

WHO's response, and role as the health cluster lead, in meeting the growing demands of health in humanitarian emergencies

The Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly,

Having considered the report on WHO's response, and role as the health cluster lead, in meeting the growing demands of health in humanitarian emergencies;¹

Recognizing that humanitarian emergencies result in avoidable loss of life and human suffering, weaken the ability of health systems to deliver essential life-saving health services, produce setbacks for health development and hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;

Reaffirming the principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, and reaffirming the need for all actors engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance in situations of complex humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters to promote and fully respect these principles;

Recalling Article 2(d) of the Constitution of the World Health Organization on the mandate of WHO in emergencies, and resolutions WHA58.1 on health action in relation to crises and disasters and WHA59.22 on emergency preparedness and response;²

Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations, confirming the central and unique role for the United Nations in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community to support countries affected by humanitarian emergencies in full respect of the guiding principles therein, establishing, inter alia, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, supported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs;

Taking note of the humanitarian response review in 2005, led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and by the Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee aiming at improving urgency, timeliness, accountability, leadership and surge capacity, and recommending the strengthening of humanitarian leadership, the improvement of humanitarian financing mechanisms and the introduction of the clusters as a means of sectoral coordination;

¹ Document A65/25

² Resolutions WHA34.26, WHA46.6, WHA48.2, WHA58.1, WHA59.22 and WHA64.10 reiterate WHO's role in emergencies.

Taking note of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals' Reform Agenda 2011–2012 to improve the international humanitarian response by strengthening leadership, coordination, accountability, building global capacity for preparedness and increasing advocacy and communications;

Recognizing United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/124, and taking note of WHO's subsequent commitment to supporting the Inter-Agency Standing Committee transformative humanitarian agenda and contributing to the implementation of the Principals' priority actions designed to strengthen international humanitarian response to affected populations;

Reaffirming that it is the national authority that has the primary responsibility to take care of victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory, and that the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory;

Taking note of the 2011 Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidance note on working with national authorities, that clusters should support and/or complement existing national coordination mechanisms for response and preparedness and where appropriate, government, or other appropriate national counterparts should be actively encouraged to co-chair cluster meetings with the Cluster Lead Agency;

Recalling resolution WHA64.10 on strengthening national health emergency and disaster management capacities and resilience of health systems, which urges Member States, inter alia, to strengthen all-hazards health emergency and disaster risk-management programmes;

Reaffirming also that countries are responsible for ensuring the protection of the health, safety and welfare of their people and for ensuring the resilience and self-reliance of the health system, which is critical for minimizing health hazards and vulnerabilities and delivering effective response and recovery in emergencies and disasters;

Recognizing the comparative advantage of WHO through its presence in, and its relationship with Member States, and through its capacity to provide independent expertise from a wide range of health-related disciplines, its history of providing the evidence-based advice necessary for prioritizing effective health interventions, and that the Organization is in a unique position to support health ministries and partners as the global health cluster lead agency in the coordination of preparing for, responding to and recovering from humanitarian emergencies;

Recalling WHO's reform agenda and taking note of the report in 2011 by the Director-General on reforms for a healthy future,¹ which led to the creation of a new WHO cluster, Polio, Emergencies and Country Collaboration, aimed at supporting regional and country offices to improve outcomes and increase WHO's effectiveness at the country level, by redefining its commitment to emergency work and placing the cluster on a more sustainable budgetary footing;

Welcoming the reform in 2011 transforming the WHO cluster Health Action in Crisis into the Emergency Risk Management and Humanitarian Response department as a means of implementing these reforms, ensuring that the Organization becomes faster, more effective and more predictable in delivering higher quality response in health, and that the Organization holds itself accountable for its performance;

¹ Document A64/4.

Recalling resolutions WHA46.39 on health and medical services in times of armed conflict; WHA55.13 on protection of medical missions during armed conflict; and the United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/132 on safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel, considers that there is a need of systematic data collection on attacks or lack of respect for patients and/or health workers, facilities and transports in complex humanitarian emergencies,

1. CALLS ON Member States¹ and donors:

(1) to allocate resources for the health sector activities during humanitarian emergencies through United Nations Consolidated Appeal Process and Flash Appeals, and for strengthening WHO's institutional capacity to exercise its role as the Global Health Cluster Lead Agency and to assume health cluster lead in the field;

(2) to ensure that humanitarian activities are carried out in consultation with the country concerned for an efficient response to the humanitarian needs, and to encourage all humanitarian partners, including nongovernmental organizations, to participate actively in the health cluster coordination;

(3) to strengthen the national level risk management, health emergency preparedness and contingency planning processes and disaster management units in the health ministry, as outlined in resolution WHA64.10, and, in this context, as part of the national preparedness planning, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs where appropriate, identify in advance the best way to ensure that the coordination between the international humanitarian partners and existing national coordination mechanisms will take place in a complementary manner in order to guarantee an effective and well-coordinated humanitarian response;

(4) to build the capacity of national authorities at all levels in managing the recovery process in synergy with the longer-term health system strengthening and reform strategies, as appropriate, in collaboration with WHO and the health cluster;

(5) to establish health response teams on a voluntary basis and develop a mechanism for deployment in case of humanitarian emergencies, depending on the choice of each Member State;

2. CALLS ON the Director-General:

(1) to have in place the necessary WHO policies, guidelines, adequate management structures and processes required for effective and successful humanitarian action at the country level, as well as the organizational capacity and resources to enable itself to discharge its function as the Global Health Cluster Lead Agency, in accordance with agreements made by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals; and assume a role as Health Cluster Lead Agency in the field;

(2) to strengthen WHO's surge capacity with global health cluster partners and Member States including developing standby rapid response arrangements and mechanisms in order to deploy and sustain response teams with appropriate resources in response to humanitarian emergencies;

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

- (3) to ensure that in humanitarian crises WHO provides Member States and humanitarian partners with predictable support by coordinating rapid assessment and analysis of humanitarian needs, including as a part of the coordinated Inter-Agency Standing Committee response, building an evidence-based strategy and action plan, monitoring the health situation and health sector response, identifying gaps, mobilizing resources and performing the necessary advocacy for humanitarian health action;
- (4) to define the core commitments, core functions and performance standards of the Organization in humanitarian emergencies, including its role as the Global Health Cluster Lead Agency and as Health Cluster Lead Agency in the field, and to ensure full engagement of country, regional and global levels of the Organization to their implementation according to established benchmarks, keeping in mind the ongoing work on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee transformative humanitarian agenda;
- (5) to provide a faster, more effective and more predictable humanitarian response by operationalizing the Emergency Response Framework, with the performance benchmarks in line with the humanitarian reform, and to ensure the accountability of its performance against those standards;
- (6) to establish necessary mechanisms to mobilize WHO's technical expertise across all disciplines and levels, for the provision of necessary guidance and support to Member States, as well as partners of the health cluster in humanitarian crises;
- (7) to support Member States and partners in the transition to recovery, aligning the recovery planning, including emergency risk management as well as disaster risk-reduction and preparedness, with the national development policies and ongoing health sector reforms, and/or using the opportunities of post-disaster and/or post-conflict recovery planning;
- (8) to provide leadership at the global level in developing methods for systematic collection and dissemination of data on attacks on health facilities, health workers, health transports, and patients in complex humanitarian emergencies, in coordination with other relevant United Nations bodies, other relevant actors, and intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, avoiding duplication of efforts;
- (9) to provide a report to the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board, and thereafter every two years, on progress made in the implementation of this resolution.

Tenth plenary meeting, 26 May 2012
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