CRITERIA FOR WHO's INTERVENTION IN EMERGENCIES

WHO intervenes to ensure integrated response to public health concerns in three typical emergency situations:

a) Emergencies where humanitarian concerns affect all areas. These are situations usually managed through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee with the support of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and are covered by the UN consolidated appeals for complete emergencies (CAP). The UN appeals for natural disasters follow a similar pattern of inter-agency consultations, but is the affected Government which has to launch its appeal for international assistance (which can then receive, if needed, coordination support from the UN).

b) Health emergencies with an international dimension (e.g. Rift Valley fever in Yemen) where WHO leads or co-leads the intervention and uses the IASC mechanism to address the health hazards.

c) Situations where the health security of the affected populations or humanitarian workers is at stake. Various areas of collaboration with OCHA are developed in these cases (e.g., recently, on depleted uranium).

To clarify when the UN declares emergencies and on the role of the IASC, here are relevant excerpts from the UN resolution 46/182:

“An Inter-Agency Standing Committee serviced by a strengthened Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator [to day OCHA] should be established under the chairmanship of the high-level official with the participation of all operational organizations and with a standing invitation to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent. Societies, and the International Organization for Migration. Relevant non-governmental organizations can be invited to participate on an ad hoc basis. The Committee should meet as soon as possible in response to emergencies”.

...and from the Consolidated Appeal Process Guidelines endorsed by the IASC on 13 April 1994:

“The use of the CAP is principally to meet the demands of ‘major’ as well as ‘complex emergencies’. Both major and complex emergencies are generally acknowledged to be those which exceed the mandate and/or capacity of any agency and are deemed to require a system-wide approach. The determination of a complex or major Emergency will be made by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), led by the emergency Relief Coordinator. It is assumed that, as is the case for most international responses to disasters and emergencies, the initial request for assistance of a complex or major emergency will come from the Government of the affected country”.