

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20523

Auditor General

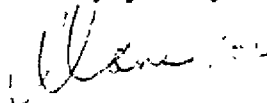
Mr. J. K. Fasick
Director
International Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fasick:

Attached are comments of the Department of State and the Agency for International Development regarding the General Accounting Office draft report "Need to Build an International Disaster Relief Agency." We apologize for the time required to prepare and coordinate the comments, but believe it important that these Agencies' opinions be fully developed on this issue. I'm sure the positions taken will be given full consideration by the GAO in development of the final report on this important issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this draft report. If there are issues requiring further information or clarification we remain ready to work with your staff on them.

Sincerely yours,



Peter M. Cody
Acting Auditor General

Attachment: a/s

STATE/AID RESPONSE TO GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICES'S DRAFT REPORT TO THE CONGRESS "NEED TO BUILD AN INTERNATIONAL DISASTER RELIEF AGENCY"

State and A.I.D. share the General Accounting Office's belief that the world's disaster capabilities can and must be strengthened. Accordingly, the U.S. played a major part in the original move in the U.N. to create the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) and more recently took another initiative to strengthen and expand its operations. We also agree with GAO that there is a need for contingency planning on an international scale which could be undertaken by UNDRO in its role as coordinator of international responses to disasters.

However, State and A.I.D. strongly believe the proposal, even in the unspecified future, to convey or commit to UNDRO all the world's disaster relief resources and responsibility for their management is neither practical nor feasible. It would create more problems than it could solve and it is unlikely that it would be supported in the U.N. by other donor nations. At this point, State and A.I.D. are working closely with UNDRO to strengthen its ability to coordinate the activities of U.N. agencies and donor nations. We do not believe that even a strengthened UNDRO would have the capability or necessary support to undertake global operational and decision-making responsibility in disaster assistance.

This response to the GAO report will outline the various factors which militate against UNDRO being given the scope of responsibility proposed by the GAO.

Sahel/Bangladesh Experience

GAO's proposal to give UNDRO total operational control is based in large part on GAO analysis of two somewhat atypical disasters, the Sahel and East Pakistan/Bangladesh. It was only because of the unusual magnitude and character of each disaster that there was such wide international support. In the case of these two disasters, it is critical to understand that a well-coordinated international response was indeed needed. Full operational control by the complex and, to a degree, compartmentalized machinery of the United Nations would in no way have assured greater effectiveness. Better international coordination (not control) was needed and ad hoc U.N. machinery was created for this purpose. UNDRO was by-passed because of its inadequate capacity (six professionals), but this was prior to the current program of substantially strengthening UNDRO, particularly in the role of coordination. Moreover, it is doubtful that the large amount of resources provided to the Sahel and East Pakistan/Bangladesh would have been supplied if the donor nations had been asked to operate under the control of an international organization. Political facts of life are that bilateral responses, because of the credit received by individual nations or because of their ties to the

disaster affected country, yield greater resources than would be generated through a go-between organization.

Moreover, as noted above, disasters of the magnitude experienced in the Sahel and Bangladesh do not occur frequently. Sahel was a creeping disaster involving six countries over an extended period of time. Bangladesh was a series of catastrophic events both natural and man-made. It is important to further note that almost all of the other 460 disasters to which the U.S. has responded over the past 11 years were confined to individual countries and were with rare exception, less complicated and considerably shorter in duration. It would appear inappropriate, therefore, to base broad recommendations on the unusual experiences in the Sahel and Bangladesh.

In considering various aspects of the GAO proposal, it is important to keep in mind that without the full support of voluntary agencies, international humanitarian agencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and League of Red Cross Societies (LICROSS), the United Nations and its specialized agencies and bilateral donor countries, UNDRO could not assume international management responsibility for operations even if it had the capacity to do so. In our judgment these donors and organizations would not favor turning over management responsibility to UNDRO. If UNDRO tried to assume such a management role and failed, the opposition generated could adversely affect its existing coordination role.

UNITED NATIONS

During U.N. debate on the creation of UNDRO there was great resistance to giving UNDRO anything but coordination responsibilities--let alone operational control. Initially, UNDRO was given insufficient funds and staff to carry out even its limited coordinating responsibilities. Our support of UNDRO is well known. Indeed, the United States played an essential role in providing funds to UNDRO to increase its coordination capacity as well as staff size. If the U.S. were now to suggest an operational control role for UNDRO, even in the distant future, the proposal would be likely to reawaken old oppositions to UNDRO. Other nations agreed to join the British and us on the basis that it would be limited to a coordinative role and would not assume any operational responsibilities. Given the circumstances, we do not believe that UNDRO could or should assume such operational responsibility. After more than three years effort, UNDRO is just now reaching the point of being able to carry out its coordination responsibilities effectively. It may take another two years to train its larger staff, establish systems, and acquire sufficient experience to perform this difficult role.

RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

Many disaster-prone countries are currently developing national disaster plans designed to meet their own emergencies. But whether or not they

have such plans, they typically insist on maintaining disaster management control of both self-help and external aid. It is a matter of national pride, an expression of sovereignty easily understood; and for a new nation it may be an action of considerable internal political importance. These countries reserve the right to request or not to request help as they choose and the right to request it from whom they choose. No donor nation or organization can force its charity or assistance upon another country.

Recognizing these facts, the U.S. and most donor countries and organizations take the position that the initiative belongs to the country in which the disaster happens. While encouraging the countries to recognize a humanitarian need on a timely basis and to request or accept assistance, donors must consider their help supplementary to what the country can do for itself. This being the case, the U.S. has accelerated its pre-planning assistance to disaster-prone countries. Over the past years where such help has been successfully received and plans developed, requests for outside help have diminished. Of even greater importance, effective self-help more rapidly mitigates the suffering of disaster victims.

For any international organization to assume total management of relief operations for a developing country would be tantamount to treating it as an incurable disaster management invalid, precluding the development of national self-help capabilities, which certainly would not be in the interest of disaster victims.

The U.S. now supports the development of certain regional assistance arrangements in which countries in high risk disaster areas plan together to assist one another following disastrous events. Such arrangements, if successfully made, would share the normal self-help burden and should bring relief resources to a disaster site in the shortest possible time. Such action, which has proven most valuable in the past even when provided on an ad hoc basis, could be diminished by the single management agency proposal.

DONOR NATIONS

As many as 70 nations may provide assistance in one way or another to a single major disaster. While it would be hopeful to believe such help is provided for purely humanitarian reasons--above politics and the battle--it would be untrue. Among world donors, willingness to play a consistent or significant role or to be coordinated varies. For example, Arab help is most often provided to Moslem nations. Latin America responds only modestly to relief needs outside the Americas. Russia and mainland China have not been willing to work in a cooperative way, and the creation of such a management role for UNDRO is not likely to change this. Many countries to date respond only with modest contributions, except where it is clearly in their political interest. In many instances,

disaster aid is given only because of the public image created.

It will be an accomplishment of some magnitude to get most donors to accept even UNDRO's modest coordination role. To go beyond this by suggesting that they relinquish their current management role which yields international recognition to them and just provide funds or pre-commit supplies and equipment to UNDRO would not be well received. We believe we must, in the interest of the victims of disaster, accept the fact that changes in international disaster assistance evolve slowly, and we should be grateful for what is provided for whatever reasons.

EFFECT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

U.S. disaster relief is an important way for the American public, as well as its government, to express its humanitarian concerns for those adversely affected by natural and man-made disasters. Equally important, disaster relief is becoming increasingly a major instrument of our foreign policy. The assistance we can provide to various nations may have a long term impact on U.S. relations with these nations and their friends. Moreover, the generosity and the expertise evidenced in the past through disaster relief responses have helped to strengthen this nation's image in the world at large.

Thus, in the above context, we know that placing total command in the hands of UNDRO would mute the U. S. Government's role. The provision of assistance is considerably more complex than the mere shipping of supplies and equipment from stockpiles. The U.S. Foreign Disaster Relief Coordinator has intimate knowledge of and immediate access to the disaster-related resources of all U.S. Government agencies. In our judgment, such resources cannot be irrevocably precommitted. In assessing the importance of bilateral action, we must not forget that many Americans regard disaster relief--bilaterally or through voluntary agencies--as a concrete expression of their ties and concern for the countries from which they or their ancestors came.

EFFECT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF U.S. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

The GAO proposal may be viewed by voluntary agencies as threatening their humanitarian role, which is one of their prime means of obtaining public financial support. Such support is often promoted by a prideful recapitulation of humanitarian accomplishments. A change in the voluntary agencies' mission to that of a collection agent for UNDRO would surely result in a rapid loss of public support. Moreover, it is likely that their unique role and ability to respond would be limited or conceivably even eliminated if UNDRO were directly involved. It should be noted that some of the most effective disaster relief provided abroad, especially during the crucial first hours following a disaster, is from American voluntary agencies' resident representatives in the stricken country. Their on-the-ground assessments are frequently of great value to all donors. They also have a proven capability for aiding in longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction.

voluntary agencies may be expected to resist the slightest semblance of government or other external control. U.S. Government/voluntary agency relationships in disaster relief have evolved slowly. U.S. Government support is accepted only on a no-interference, no strings attached basis. We believe voluntary agencies will not submit to any degree of management control by UNDRO, though they would probably be willing to accept a degree of UNDRO coordination.

U.S. INITIATIVE

The U.S. has strongly supported UNDRO and will continue to do so at every reasonable opportunity. Not only did the U.S. play a major role in co-sponsoring the creation of UNDRO in 1971, but we initiated a resolution adopted unanimously by the U.N. General Assembly in November, 1974, to substantially strengthen UNDRO's capacity to carry out its assigned mandate. The resolution called on the Secretary General "to provide sufficient staff, equipment, and facilities to strengthen UNDRO's capacity to provide an efficient and effective worldwide service of mobilizing and coordinating disaster relief, particularly the collection and dissemination of information on disaster assessment, priority needs, and donor assistance." It called for meeting the additional costs from voluntary contributions during the initial three-year period. The resolution decided further that, while the main purpose was to concentrate on coordination, this was without prejudice to improvements in UNDRO's disaster prevention and pre-disaster planning roles. The U.S. offered \$750,000 to substantially meet the first year's costs of this program (which has since been drawn down), and our fair share thereafter.

In early 1975 the U.S. Disaster Relief Coordinator participated in a three-man experts panel appointed by the U.N. Disaster Relief Coordinator to draw up a plan for implementing this resolution. UNDRO is now in the process of putting the plan into effect, together with a parallel plan to strengthen its disaster preparedness programs. This will mean inter alia an increase in staff from 11 to 42, as well as additional facilities and communications equipment. Pledges to a voluntary fund to meet the first three years' additional costs of about \$3 million have been made by the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Belgium, in addition to the U.S.

A further increase in UNDRO's resources has been authorized by two resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in December 1975, calling for substantial increases, also through voluntary contributions, in the funds available to UNDRO for modest (token) disaster relief contributions and for program costs of technical assistance in pre-disaster planning and prevention.

For the U.S. to go beyond the significant initiatives recently agreed to by launching an international initiative for support to make UNDRO the world's disaster commander would not only be counter-productive but also could be politically inadvisable. It would give the rest of

the international disaster relief community of nations and organizations reason to question U.S. understanding of the dynamics and present world attitudes toward international disaster cooperation.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE GAO PROPOSAL

We must continue to take every opportunity to strengthen and support UNDRO as the world's disaster relief coordinator, both within and outside the U.N. system. To this end we must continue to support the initiatives now underway and to help UNDRO in its efforts to implement them.. A.I.D.'s Office of Foreign Disaster Relief Coordination consults with UNDRO staff frequently on problems they encounter in accomplishing their goals and, from time to time, provides training for their staff. A.I.D. routinely provides UNDRO with detailed assessment information it receives from U.S. Diplomatic Missions and keeps them informed of relief actions contemplated or taken. There is increasing interest on the part of other nations to join in the support of UNDRO. The Governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland and Denmark have pledged approximately \$1.5 million for that purpose.

The U.S. must show, by example, its willingness to accept UNDRO coordination and be guided by it. We must expand our own association with other donors to draw them into a coordinated system. We must make available to UNDRO whatever expertise it may need for any good purpose. We must also encourage UNDRO's preparedness planning to increase the self-reliance of developing disaster-prone nations and remain vigilant to all other opportunities for international action which may present themselves.

Finally, we must continue to strengthen U.S. international disaster relief capacity. The U.S. at this time possesses the most sophisticated disaster relief response capability in the world. Its disaster relief activities are supported by the American public. The Congress, in recent amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act, has legislated for the first time a separate section focusing entirely on international disaster assistance which places emphasis on developing a preparedness, planning and contingency ability. In this vein, the Executive Branch has attached equal importance to an effective disaster relief capacity. Recently, the President designated the A.I.D. Administrator as his Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance. In so doing, the President has demonstrated the importance the Executive Branch attaches to our bilateral response. This feeling is also demonstrated by the growing support of the American community and the Legislative Branch for U.S. bilateral disaster relief operations.

CONCLUSION

For reasons given, we wish to record our disagreement with the GAO recommendation to make UNDRO the world's disaster manager. At the same time, we wish to commend the report for signalling the urgent need to strengthen international disaster relief activities. In doing so, it performs an important function in the international and domestic dialogue which will serve the cause of more effective disaster assistance in the years to come.

PRINCIPAL U.S. OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR
MATTERS DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

	<u>Appointed</u>
SECRETARY OF STATE Henry A. Kissinger	Sept. 1973
ADMINISTRATOR, AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT Daniel S. Parker	Oct. 1973



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

B-159652

To the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives

This report deals with the need to improve the current state of international disaster relief management. The report (1) summarizes our case study of the recent international relief effort in the Sahel area of Africa and (2) presents our recommendations and proposals for uniting the relief resources of the international community under the leadership and direction of an international disaster relief agency.

We made our review pursuant to the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921 (31 U.S.C. 53), and the Accounting and Auditing Act of 1950 (31 U.S.C. 67).

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and to the heads of interested agencies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Luther B. Stacks". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Comptroller General
of the United States

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