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Informal consultations of the plenary of the General Assembly
on United Nations system-wide coherence

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I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

Today we have the first meeting within the informal consultations of the General Assembly on United Nations System-wide Coherence. The EU thanks the co-chairs for convening this meeting. We believe these consultations are an important opportunity to hear the views of all Member States, and we look forward to engaging in a constructive and open dialogue on the issues raised by the High Level Panel Report. We highly appreciate the structured and forward looking approach which you have chosen.

The current debate on humanitarian issues and recovery is both critical and timely. In placing humanitarian assistance and recovery at the beginning of the informal consultations, we acknowledge the importance of the international humanitarian system, which in the past decade has been faced with growing demands as a result of an increasing number of natural disasters and recognised complex crises.

The process of reform of the humanitarian system initiated under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and OCHA is already under way. Many of the recommendations in the High Level Panel report incorporate decisions already taken by the General Assembly. It is therefore important to avoid both unnecessary delays of a reform well underway, and a duplication of efforts. We should consider carefully how different recommendations can best be taken forward.

It is important to underline the central role of the United Nations and in particular the Emergency Relief Coordinator in the coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance to the victims of humanitarian crises, a role which must be further enhanced.

Strengthening partnership between humanitarian actors from the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, NGOs and national governments lies at the heart of the ongoing humanitarian reform. As a result of various factors, i.a. the Cluster Approach, partnership-building efforts at the global and at field level have resulted in improved collaboration. The EU agrees that the leadership provided by humanitarian coordinators plays a vital role in fostering partnerships on the ground and acknowledges the progress being made in the strengthening of the Humanitarian Coordinator System. Wider proposals to strengthen the RC system should complement existing efforts to ensure strong leadership of the UN's work in crisis-affected countries, and in particular the role of Humanitarian Coordinators.

Since its launch in March 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund has established itself as valuable tool for response to sudden-onset or underfunded crises. We particularly welcome the breadth of the donor base for the CERF. The EU supports the Panel's recommendation of fully funding it by the year 2008. To date, around three quarters of CERF contributions have been made by EU Member States.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

With respect to Internal Displacement, it is obvious that the dimension and challenges of the problem currently lie beyond the capacity of any single organisation. Agencies with cluster lead responsibilities, such as UNHCR, need to take an inclusive approach whereby responsibilities are shared among all key partners, both inside and outside the UN system. The needs of IDPs can only effectively be met by inter-agency and partnership approaches, in close consultation with national governments, who carry primary responsibility for their citizens. The Cluster Approach provides a valuable basis, which must be further developed.

Our response to the transitional period from relief to development should be a collective one. We welcome the envisaged leadership of UNDP as coordinator for early recovery. Details of repositioning UNDP with regard to strategic direction, internal structure and adequate funding for this purpose will be subject to further in-depth consultations, which we highly encourage.

With regard to long-term food security, we look forward to the recommended review of FAO, WFP and IFAD's respective approaches. Within this context the EU considers the Rome-based-agencies' cooperation to be a central part of an overall strategy to improve efficiency and enhance the impact of food security, and to ensure an appropriate, efficient and timely response in times of crisis. A concerted effort of all three agencies can help to improve food security worldwide, as well as at the country level. The EU welcomes efforts to seek synergies which are cost-efficient and improve the effectiveness of the three institutions. It will also want to enable each of the respective institutions to concentrate on those activities where they can demonstrate greatest comparable advantage.

As the Panel rightly suggests, greater emphasis should be put on natural disaster risk reduction. In this context the EU welcomes the recent progress made in the area of disaster risk reduction within the UN framework and its International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction. The first meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva allowed stakeholders such as governments, UN agencies, regional bodies and civil society to assess the progress made in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action and to identify the way forward. From an EU perspective, the call for integrating disaster risk reduction into development policy and humanitarian assistance at regional, national and community level to an even greater extent was one of the important outcomes of the Global Platform Meeting. It is often developing countries that are least resilient to natural disasters. Natural disasters in general are on the rise worldwide, not least due to climate change. Disaster Risk reduction thus remains key to reducing poverty and to achieving sustainable development.

In conclusion allow me to draw the Assembly's attention to recent developments within the European Union in the field of humanitarian assistance. The EU provides more than half of official international humanitarian aid, either directly from individual Member States or through the European Commission. On June 13 last week, the European Commission after a wide-ranging consultation of humanitarian stakeholders adopted a Communication paving the way for a European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. This European Consensus which we are aiming for will be the first joint document on the European Union's humanitarian aid policy and will boost the impact of its humanitarian aid. Under the German Presidency, the Council of the European Union on 18 June declared its support for this process, which stresses the central role of the United Nations in promoting a coherent response to humanitarian crises. It also underlines that the promotion of disaster risk reduction strategies and preparedness activities is essential to the EU.