

# TODAY AT THE GA

SUMMARY OF THE 62<sup>ND</sup> SESSION

21 DECEMBER 2007

## Summary

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On 17 December, the General Assembly adopted, by consensus, five resolutions under agenda item 71 on Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

The GA also adopted by consensus resolutions on the protection and assistance to IDPs, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the elimination of rape in conflict settings and the on the development activities of the UN, including transition situations. A controversial resolution calling for a moratorium of the death penalty went to a vote with 104 Member States in favour, 54 against and 29 who abstained (see sidebar).

During the negotiations of these resolutions, the overall dynamic among delegations on humanitarian issues was marked by a North-South divide that has markedly deepened since the World Summit of 2005. On one side, delegations from India, China and other members of the G77 as well as Russia, promoted a minimalist approach to the role and remit of the UN and more oversight by the GA of UN humanitarian activities. On the other side, traditional donor countries were joined by several Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, and Mexico to promote a stronger UN that develops its own policies and practices which are then supported and legitimized by the GA. Countries that benefit from humanitarian assistance were absent from these discussions. As a result, discussion became polarized and politicized by opposing world views, and negotiations became dominated by ideological positioning and political tactics rather than the substance of the issues. This dynamic appears to have been pervasive across the GA throughout the fall season of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session.

## Highlights

### ***Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations***

As part of this humanitarian “omnibus” resolution, delegations were able to highlight disaster preparedness as a key humanitarian concern, asking the United Nations to better coordinate preparedness programmes, asking donors to fund preparedness programmes and governments to share best practices for preparedness with a particular focus on risk monitoring. Support for the humanitarian reform agenda remained intact, with particularly strong support for CERF, including meeting its \$500 million target and completing its 2-year evaluation in 2008.

However, the difficult dynamic prevented any further development of humanitarian norms and policies on key issues. Delegations reverted to agreed language on humanitarian access, the protection of civilians, IDPs and

gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, which Russia strongly opposed. In addition, the resolution is peppered with references to government oversight and features a new preambular paragraph on the conduct humanitarian personnel, a compromise on several muscular paragraphs from Sudan, India, Russia and Colombia that implied the involvement of humanitarian personnel in child abduction and trafficking, collaboration with terrorist organisations and rape. Recent events concerning humanitarian actors that were perceived of going beyond their mandates fell on fruitful ground in this regard.

### ***International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development***

As in past years, this G77-sponsored resolution was negotiated in a very short time with little controversy. It focuses on early recovery/transition in disaster response, as driven by the facilitator's agenda (India). It has a strengthened reference to the dissemination of best practices while encouraging Member States to scale-up successful local initiatives. It also requests the SG to review the Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities in 2008. The proposal by India to link early recovery funding to the CAPs and the CERF was blocked by the EU and Canada.

Delegations were reluctant to make references to disaster preparedness, and on legal preparedness in particular, and to climate change, though both issues featured prominently in the SG's report prepared by OCHA and the IASC.

### ***Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel.***

This year's resolution has strong language on the importance of close collaboration between the UN and the host country on contingency planning, information exchange and risk assessment (pp17). While delegations could not agree on a reference to the UN's Saving Lives Together initiative, they agreed to a general reference and a request to the SG to report on steps taken in this regard. There was little progress on the vulnerability and need for protection of locally recruited staff, which some delegations fear means extending them special legal status. Delegations could also not agree on a reference to the 'Optional Protocol to the Convention on Safety and Security of UN and Associated Personnel,' which expands the legal protection to include peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance.

### ***Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster***

The negotiations were swift and uncontroversial. New resolution features include a paragraph on the identification and dissemination of best practices and a strengthening of early warning systems. Although several donors questioned the placement of this resolution on the humanitarian agenda, delegations agreed that the SG should report on its implementation for another year.

## **Other Resolutions**

### ***International Strategy for Disaster Reduction***

The resolution was adopted by consensus. The discussions were constructive and there was strong support for ISDR. Delegations acknowledged that much progress has been made in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework, recognized the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and the importance of coordinating climate change adaptation with relevant disaster risk reduction measures. Delegations also saw a need to review the current methods of financing with a view to stabilize the ISDR secretariat's financial base.

### ***Protection and Assistance of IDPs***

This resolution was adopted by consensus and through fairly constructive negotiations. The resolution strengthened the mandate of the Representative of the Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. The text also features a reference to mainstreaming the human rights of IDPs into all relevant parts of the UN system, to natural disasters and disaster risk reduction, to the development of benchmarks for assessing when displacement ends. The Peacebuilding Commission is called upon to systematically include IDPs into its work. For the first time, governments are explicitly encouraged the development of domestic laws and policies for all stages of displacement.

### ***Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR)***

The GA also adopted the TCPR, a triennial resolution on the development activities of the United Nations. The extensive and difficult negotiations of the resolution's 89 paragraphs suffering from the divisions apparent elsewhere in the GA: The G77 and Russia believe that country-level development initiatives should be led by governments and norms, principles and best practices should be set by States. Donor countries continue to push for some of the recommendations from the near-dead Report of the High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, including unified UN leadership, programming, budgeting and administration at country level. The resolution reflects delegations' support of strengthening the RC system, and particularly with regards to the double role of the RC as humanitarian coordinator in transition situations.

### ***The Elimination of Rape***

The GA also passed a resolution calling for the elimination of rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations. The text urges States to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence; to end impunity for perpetrators of such crimes; to provide victims with greater access to health care, to promote human rights education and conduct public awareness campaigns; and to consider ratifying or acceding to all human rights treaties on the issue.

The adoption of the resolution by consensus follows several weeks of contentious discussions between the United States, the resolution drafters, and the Africa Group. While the US had intended to put forward a resolution specifically condemning rape and sexual abuse by governments and armed groups to achieve political and military objectives, the Africa Group, and most vocally South Africa, fought to broaden the scope of the resolution and deflect attention from countries such as Sudan, Zimbabwe and DRC who felt implicated by the text.

### ***Moratorium on the Death Penalty***

The General Assembly voted to back a resolution calling for a global moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty entirely. 104 Member States voted in favour, 54 against and 29 abstained. The resolution asks countries to progressively restrict the use of the death penalty, and calls on nations that do impose the death penalty to ensure they meet internationally agreed minimum standards on the safeguards for those facing execution. The United States, Singapore and China joined many developing countries, notably from the Islamic world, in voting against the resolution. At issue was whether the death penalty is a human rights concern governed by international conventions or a criminal justice issue, and therefore guided by national laws. Some also argued that the resolution smacked of the moral righteousness of its Western sponsors and showed little respect for the rights of sovereign states.

### ***Assistance to Victims of Sexual Abuse by UN and Related Personnel***

On 21 December 2007, the General Assembly adopted a draft "United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel." The Strategy establishes that the UN will help victims to receive the assistance they need in a coordinated manner across the UN system. The Strategy contains most of the elements proposed by the Secretariat for inclusion, except direct financial assistance to victims. Some elements (economic support, victim protection and Victim Support Facilitators) were removed as explicit elements with the understanding that they could be read into the Strategy. A rollout plan will be developed in the new year.