Southern and Eastern African Regions Agree to Set a Course for More Effective and Efficient Humanitarian Action

Pretoria, 30 October 2014—The Republic of South Africa, the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) co-hosted the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Regional Consultation for Eastern and Southern Africa from 27-29 October 2014 at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) OR Tambo Building. About 200 delegates participated in the meeting, which included government representatives, civil society, the private sector, academia, youth and disaster-affected communities, including UN agencies and international aid organization from 23 countries across the region. The participants called for "an innovative and people-centred approach to humanitarian action in the lead-up to the 2016 WHS that will be convened by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki Moon.

The Eastern and Southern Africa region is the third of eight world regions to hold such consultations following consultations held in the West and Central Africa region in June and in North and South-East Asia in July. This round of consultations was overseen by a Regional Steering Group co-chaired by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The purpose of these consultations was to identify different constituencies' perspectives and priorities on four key themes: namely: humanitarian effectiveness; reducing vulnerability and managing risk; transformation through innovation; and serving the needs of people in conflict. The results and recommendations will feed into the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, in 2016 convened by the UN Secretary-General. The aim of the summit is to set the agenda for future humanitarian action and create an inclusive and diverse global humanitarian system.

During the opening of the regional consultation, Ambassador Ebrahim Saley delivered a statement on behalf of South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, who underscored the importance of the meeting to "fashion out a region specific approach which is fit for the future."

The Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms Valerie Amos, in her opening address said that the participants need to ensure that people are at the heart of our response efforts, not an afterthought. Adding further, the Executive Secretary of SADC, Dr Stergomena Lawrence Tax, said that the member states of the SADC Region are vulnerable to a range of natural disasters, and since many events affect several countries almost simultaneously, a regional approach to managing the risk is appropriate and necessary.

Mr Ignacio Garcia Leon, Head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Regional Office for Southern Africa (UN OCHA ROSA) noted, "This consultation is the first-ever humanitarian summit of this scale and magnitude which aims to radically shift humanitarian action to ensure improved responsiveness to the changing humanitarian landscape in terms of greater needs, more diverse actors, new technologies, and political and economic shifts. It is imperative that we find innovative ways to helping those who need it most. We must go beyond reacting to crisis, but look at ways of preventing it or at least mitigating effects in a first instance."

South Africa also encouraged participants not to put on hold until the 2016 WHS in Istanbul, Turkey, the concrete solutions that emerged from the Regional Consultation but to implement them immediately at the ground level. To this end, the meeting concluded with 16 key recommendations which focused on strengthening the role of communities to prepare for disasters, adopting innovative multi-sectoral partnerships and approaches to deliver assistance to disaster-affected people, particularly youth, woman, immigrants and refugees more swiftly and effectively. The final meeting report is expected to be issued in early November.

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