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## EVALUATION REPORTS

### Agenda item 5

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## SUMMARY REPORT ON THE TRIPARTITE (UNICEF/UNHCR/WFP) STUDY<sup>1</sup> OF THE GREAT LAKES EMERGENCY OPERATION

September 1996–September 1997

Total food cost (April 1995–April 1998)	252,456,374 dollars
Total cost to WFP	569,614,712 dollars
Date approved	10 March 1995
Date letter of understanding signed	10 July 1995
Duration of project (first three phases)	Three years
Date of evaluation	October/November 1997
Composition of mission	WFP/UNICEF/UNHCR

All monetary values are expressed in United States dollars.

<sup>1</sup> The full report is available on request, in English only.

## ABSTRACT

In the mission team's view, the quantity and quality of the informal cooperation and formal coordination were generally high. A number of signed formal agreements were concluded in the form of: a) regional, country-level and local Memoranda of Understanding and operational plans; b) separate agreements on cooperation in specific sectors such as logistics and telecommunications; and c) country-level and local joint work plans.

More significant perhaps for future emergency operations was the amount of joint activity undertaken by the three agencies. Informal arrangements included, *inter alia*, regional and local logistics control centres with pooled resources, an arrangement for shared telecommunications connectivity and frequencies and joint use of equipment and personnel, and undertakings for common warehouse, office and other facilities. Moreover, there was a concerted effort among the three agencies, as the level of emergency activities has wound down, to build upon these experiences through the adoption of written procedures and agreements to guide the establishment of joint activities in future emergency operations.

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**This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.**

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## BACKGROUND

1. In 1995 and early 1996 the donor-sponsored “Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda” (better known as the “multi-donor study”) examined the regional emergency programme at a time when most of the beneficiaries were refugees clustered in eastern Zaire and western Tanzania. The outbreak of civil war in Zaire in late 1996, however, created large numbers of internally displaced persons in that country, and forced the repatriation of over a million refugee to Rwanda and Tanzania. Several hundred thousand refugees were forced into the most inaccessible parts of eastern Zaire.
2. In mid-1997, WFP proposed to UNHCR and UNICEF that the three agencies undertake a joint study of inter-agency operational coordination in the Great Lakes region. Agreement was reached on the terms of reference, and the “Tripartite Mission” commenced in October 1997. The mission team was composed of a WFP (OEDE) Evaluation Officer, a UNHCR operations staff officer, and a retired UNICEF officer. The period selected for the study, September 1996 to September 1997, begins with the outbreak of the war in eastern Zaire, and ends the month prior to the mission’s visit to the region.
3. Over a period of three weeks the mission visited six countries of the region (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—DRC); it also held consultations at the headquarters of the three agencies in Rome, Geneva and New York. In the field the mission met with the regional directors/managers and country representatives of the three agencies and with those staff of the three agencies who, working at the regional, country and field level in areas such as communications, logistics, programming, security and information, were most closely concerned with the implementation of the various emergency programmes. Following the field visit, the team prepared a draft report which was subsequently revised to take account of comments made by operations and evaluation managers at the headquarters of the three agencies.
4. The mission also interviewed officials of other United Nations agencies, including UNDP Resident Coordinators and United Nations Humanitarian Coordinators. It met with NGOs in Rwanda, and with national government officials in Burundi. In Tanzania, the mission met with members of the Joint Food Aid Assessment Mission of the Great Lakes Region (JFAM) and attended part of the latter’s debriefing. Although the Tripartite team was unable to meet in the field with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group/Department of Humanitarian Affairs mission (IASC/DHA Mission), which was studying strategic humanitarian coordination in the Great Lakes region, it did subsequently have the opportunity for an extensive exchange of views. The full mission report, available from OEDE, contains some findings and recommendations which do not relate directly to WFP and therefore for reasons of space were not included in this summary.

### Purpose and scope of the study

5. The objective of the joint WFP/UNHCR/UNICEF mission was to examine operational aspects of humanitarian assistance coordination in the Great Lakes region in order to:
  - a) contribute to a shared regional inter-institutional process of self-evaluation which will prioritize and shape work to improve inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance appropriate to the changing context; and
  - b) document lessons for broader application to humanitarian assistance.



6. The focus of the study was limited to the three primary United Nations operational agencies: UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### General

7. The mission observed that both the quantity and quality of the formal and informal cooperation in the field among UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR operational staff were of a high level, higher than the mission had anticipated. Agreements in the form of operational plans, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) and technical agreements covering specific sectors such as logistics and telecommunications were concluded as a result of regional, country-level and local initiatives. Subsequently, a Global MOU was signed between the headquarters of WFP and UNICEF, together with a global technical agreement covering radio communications.
8. More significant, from the point of view of future coordinated activities, was the increased number of joint activities undertaken by the three agencies, in which, for a finite time and for specific purposes, they merged their identities. Informal arrangements included: some regional and local logistics control centres employing shared resources; an agreement for shared telecommunications connectivity and frequencies; joint use of equipment and personnel; and undertakings for common warehouse, office and other facilities. Subsequently, as the level of emergency activity in the region has decreased, there has been a concerted effort by the agencies to build upon experience and to develop agreed written procedures to guide the establishment of joint activities in future emergency operations.
9. In this, as in previous emergency operations, divergences of views between United Nations agency officers sometimes hindered coordination. When such differences occurred, even signed agreements and MOUs could do little to overcome them and harmonize agency operations. Another recurring difficulty was the competition among the individual United Nations agencies to promote their own identity for fund-raising purposes. It is precisely these “natural” characteristics of the international emergency assistance system, however, that serve to emphasize the importance of the achievements made by the personnel of the three agencies in developing the new formal and informal modalities of operational coordination and joint action.
10. Although the detailed examination of the question of *strategic* coordination was properly the task of the IASC/DHA Mission, the Tripartite Mission permitted itself to comment on such coordination when it clearly had a direct relation to operational matters. It was observed that in general, the closer one gets to the physical ‘action’, the clearer the responsibilities among the agencies appear to be defined; and the more coherent and coordinated the decision-making mechanism, the more orderly the manner in which the decisions were implemented. At this level, administrators were more often than not focused on the task at hand, rather than on agency politics or visibility.
11. In the latter half of 1996, with the commencement of the civil war in eastern Zaire, a new phase in the Great Lakes emergency operation began. The sudden movements of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) tended to bring UNHCR’s protection and relief activities and WFP’s logistics and feeding operations into the forefront of the programme. As the WFP and UNHCR operations escalated with their significantly superior resources, UNICEF’s efforts were merged into this larger operation.



Food, shelter, protection and transport became the primary operational concerns and certainly attracted the bulk of donor funding. The result was that UNICEF was not always included as a full partner in those cases where local logistics control centres or programming arrangements were established.

12. Then, when the local situation normalized and the refugees/IDPs returned or relocated, the focus of the local community and the governmental authorities turned to the reconstruction of infrastructure, and the re-establishment of schools and health and other social services. Emergency water-supply had to be developed into community water-supply, for example. Consequently, when emergency operations wound down and rehabilitation and reconstruction activities were commenced, UNICEF, on occasions with very little advance notice, and without necessarily having been involved in the emergency planning (as occurred in Kivu Province, DRC), was expected to take over the operations.

**Recommendation:** In the interest of programme continuity and to hasten normalization and the resumption of basic social services in conflict-affected areas, all three agencies should be actively involved in planning and coordinating activities from the outset of complex emergency operations (that is, not only in the development of the programme proper, but also the entry and exit strategies). In particular, because UNICEF usually has a key role during the transitional phase of re-establishing basic services, it should be a partner in the planning of humanitarian relief even in those situations where, and at stages when, it does not have a substantial role to play in those operations.

### Logistics and commodity tracking

13. After the outbreak of civil war in September/October 1996, over a million (mostly) Rwandan refugees suddenly fled the fighting to return to their places of origin or to move deeper into eastern Zaire, necessitating the repositioning of aid agencies and the rerouting of assistance. In eastern Zaire logistics and telecommunications became major problems since large numbers of refugees and IDPs had to be assisted and protected, and quickly moved out of harm's way and/or returned to their place of origin, amidst the ongoing hostilities.
14. As significant numbers of people migrated or were driven to a particular location, the three agencies (or in some instances, the 'two' agencies—UNHCR and WFP) were able to agree on an ad hoc assignment of roles which corresponded to the funding, personnel and equipment resources at hand available to each party at that location. Whichever agency had the formal designation 'lead agency' did not matter, for significant parts of the operation were carried out through local joint arrangements, utilizing shared staff, equipment and funding.
15. At the *regional* level in Kampala in December 1996, DHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP established a United Nations Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC). Originally intended primarily as a liaison point for the United Nations Multinational Force (MNF) briefly deployed to the region, UNJLC was used to process information on logistics operations of the three operational agencies, and more broadly for the common management of their logistics operations throughout the region. This unit was responsible for the coordination of incoming freight and forwarding to the *field* locations. A document setting forth procedures for the establishment of UNJLCs in future emergency operations was agreed in draft form in February 1997 by the logistics sections of the three agencies.
16. The individual field operations which WFP and UNHCR established for the first time in the Great Lakes emergency in locations such as Kisangani, Goma, Entebbe, Mbandaka,



Mwanza and Brazzaville were called Movement Control Centres (MOVCONs). Each had its own specific form and content, developed to address the particular logistics problems encountered in the area covered by that operation.

17. Through UNJLC, MOVCONs, and similar arrangements, any combination of agencies can temporarily pool personnel and equipment resources to manage an aircell or barge or trucking operation in a manner that is not only efficient and economic, but is also not threatening to those agencies involved. Further, the mix of inputs or assignment of responsibilities (the tasking of aircraft, the management of warehouses, etc.) does not prejudice the formulation of arrangements in the establishment of joint logistics operations in the next operation in a new location, several weeks or months later, since its parameters would almost certainly be different.

**Recommendation:** The UNJLC document should be incorporated into the global inter-agency MOUs between the three agencies, and into their internal logistics manuals.

**Recommendation:** The practice of selecting one agency to assume a lead role in local operations should be encouraged by the three agencies, along with the routine establishment of informal arrangements for joint operations.

18. In spite of the successes of the joint logistics operations, there were certain instances in the Great Lakes emergency programme where warehouses, repair facilities, offices and transport equipment and even forwarding agents were unnecessarily duplicated by the three agencies, resulting in wasted resources. This observation echoes the findings of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. The costs of transport services (trucking services and air charter contracts for both passenger and cargo aircraft) were unnecessarily inflated when agencies, in the heat of the moment at the start of operations, bid against each other for the same equipment and/or services. During the start-up of air operations in the Great Lakes emergency, the agencies also tended to negotiate independently with the relevant governmental authorities on airport taxes and landing fees, with the result that rates have varied considerably.
19. In much of the Great Lakes emergency operation, particular in the early stages, the management of United Nations passenger aircraft in support of emergency operations often proved problematic. Procedures were often inefficient and costs were unacceptably high. Agencies often had duplicate capacity, so planes flew lightly loaded or even empty in a few instances. In the Great Lakes operation, however, such problems were sometimes overcome by the three agencies establishing an arrangement previously used in Somalia: a common air service for the transport of staff known there as United Nations Common Air Service (UNCAS). A similar arrangement was established for the transport of United Nations staff between Nairobi, Kampala, Goma, Kigali and Bujumbura for short-haul passenger service, and within Burundi.

**Recommendation:** Procedures regarding common tenders for transport contracts should be agreed among the three agencies.

**Recommendation:** The three agencies should adopt a common position on United Nations privileges and immunities as they apply to airport taxes and fees. When possible, one United Nations-wide agreement should be jointly negotiated in one country.

**Recommendation:** The logistics sections of the three agencies should develop agreed procedures for the establishment of United Nations common passenger services in future emergency operations.



**Recommendation:** Regular inter-agency logistics staff meetings should be held at the country and sub-office level, and provision for such meetings should be included in relevant local and country-level MOUs and in joint workplans.

20. Throughout the calendar year 1997 each of the three agencies has been independently developing new and/or refining existing computerized commodity tracking systems (CTS) tailored to its particular requirements. To some extent, these independent development tracks reflect the differing requirements of the three organizations. UNICEF handles over 2,000 items, a large number, but by no means all, directly through its Copenhagen warehouse; others are purchased and shipped locally. WFP has far fewer types of commodities or 'items', but purchases and/or ships from many different points, and, of course, in far greater bulk. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences—and this was particularly true in the large and complex Great Lakes operation—each of the three agencies has an interest in tracking commodities in the other agencies' supply chains, in order to effect logistics coordination.

**Recommendation:** The CTS design teams of the three agencies should work closely together to ensure transparency and mutual accessibility in their respective systems. In particular, the mission recommends the establishment of a tripartite CTS working group to ensure constant exchanges of information and maximum compatibility in systems.

## Telecommunications

21. Instant voice communications are critical to the conduct of humanitarian assistance operations in the high-risk security environments of conflict emergencies. The outbreak of civil war in eastern Zaire in October-November 1996 posed severe challenges to the three agencies' voice and data communications systems. In particular, security concerns for staff in remote locations (discussed later in the section on security), several large-scale evacuations and the coordination of complex inter-agency air, road, rail and water logistics exercises placed enormous demands on these systems.
22. For the past several years UNHCR, with large numbers of staff in high-risk situations, has led the three agencies in acquiring and developing radio voice communications capability, particularly in the field of VHF systems. In order to support logistics operations and to track shipments of relief goods in remote locations, however, the timely, dependable communication of text and data (tables, spreadsheets, etc.) is essential. In the framework of the Great Lakes operation, over the past two to three years WFP has developed a means to accomplish this efficiently and inexpensively using computers linked by HF radio to the Internet. This "Deep Field Mailing System" (DFMS) is now also being used in remote locations by UNICEF, and has attracted wide attention in the international emergency assistance community. All three agencies actively participate in the United Nations Inter-Agency Telecommunications Advisory Committee (ITAC), a group consisting of 22 United Nations agencies and programmes whose focus is to promote United Nations coordination in telecommunications.
23. Building upon the experience in the Great Lakes over the past year, the three agencies have begun to use the regional United Nations logistics and telecommunications meetings, and the ITAC meetings, to standardize their communications systems in both voice and data areas, and to make them compatible. The capability now exists (and in certain major international emergency assistance operations has already been exploited) of using satellite earth stations to quickly link *any* part of the globe with *all* of the United Nations operational agencies. Emergency staff with a laptop will be able to connect to local servers



to send voice, text, data and pictures via the internet HF or VHF radio, satellite or telephone to locations globally.

24. Upon its return from the field visit the mission, in November and early December 1997, discussed and drafted a recommendation proposing that the three agencies agree to connect their long-distance telecommunications systems to the existing Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) satellite network in Brindisi, Italy. In an agreement reached under the aegis of ITAC, this additional capacity was made available in mid-December, although it began to be utilized in mid-1998.
25. On the basis of their cooperation in the field of telecommunications in the Great Lakes operation, UNICEF and WFP recently concluded a technical agreement on field telecommunications and support, providing for the sharing of connectivity resources, technical support and administration, for standardizing equipment specifications and strategic telecommunications stocks, and for joint telecommunications/information technology (TC/IT) training. The agreement was subsequently completed and signed by UNICEF and WFP in March 1998 as a technical agreement in support of the global MOU between WFP and UNICEF.

**Recommendation:** In the interest of establishing a global, inter-operable telecommunications system for the international emergency assistance community, the senior management of all three agencies should support the expansion of their existing bilateral global MOUs, to include telecommunications technical agreements developed among these three and other agencies, and specifying the agencies' major implementing partners.

### Planning, programming and monitoring

26. An inter-agency MOU, Letter of Understanding (LOU), joint workplan or operations plan expresses an intent: it does not necessarily ensure coordination. Nevertheless, in its discussions with agency programming officers, the mission found that these different written agreements were usually taken very seriously. More often than not, particularly at the local level, these agreements had provided a cooperation framework for the duration of subsequent operations. In the case of the Goma Joint Workplan involving WFP and UNHCR, the document was scrupulously updated on two subsequent occasions. The second extension was still in force when the war in Zaire broke out and the target population fled. The Joint Operations Plan for Humanitarian Assistance in Burundi, brokered by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and involving all three agencies, assigned lead roles to each of the agencies in critical operational areas.
27. In spite of the numerous innovative forms of joint action in the Great Lakes operation, and the pace of political/military developments during the review period, there was a significant lack of joint contingency programme planning among the three agencies. The mission believes that advance joint situational assessment and consideration of agency assets and possible roles can at the very least *advance*, even if they do not *ensure*, smooth programme coordination when the crisis occurs. An early consonance of views on these matters can, in turn, be beneficial for subsequent coordination in the areas of security, logistics, common services/facilities, public information and even resourcing.
28. Monitoring missions serve several purposes, of course, ensuring that basic needs are covered and that resources are used optimally in a changing environment. They are an important tool to ensure that lessons are learned and mistakes not repeated. They are also part of the institutional memory of the agencies. Whereas joint assessments of needs were





routinely undertaken in the Great Lakes regional emergency operation, joint monitoring missions were not.

**Recommendation:** In emergency-prone areas, the three agencies should routinely undertake joint contingency planning. With a revised regional office structure such planning might best be undertaken at that level, and should involve logistics, communications, information, security and programme staffing.

**Recommendation:** At the onset of an emergency and at agreed intervals during implementation of major complex emergency programmes, the three agencies should as a matter of course field joint assessment/monitoring missions. Evaluations of complex emergency operations should also routinely be conducted jointly.

29. Several of the countrywide (Burundi, Rwanda) and some of the major local (Bukavu, Goma, Kigoma, Ngara) emergency operations in the Great Lakes were covered at the outset by joint workplans or operations plans. Not all of these included all three major United Nations operational agencies, however, and these documents varied considerably with regard to the areas of responsibility and their degree of specificity. Where UNHCR and WFP were involved, the global MOU between the two agencies was often consciously used as a model.

**Recommendation:** Joint operations/workplans should be developed at the outset of emergency operations, at both the local and country level. These exercises should involve all three agencies and, in addition to a clear delineation of the respective areas of responsibility should, where possible, include agreement on the initial number of beneficiaries, the location of extended delivery points (EDPs) and an 'exit strategy' for the operation, including the elements of staff, communications, logistics and security.

30. The mission noted a near-universal perception in the Great Lakes region that refugees received a far greater proportion of relief assistance than the internally displaced persons (IDPs) or civilian victims of conflict. Inevitably this disproportionality was viewed, rightly or wrongly, by the new governing authorities in the region as a political position taken by the aid institutions and their donors. Disparities in the provision of relief to different groups of beneficiaries can give rise to serious problems, affecting not only the well-being of the beneficiaries, but also the prospects for a long-term solution and in some cases even the security of the emergency assistance staff involved.

**Recommendation:** To the extent possible, the levels and types of assistance to be provided to different categories of beneficiaries should be agreed mutually among the three agencies, at the outset of the operation or during a new phase of the operation.

## Organization and staffing

31. Within the three agencies, the management structure differs considerably from one agency to another, as for example in the roles and authority of Regional Offices. Moreover, the agencies are constantly rethinking and changing their lines of authority. One example is the strongly advisory role of the UNICEF Regional Office, and the strongly management-oriented Regional Office of WFP. The implications of this are that for practical purposes discussions on coordination between, say, WFP and UNICEF, would most effectively take place between the WFP Regional Director and the relevant UNICEF Country Representatives, which is not at first sight an obvious or natural line of communication. In spite of these apparent drawbacks, however, the regional approach should eventually permit more flexible use of staff and resources, and should be encouraged. The bilateral global MOUs which have been negotiated among the



three agencies in the last few years have generally served to clarify respective roles. However, they have not, so far, been able to address the ‘differing lines of authority’ issue.

**Recommendation:** Consideration should be given by senior management of the three agencies to a process of reconciliation of the bilateral documents and their eventual consolidation into one tripartite MOU covering the working relationships of all three agencies.

32. There are glaring disparities in incentives accorded to the staff of the various agencies. In this case the reference is to all the agencies and is not restricted to UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. These disparities relate to the nature of the differing contracts awarded for similar jobs; the interpretation of financial rules (advances, etc.); mission status (the staff of some agencies are granted mission status in emergency stations, others not); rest and recuperation (R&R) or procurement missions (some grant R&R to staff, some do not); and hazard pay (personnel of some agencies receive hazard pay when out of station, on leave, or on R&R). Apart from the injustice of treating United Nations staff unequally when they are working together under extremely difficult conditions, such disparities impede coordination. It is possible to explain why such discrepancies arise, but not why they are permitted to continue to exist. This point was made particularly strongly in Burundi, but was noted throughout the region.

**Recommendation:** The senior management of the three agencies should consider the standardization of incentives and conditions of service, as well as forms and (to the extent possible) content of contracts for staff serving in emergency stations, and for contracts with NGO implementing partners.

## Security

33. The relief assistance environment in the region for the last four years has been characterized by more or less continuous armed conflict. At the time of the mission’s field visit, large-scale fighting had resumed in western Rwanda, and random conflict was occurring in eastern DRC and in Burundi. Even in areas where fighting did not exist, the mission’s key information sources agreed that there was a potential for a resumption of ethnic conflict over much of the region. In such a situation the security of personnel is obviously a critical factor in the delivery of emergency aid in the region, and this in itself tends to ensure a high level of cooperation among the agencies in security matters.
34. While country security or crisis management teams functioned, because of the intensity of the workload and paucity of resources, they tended to be re-active rather than pro-active in their approach to security. There was a general concern for the security of staff and equipment, but this did not necessarily translate into *accountability* for security beyond those immediately concerned, nor into material support for security. Significantly, the Flash Appeal for Congo Brazzaville contained no reference to security requirements, beyond a communication system for WFP. It seems to the mission likely that the donors responding to such an appeal would have been prepared to give a high priority to the security of the agency staff delivering aid generated by that appeal, had they been asked.
35. The progress of missions into insecure areas was carefully monitored at the central level in-country, but once again, with rare exceptions, this tended to be an agency-based rather than a coordinated undertaking. In some cases individual drivers did not have radio communication equipment and convoy discipline was not always standardized. Evacuation plans varied in their plausibility (particularly those at the country level)—the most



disconcerting situation being that of Kinshasa, where it was agreed that evacuation was simply not possible.

36. As with so many other aspects of operational coordination, security seemed to work best in the field at the sub-national level, where the concept of “lead agency” usually meant that the agency charged with security had the resources and the authority to carry out the task. This highlights the dilemma that confronts the three agencies in many countries. The United Nations Humanitarian or Resident Coordinator, though he/she is most often the Designated Security Official (DSO) of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) in New York, does not often have the resources to support a comprehensive security system. The will to participate in joint funding is too weak, and sometimes the resources too meagre to permit effective participation. The DSO finds him or herself bearing enormous responsibilities with scant resources (and, by implication, diminished authority) to carry out a crucial task. In these circumstances agencies have tended to establish parallel if not independent security systems.

**Recommendation:** In all six countries of the region there is an urgent need for the following actions:

- a) the posting by all three agencies of qualified security professionals at the country level and in field posts with high-risk security environments;
- b) country and situation-specific security training for all field staff, including NGO implementing partners;
- c) the updating of security contingency and evacuation plans, including logistics options, and the clarification of the status of various categories of staff, including that of implementing partners;
- d) the creation and maintenance of a central list of the names and locations of all international staff and others in the region who are eligible for evacuation; and
- e) the development of a mechanism at the regional level for coordinating the security plans and activities of all three agencies.

**Recommendation:** The mission strongly feels that the security costs (staff, equipment, training, etc.) for agency staff and their implementing partners who are posted in high security risk situations should routinely be included in both flash appeals and consolidated inter-agency appeals as part of the ‘cost of doing business’ in such operations.

### Information management

37. There are three basic classes of information that have to be managed within the type of emergency operation that existed in the Great Lakes region. All three are not only critical to the success of the operation, but are also highly sensitive and, if wrongly handled, can jeopardize it. The first class of information is public information; that is, informing the outside world about the situation and how it is being handled. The second, separate from the first, although clearly related to it, is statistical information required for planning and monitoring. The third is the kind of information that has to be disseminated to the target populations.
38. Because of the sheer size and scope and the highly political nature of the Great Lakes conflict emergency, confusion and disagreement have sometimes arisen about the statistics involved in the humanitarian assistance operation. Media interest has been intense and unrelenting. The numbers, origins, and the age, gender and ethnic composition of gatherings of refugees, returnees, internally displaced and other conflict-affected persons



have been sources of controversy, as have figures on amounts of food and other relief provided, the numbers of wounded and missing, and so forth.

**Recommendation:** In this and future similar complex emergency operations, it is important for the three agencies to coordinate their public information at the headquarters, regional and country levels. Among the headquarters and regional offices, this would probably have to be done primarily by telephone, fax and e-mail. However, at the country level, the mission recommends that the three agencies replicate an operation undertaken in Dar-es-Salaam over the past year where the entire United Nations community have issued, through the aegis of the Resident Coordinator's office, weekly information notes containing timely programme statistics developed on a consensus basis. Each agency in Dar-es-Salaam, of course, continues to undertake its own public relations, but there is a conscious, concerted effort to anticipate and allay public differences on statistics.

39. In recent complex situations, (Vietnamese boat people, Albania, former Yugoslavia), a new and important aspect of emergency operation information support has emerged: mass information campaigns aimed at the beneficiaries of the relief efforts, be they refugees, internally displaced persons, or civilian populations of affected areas. The campaign may provide accurate information about real conditions in the place of origin to refugees or IDPs who are making decisions about movement, or it may inform about mass vaccination programmes or provide information to allay the fears of local populations affected by the existence of large numbers of refugees or IDPs. A further objective can be to improve the monitoring of the human rights situation by expanding awareness and encouraging the report of abuses. The Great Lakes emergency programme would have benefited from such a campaign, from the inception of operations in 1994.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

40. The way in which the international emergency assistance programme in the Great Lakes region developed and evolved over the past four years was to a large extent random, accidental, ad hoc. Civilians had long been targets of the ethnic violence in the area, but the scale and organization of the slaughter in Rwanda in 1994 surpassed anything seen on the Continent in generations. The aftermath of anger and bitterness has fuelled the fighting that continues sporadically to this day. To some extent, it is this constant presence of low to medium-level conflict across six countries, and the sudden population movements it causes, which have dictated the random patchwork of United Nations, bilateral and NGO organizational staffing, responsibilities, activities, funding, etc. The situation is constantly changing, and the system responds reflexively.
41. There have been other determining factors, of course, including the political motivations of donors, sharp fluctuations in media coverage and public interest/funding, and the very size and complexity of the international emergency assistance system itself. Many of these same factors have been present in other recent conflict emergency operations, and they will doubtless be there also in the next large one.
42. That said, the mission team believes that in the Great Lakes emergency operation the disparate elements of the system, and in particular the three United Nations agencies at its core, began to relate to each other operationally in ways and to a degree previously unseen in major emergency assistance programmes. The ethos of competition was to some extent overcome by that cooperation. This report provides ample evidence of this fact, just as it details those glaring failures to coordinate which remain. Certainly the system's chaotic



approach to personnel security in a high-risk environment throughout the operation must temper any celebration of new forms of joint action and coordination.

