are mounting to try to raise awareness and find methods of tackling this. And I am very much in support of this. But again, it's a difficult issue. It goes back to the same

question of -- we can talk about it, and we can talk about raising awareness and trying to prevent abuse, but we cannot physically protect people from it, and we should not give the impression that we can. (Applause.)

Ms. Calabia:

We only have time for just a few questions.

Question:

My name is Jennifer Quigley and I am the advocacy coordinator for the U.S. Campaign for Burma. Thank you very much for your speech. I actually applaud everything you said and agree with you. My question is, when you talked about the human rights situation and political solutions versus humanitarian aid -- we're discovering that that's sort of an issue in Burma and along the border with all of the refugees in which certain agencies of the UN, World Food Programme, UNDP are favoring humanitarian and actually working pro-actively to downplay the human rights abuses and a political solution fearing that that will hinder humanitarian effort.

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

The relation between humanitarian efforts and human rights is a tricky issue. As I suggested, I think, the two agendas have been converging. So many humanitarian agencies I think rightfully see themselves as also looking at humanitarian work in a broad way and human rights abuses are part of what they're trying to achieve, so they are advocates. They're not just handing over food and water. They're trying to look at the protection of the people that they're trying to look after in a broader way.

This raises obvious problems. If you take the example of Darfur, and I'll come to Burma in a minute, you can see that the Sudanese government likes agencies which do practical things like food and water and shelter and doesn't like agencies which make a noise about things that are happening because they don't want to hear that. So they try to discriminate between agencies on that basis or NGOs particularly on that basis and try to intimidate those agencies or NGOs which are making a noise into stopping making a noise. And there are bureaucratic weapons they can use to do that in terms of visas and so on and absence of permission to operate. The truth is that that sort of intimidation can be very effective because the people concerned on the ground want to help people. That's what they're there for, and therefore they can be pushed into being relatively silent at least in order to stay present and stay helping because they think that's the lesser of the two evils. And that's perfectly understandable.

There are ways around that. I mean the people on the ground can keep relatively quiet but the people in headquarters can make a noise or somebody else can make a noise or the information that you're providing can be given to someone like me who can make noise without fear or favor, as it were. But there is this kind of tricky balance to be struck.

In the case of Burma it is particularly tricky because there are some quite serious humanitarian concerns, particularly along the borders as you suggest and refugee issues. The Burmese government is an example, they're not the only one by any stretch of the imagination, but a government who regards humanitarianism or have regarded humanitarianism as people operating with a hidden western political agenda trying to intervene in their countries in ways they simply don't want. They have rejected the humanitarians by and large, and it's partly in response to that that people have decided the best thing is to keep a very low profile and let's see if we can do something quietly. We'll come in from the other side, from Bangkok.

What we're trying to do is to -- I mean we are talking to the authorities in Rangoon at the moment, I think it is called Yangon now, about trying to reduce their fears of what humanitarianism means and say that the principles are very clear: it's independent, it's impartial, and it's mutual. We don't come with any hidden political agendas and we're not part of a western deal to try and undermine you. But that's a very tricky balance to strike, and that's why trying to maintain this distance between humanitarian action and political or peacekeeping action is very tricky.

Question:

Thank you for you remarks. My name is Bonnie Jenkins. I'm from the Ford Foundation, and I run the U.S. Foreign Aid Security Policy Portfolio. Just very quickly could you say something about the interaction between the humanitarian efforts and the military?

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

Humanitarian efforts and the military is a very controversial subject within the humanitarian community, some agencies, particularly some NGOs will not touch anything military with barge pole because it's just not what they want to do, which is understandable, but we have to be a bit more pragmatic than that, by and large.

There is a distinction between working with the military in disaster situations where there are not political sensitivities particularly and where it's a question of who can do what as a last resort. If you have a Pakistani earthquake or a tsunami, there are situations where only the military has the kind of resources you need, the helicopters or the planes or whatever it is, to do things, particularly in the first few days. So I think we have to be ready to accept their help in

those situations because they can do things which no one else can do. And I think that's a perfectly reasonable position, even though some don't agree with it. There was a secondary question that military assets are actually extremely expensive and militaries usually charge these days for what they do. Not always, but they usually do. So there's a separate question about that.

It is much more complicated when it comes to conflict situations because of this problem we have of trying to maintain what we call the humanitarian space so we are seen as separate from people with military security or political agendas and we want to be seen to be separate from them just doing what we're doing to help people irrespective of race, creed, whatever it might be, just on the basis of need. So we need to be separate from them. This is particularly difficult, you know, even in a UN peacekeeping operation. You're supposed to be relatively neutral. You want to be coordinated with them but separate from them at the same time.

The problem is getting worse in the sense that you can see a lot of military operations, Afghanistan or elsewhere. The military want to be winning hearts and minds as well as killing people, perfectly understandable. I mean no one would object to that in a sense, but that leaves them to start doing humanitarian operations themselves, which then contaminates the whole rest of the humanitarian community. So we keep saying, don't go into humanitarian operations. If you want to win hearts and minds, there are other ways you can tackle that, but leave the humanitarian aid to the humanitarians, because otherwise you're putting people's lives at risk and jeopardizing the whole humanitarian operation. And some people understand that and some people don't, frankly, but it's a constant effort.

Question:

I'm Olivia Albrecht and I'm with Lockheed Martin. And I'm curious when you discussed the tsunami issues, I know that you weren't particularly part of that coordination effort, but what is the role of public opinion in coordinating these events when there are so many news media agencies surrounding these processes. How does that affect what you're doing and does that cause you to make different decisions than you perhaps would if the media attention weren't there?

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

Public opinion is a double-edged sword, obviously. The media is very effective at raising awareness. The tsunami was a massive media event and people responded in an individual way and with incredible generosity. And in the end, of course, too much money was raised. It's just one of those things. That's not normally the problem, by the way. Normally it's much too little.

But that is one of the problems: the public response is very dependent on what the media spotlight is doing. And the media spotlight is fickle and short term and driven by considerations which are not considerations of need. So although we can use the media and use public opinion to put pressure on governments to do what they should do in terms of looking after people or stopping their abuses, it's also can be something which focuses resources in the wrong place, which drives governments to look at issues in a lopsided way because they're only looking at the issues which public opinion is interested it, because they're driven by the media as well, so it's a double-edged sword.

What we try to do is to draw attention to situations which are neglected and which are not driven by political agendas, raise money for those as well using the kind of funds I was

talking about earlier so we can try and balance the situation up in a way that the media are simply not going to do.

Question:

When I look at what is happening in Darfur and eastern Chad, I see the refugees so I'm wondering, they don't have tents. Usually when you have disasters, et cetera, tents are there right away, but this time it has been for a long time and I haven't seen anything.

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

I was in eastern Chad, and I think it is a particularly worrying humanitarian situation, more worrying in a sense than Darfur at the moment, in the sense that you have a large number of refugees who've been there for a while and are being looked after more or less or they've been there for a very long time and it raises its own questions. And then you have a lot of displaced people to add to that, 150,000 I think is the latest figure, but that's increasing all the time. Gearing up to respond to that in a humanitarian way is proving a problem.

Do they have tents? I mean usually what happens -- I mean, what do I know? I'm not an expert in all this, but people will distribute plastic sheets which can be used for shelter, which are used very often in the immediate aftermath of a crisis when people need something for protection, particularly when you're in the rainy season, that's when you need protection in terms of a plastic sheet. The camps I saw in Darfur and Chad, the well established ones tend to use more traditional construction methods with grass roofs and so on. Actually a lot of the camps I saw are pretty well organized and pretty well constructed. I mean it's very patchy, to be honest, but they look like suburbs of towns almost, some of them, rather than the kind of camps that you

have in your mind sometimes.

But as I say, plastic sheeting is distributed. Again, a problem that you find is that people will sell the plastic sheets you give them because they need the money more than they need the plastic sheet, or at least the immediate equation is I need the money to buy food or medicine more than a plastic sheet, even though I will need the plastic sheet in six months time. We have to keep an eye on that, but it's a more complicated equation than you might imagine, and people don't always want to live in tents because living in tents in those temperatures is not funny actually.

Question:

Talking about Iraq, Mr. Holmes, the UN is doing a little bit about humanitarian aid to internally displaced people and refugees in neighboring countries, and this again was discussed at a conference in Geneva. Could you just tell us a little bit about the conference, the results and the tangible measures going to be taken to help the Iraqi displaced people internally and the refugees outside Iraq?

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

Yes, one of the things we've been trying to do is to draw attention to the fact that Iraq, leaving aside all the political controversy about it, it has now become a very serious humanitarian situation as well. There are something like 2 million Iraqi refugees who've left Iraq, mostly in the last two or three years, sitting in Jordan, Syria and in other neighboring countries. This is posing an enormous burden on the systems -- the education and health systems for example of those two countries. So part of the purpose of the conference in Geneva

you were referring to and which I was at was to draw attention to the scale of this problem and to suggest that the international committee needs to do more, we need to find ways of working with the Jordanian and Syrian governments to provide help to those people, not by setting up camps or parallel structures inside the countries but by giving them more resources to deal with the extra strain that's putting on their resources without suggesting these people are going to be there forever and without being so overgenerous, if you like, that you attract more refugees, which is what you don't want to do. So that's a complicated problem in itself, but that's what we're trying to do externally.

Meanwhile internally inside Iraq there was also an increasing humanitarian crisis because people are being displaced for ethnic cleansing type of reasons. It's not ethnic, it's religious, really; sectarian, if you like -- and because the security problems are beginning to result in a breakdown of the internal systems. The public distribution system for food and so on is simply not working in some areas. There are even areas where it's being used as a sort of political weapon because food is being given to people of one sect and not of another. So we've been drawing attention to that problem too.

This raises huge issues for us on how are we going to operate ourselves inside Iraq? The UN reputation in Iraq is about as low as it could be for all sorts of reasons to do with the past, sanctions, oil for food, too much identification with the western agenda in the eyes of the people of Iraq. So sending international humanitarian workers back into Iraq is something that we'd have to think about very carefully. We have to balance the responsibility with the safety of our staff with the desire to help people.

There are things we can do. We can operate with national Iraqi staff. We can operate through local NGOs. The Iraqi Red Crescent is doing an extremely good job in many respects.

But we're trying to grapple with exactly how we do this and exactly how we ramp up our efforts if you like inside Iraq and to help people without, as I say, and wanting to suggest that the people -- the UN agencies or NGOs, international NGOs are going to pile back into Iraq in large numbers because in current security circumstances, with the exception perhaps of bits of the north or perhaps some parts of the south, they simply can't do that. We haven't got a magic solution to that, but at least we're aware of the problem. The main aim of the conference was to draw attention to the scale of the problem, to try and raise resources to deal with it, and it was successful in that, not least in that the Iraqi government themselves recognized the scale of the problem both outside and inside the country and promised more help and more resources to deal with it. This is an ongoing situation.

Question:

Thank you, I'm Andrea Friedman with the Global Justice Center of International Law to Promote Gender Equality, and I am wondering what you're doing at OCHA to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security?

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

You're more of an expert on the Security Council resolutions than I am, I suspect, but I mean we are, like the rest of the UN system, making an enormous effort to mainstream gender considerations and do everything we do in terms of humanitarian relief and to spread that message to all the other agencies and NGOs we deal with because I think we have recognized that unless this is built into the way you deliver aid and humanitarian relief and reconstruction, then you're creating problems at the same time as you're solving problems. So we have very

clear standing instructions to all our staff, training programs for everybody so that gender awareness is absolutely built into everything we're doing, is mainstreamed into all our activity, and is present in the consciousness of everybody. I'm not claiming we're perfect in everything we do, we certainly aren't I'm sure. This is an ongoing effort, and it started in its current intensity relatively recently, but I think we are certainly making an enormous effort and there are reporting procedures of various kinds both internally and in the UN system more widely to make sure that we are doing what we're supposed to be doing.

Ms. Calabia:

I'm going to use the prerogative of the chair to ask just one question. You mentioned the question of resources and how tsunami attracted enormous resources, and yet you have to deal with a lot of neglected emergencies around the world that don't make CNN. What is your budget like and how well do you do in raising the kinds of resources that you need in some of the neglected places that we maybe should pay more attention to?

Under Secretary-General Holmes:

We have established a new fund. I mean it was established essentially last year, called the Central Emergency Response Fund. The aim is to have $450 million a year in that fund, and we're at something like $350 million at the moment, which we are disbursing as fast as we get it. A significant proportion of that is indeed for neglected crises, which could be areas like Chad or the Central African Republic or Congo, for example, which has been an enormous, I mean a huge humanitarian issue, not just a humanitarian issue but for the last nine years with enormous numbers of death because it never got much attention in the world's media. So that's one of the

areas we've been able to push money to, but there are others in other, more neglected bits of Africa. In particular, it tends to be Africa unfortunately, but not only.

In terms of raising resources in general there is a system, there's an appeals system which we try to run, a consolidated appeals system where we put together the projects, the humanitarian projects that the UN agencies and the NGOs and the Red Cross and so on have in particular countries to deal with the needs that they see and issue what's called a consolidated appeal each year, which may be $100 million, $200 million, $300 million. I mean for Darfur it's more like $1 billion. It's something like $600 million for Congo, and then you go down into slightly smaller sums. The problem is these are funded very unevenly and they are also funded unevenly within the countries between different sectors. Some people like to fund food because they think that's the sort of -- an easy win, not so sure about health, so they don't fund health. So we have to try and correct both the geographical *and* the sectoral imbalances through our own fund, which is clearly inadequate to do that, but we can help with that fund, but we can also help by going to the donors on a regular basis as we do and saying, this crisis is really serious but you're not funding it, you need to do more. Or, as we were doing recently in the Central African Republic, where you have quite a serious internal displacement problem of a slightly odd kind where people have just fled but not very far from their homes, they're not in camps and they're hard to reach, the agencies and the NGOs need to be more present on the ground to deal with this. They need to get there despite the difficulties. You need the resources as well, but if there's nobody present to do it, the resources don't help. So we perform this kind of advocacy and alarm bell-ringing role generally. We don't always succeed perfectly, but we try to ensure that there is a balance across the board and between the sectors.

Ms. Calabia:

Well, I want to thank you very much Under Secretary-General Holmes. I would like to invite you to come down and talk to us in Washington because you're sitting in front of room full of advocates and they'd like to know how they could help you in your task. They certainly picked the right man for the job. Thank you. (Applause.)