

NOTE ON THE ADVISORY GROUP MEETING OF THE CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND 19-20 JUNE 2019



1. The CERF Advisory Group was established by the General Assembly resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), on the use and impact of the fund. The first meeting of the group in 2019 was held in Dublin on 19 and 20 June and was chaired by Leni Stenseth (Norway). The ERC Mark Lowcock participated in one of the meeting sessions.

2. In the first session of the meeting, the Chief of the Pooled Fund Management Branch (PFMB), Ms. Lisa Doughten provided a briefing on the use of the fund during 2019. The Branch Chief informed that, as a result of the increasing humanitarian needs around the globe, CERF had supported life-saving humanitarian operations at a total value of \$319 million during the first two quarters of 2019 - the highest amount ever allocated by CERF at this point of the year. The grants have targeted a range of humanitarian crises from the hurricanes in Mozambique to the Ebola outbreak in Africa and crisis in Yemen. A total of \$193.7 million has been allocated to new or deteriorating crises through CERF's Rapid Response (RR) window and \$125 million has been allocated to 13 forgotten crises through CERF's Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) window. The Chief also presented the 2019 edition of the CERF Results Report that highlights that CERF grants given in 2017 at a total value of \$418.2 million enabled UN agencies and their partners to provide life-saving assistance to an estimated 24.6 million people in 36 countries. The report also informs that 23 per cent of 2017 CERF funding to UN agencies was sub-granted to national and international NGOs for implementation. This includes 568 non-UN organizations in 33 countries, including 447 local and national partners and 121 international NGOs. Furthermore, the report highlights that Humanitarian Coordinators (HC)/Resident Coordinators (RC) through 2017 Grant Reports inform that 90 per cent of CERF allocations led to fast delivery of assistance, 93 per cent of CERF allocations helped respond to time-critical needs, 91 per cent CERF allocations helped improve coordination, and 80 per cent of CERF allocations improved resource mobilization from other sources. Members expressed appreciation for the update and congratulated the CERF secretariat on this year's Results Report, reiterating that it is a cornerstone for CERF's resource mobilization efforts and a best practice within the UN system on reporting on results and value added achieved. Members expressed appreciation for the continued high-quality of the CERF Results Reports and suggested that future editions more prominently consider key challenges encountered in the implementation of CERF grants.

3. The Advisory Group welcomed a presentation by the Chief of the PFMB on CERF's processes for communicating cases of potential fraud to CERF donors and an update on cases of potential fraudulent use of CERF funds as reported by agencies since the group's meeting in October 2018. Following this presentation, WFP's Inspector General, Ms. Patricia Kiko Harvey, and FAO's Senior Investigation Officer, Pablo Fonte, presented the two agencies' processes for identifying potential fraud cases and reporting potential fraud cases involving CERF funding to the CERF secretariat. These presentations highlighted that agencies in general face challenges in identifying fraud cases due to the operational contexts, but in particular that the agencies have significant challenges in identifying whether CERF funding is impacted in cases of potential fraud. The group discussed agencies' likely underreporting of relevant fraud investigations to CERF and noted that a confirmed total number of fraud cases reported to CERF since 2015 of 13 is very low considering the high number of grants disbursed during the period totalling \$2.14 billion. The group expressed appreciation for CERF continuing to clarify with agencies their responsibilities with regard to identifying and reporting on potential cases of fraud. However, members expressed concerns about agencies' challenges in identifying and reporting on potential cases of fraud, including some agencies' inability to identify whether CERF funding is impacted in identified cases of fraud, and requested that this issue be put on the agenda for the Group's next meeting.

4. In a session with the RC for Cuba, Ms. Consuelo Vidal and the Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for DRC, Ms. Kim Bolduc, they presented examples of the use and impact of CERF grants in their respective countries. This was complemented by presentations of the findings of external reviews conducted by consultants commissioned by CERF to provide an independent analysis of the effectiveness and impact of CERF's allocation in responding to emergencies in DRC and Cuba and the Caribbean. The DRC review found that CERF played a fast and efficient gap filling role in supporting timely interventions in emerging conflicts and in the Ebola response, but that grant proposal decision making had not been rooted in inclusive prioritisation processes at subnational level due to the weakness of subnational coordination structures. The DSRSG for DRC reiterated CERF's critical role as an enabler of fast and efficient response and CERF's support to strengthen coordination structures but also described capacity issues within the Humanitarian Financing Unit in concurrently handling multiple funding streams. The Cuba/Eastern Caribbean review concluded that CERF ensured fast availability of resources for the Cyclone response in 2018 but also suggested that anticipatory action by CERF based on early warning indicators could have further improved the impact of funding. The RC for Cuba emphasized that CERF funding for Cuba is critical given the limited access to international funding and that CERF is a crucial

vehicle for the UN system in Cuba to complement national authorities in humanitarian responses and in preventing humanitarian emergencies from worsening. The RC further highlighted that CERF funding in Cuba promoted synergies between international humanitarian actors and national authorities, allowing for the most efficient and proper use of resources but also highlighted the need for more anticipatory financing ahead of expected crises.

5. The Chief of OCHA's Partnership and Resource Mobilization Branch (PRMB), Marcy Vigoda, provided a snapshot of CERF's funding status and noted that received or pledged contributions currently stood at roughly \$438 million for 2019 with the hope that last year's record income level of \$555 million could be exceeded. The Chief of PRMB presented recent resource mobilization, advocacy and communication efforts, as well as opportunities for peer-to-peer advocacy during the remainder of 2019. The group highlighted the importance of simple and targeted communication products to maintain political interest in the CERF. The group discussed the timing of the 2019 CERF High-Level Pledging Conference and agreed that early December remains the best time for ensuring that Member States are able to announce annual pledges and ensure conference participation. The group also received an update on OCHA's Germany-supported philanthropy initiative for CERF targeting high-net-worth individuals, foundations and corporations to further diversify CERF's donor base. Under the initiative, an in-depth analysis concluded that humanitarian giving currently represents a miniscule share of this donor segment's overall giving and that there currently is no ready philanthropy market to be targeted by CERF fundraising activities. Another analysis under the initiative concluded that digital campaigns targeting individuals and the private sector could function as a suitable entry point to private sector funding and the German Advisory Group member, Mr. Peter Felton confirmed Germany's willingness to support such an initiative.

6. In a session on strategic CERF initiatives, the Chief of PFMB informed the group about the ERC's "strategic steers" initiative to encourage more attention to four generally underfunded areas in CERF funding proposals (women and girls, persons with disabilities, emergency education and other areas of protection). The Chief also briefed the group on plans for a pilot CERF multiyear grant - in support of education in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Additionally, the Chief of the CERF secretariat, Mr. Michael Jensen, updated the group on CERF's role in Anticipatory Action, highlighting the planned roll out of anticipatory action pilots in 2019 that will help define CERF's potential added value and role.

7. In view of continuously increasing needs, the ERC highlighted the potential role that CERF can play in supporting further improvements in the humanitarian system, including by functioning as a role model in key strategic areas. The ERC emphasized that the OCHA-managed Humanitarian Pooled Funds are ideal instruments for testing new approaches and initiatives for the benefit of the entire system. On the strategic steers initiative, the ERC underlined the importance of supporting sectors and activities that are consistently underfunded, while remaining fully consistent with CERF's needs-based, life-saving in-country processes under the leadership of HC/RCS. On the multiyear funding pilot, the ERC noted that most humanitarian crises are protracted and that particularly NGOs struggle to ensure efficient use of short-term grants for multiyear problems. He informed that while CERF's role on multiyear funding will be limited, it could serve as a role-model for other humanitarian actors. On anticipatory action, the ERC reiterated that this will remain an exceptional activity for CERF to be used only in specific contexts – for instance to contribute to avoiding another famine in Somalia. He reiterated that CERF's priorities will remain its fast response to new and deteriorating humanitarian emergencies, as well as its support to underfunded humanitarian operations. Finally, the ERC expressed appreciation for the Advisory Group's engagement in the development of CERF's approach to anticipatory action.

8. The Advisory Group welcomed the update on anticipatory action and while a few members expressed a continued concern about potential risks, the majority of the group applauded progress made – especially the collaborative efforts with other key stakeholders including the World Bank and UN agencies. The group expressed appreciation for the anticipatory action discussions in the group over recent years and recommended a similar involvement of the group as an advising body for other strategic initiatives. The group expressed general support for CERF innovations that can contribute to ensuring that the fund remains responsive to growing humanitarian needs and underlined that it is important to continue to explore the potential for the fund to instigate transformative change in the humanitarian system, as well as to track its impact on change. The group however also stressed that while it is relevant to continue to develop CERF, it is important to safeguard the fund and preserve CERF's life-saving focus. In this regard, the group emphasized the risks of diluting CERF's otherwise clear mandate and the importance of avoiding that CERF becomes "*a fund for all, for everything*" that replaces other funding streams. The group recognized the need for more predictable humanitarian financing in protracted crises but underlined that while multiyear funding in general should be followed by a multiyear pass on mechanisms, this is not necessarily the case for CERF. As such, the group stressed that there is a clear risk that multiyear CERF grants can undermine CERF's flexibility to respond to unforeseen rapid onset emergencies and underfunded crises based on the methodology developed by CERF around severity of needs. In continuation hereof, the group asked for clarifications regarding the decision to select the Bangladesh/Rohingya crisis and education support as the first pilot for CERF multiyear funding grants. Some members also suggested that Country-Based Pooled Funds are better vehicles for providing multiyear grants. While several members of the group expressed agreement on the need for added attention to the four priority areas, some sought to better understand how these

priorities were selected and how the initiative would impact field-driven CERF prioritization processes. Overall the group expressed appreciation for the piloting of new allocation initiatives in a structured manner with built-in learning to inform decisions on future innovation. The group encouraged the ERC to share learning from ongoing initiatives with the group and to discuss next steps with the group – in particular regarding multiyear grants. The group also encouraged the ERC to generally seek the advice and guidance of the group on future innovative CERF initiatives.

9. The outgoing Chair, Ms. Leni Stenseth announced Ms. Alison Milton (Ireland) as the new Chair of the CERF Advisory Group and the ERC thanked Ms. Stenseth for her strong support to CERF and her Advisory Group chairmanship, as well as other outgoing members for their efforts in the group during the past three years.