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Coping with Major Emergencies

WHO Strategy and Approaches to Humanitarian Action

World Health Organization
Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action

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Foreword

*Hiroshi Nakajima, M.D., Ph.D.
Director-General
World Health Organization*

The end of the east-west political and economic confrontation known as the Cold War has not, unfortunately, brought about any decline in the numbers or severity of emergencies affecting all parts of the world. On the contrary, there has been a dramatic and continuing rise in both natural and man-made disasters.

The cumulative impact of complex emergencies on the international aid community has been profound, and has led to the diversion of large amounts of resources from developmental to relief purposes

At the same time, it has also provoked widespread centralization in the management of major crises, linked to the need to make optimal use of limited resources and to reduce overlap. The international community is, today, very conscious of the urgent need to deal more systematically with the preparation of emergency response programmes in various parts of the globe, with resource mobilization and monitoring activities, and with establishing effective relationships between cooperating partners and with the media.

WHO is resolved to improve its rapid response capability at the country, regional and global levels, and to ensure effective teamwork and communication among all levels of the Organization. As a first step, I have decided to handle personally, in close collaboration with the regional directors concerned, all complex emergency situations

having major political dimensions, and hence being dealt with under the direct leadership of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, assisted by the Security Council and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA). In this perspective, I have set up an Emergency Task Force which will meet every month to review on-going and planned EHA activities relating to WHO response to complex emergency situations, as well as internal policy and administrative issues arising, within WHO, from its participation in complex emergency response programmes.

The Organization will also look carefully at all issues arising from WHO's membership in the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) which has been set up by the Secretary-General to bring about improved coordination in the management of emergency response programmes. The IASC brings together, for the first time, not only the relevant United Nations humanitarian agencies but also the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and major consortia of nongovernmental organizations engaged in humanitarian relief. WHO has been an active participant in the work of the IASC and will continue to give its full support.

Resolution EB95.R17 adopted by the Executive Board in January 1995 urged Member States to include disaster reduction and emergency preparedness in their national development plans and to allocate budgetary resources for

this purpose. It called on the donor community to give greater priority to health aspects in their humanitarian assistance programmes. The resolution required WHO to support the efforts of Member States in this domain as well as to seek extrabudgetary resources to help protect the development achievements of countries and reduce the vulnerability of communities at risk. Specifically, in the field of emergency response and humanitarian action, the resolution called for improved internal coordination and emergency response capacity, and for strengthened ability on the part of WHO field offices, particularly in disaster-prone countries, to respond to early warning signals.

Within WHO, the overall aim is to create "a culture of emergency response and humanitarian action" so that our Organization can quickly and efficiently translate intentions into actions.

It is with a view to making all WHO country representatives and WHO staff generally aware of what is required of them in the related fields of emergency preparedness, emergency response and humanitarian action that this brochure has been prepared. I am pleased to commend ***Coping with Major Emergencies*** to the attention of all of you.