

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS CERF ADVISORY GROUP MEETING - 1 JUNE 2020



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 2020 on 1 June was held virtually due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions. The meeting was chaired by Alison Milton (Ireland). ERC Mark Lowcock participated in one of the two meeting sessions.

2. In the first meeting session, the ERC provided an overview of the global impact of COVID-19 and CERF's response to the pandemic. The ERC highlighted that the most devastating effects from the pandemic will be felt in the world's poorest countries and that the humanitarian system is preparing for a rise in conflict, food insecurity, and poverty as economies contract. The ERC informed that CERF in response to the pandemic has allocated \$95 million to nine UN agencies through an innovative approach intended to prioritize speed and flexibility by disbursing funds directly to the agencies at the global level. The CERF funding has supported COVID-19 programming in 34 countries by eight agencies as well as global logistics by WFP. The ERC also informed that CERF has approved the reprogramming of some \$8 million from existing projects to COVID-19 related operations. He emphasized that CERF funding only represents a fraction of what is needed for global humanitarian response, requiring CERF funds to have a rigorous prioritization of the greatest needs. He also called for the Advisory Group's continued support in mobilizing support for CERF. The Advisory Group commended OCHA's leadership on the COVID-19 response and noted the pace and agility with which CERF disbursed grants. The Group expressed concern about the potential impact of COVID-19 on the availability of funding for other humanitarian crises and reiterated the need for CERF to ensure prioritization of the most imminent and greatest lifesaving needs across humanitarian crises. The Group underlined that CERF's COVID-19 response has demonstrated the added-value of a well-resourced CERF and emphasized the need for increased funding for the CERF to reach its \$1 billion target. The Group further stated that CERF's COVID-19 allocations can serve as an important element in advocating for increased CERF funding and suggested that OCHA promotes the CERF as a 'donor' and the results achieved. The Group also recognized the important role Advisory Group members play in advocating for increased CERF funding, as well as the relevance of recipient countries' advocacy for CERF.

3. In the same session, the ERC informed that CERF received record-high contributions in 2019, amounting to \$831.4 million, and that this funding uplift has allowed CERF to undertake innovative allocations in 2020 and to have greater impact. He also informed that to ensure a comprehensive approach in its anticipatory action pilots, OCHA is adding further pilots to the one established in 2019 for drought in Somalia. The ERC also informed that the agencies' feedback at this early stage from the 2019 multiyear allocation to UNICEF and UNHCR education projects in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh is positive. Learning will be available in advance of the next Advisory Group Meeting. Finally, the ERC reminded the Advisory Group about his call to Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators for added attention to four generally underfunded priority areas (programmes targeting women and girls; programmes targeting disabled people; education in protracted crises; and other aspects of protection). The ERC noted that this has resulted in increased attention to the four areas in CERF allocations. He confirmed that thorough learning processes on the innovative allocations will be ensured. The Advisory Group expressed support for the innovations and the way CERF helps drive reform across the humanitarian system and asked that innovative efforts be balanced with safeguarding the Fund and its clear mandate. The Group also emphasized the importance of documenting and sharing learning from the initiatives and looks forward to this being shared at the next meeting.

5. In the second session, the Chief of the Pooled Fund Management Branch, Alice Armani Sequi provided an allocation update informing that so far in 2020, grants at a total value of \$549 million have been approved for

lifesaving humanitarian assistance in 49 countries. The Chief informed that this is the highest ever total allocation amount at this time of the year and a result of CERF's ability to respond at a much larger scale due to the generous support from donors. The Chief also introduced CERF's first Annual Results Report that combines the former CERF Annual Report and CERF Results Report into a single document. The Chief highlighted that 2019 CERF funds enabled the provision of lifesaving assistance to an estimated 29.4 million people in 49 countries. The Chief also informed that the report contains analysis showing that the number of people reached significantly exceeded the planning figures originally set out in CERF project proposals - with 20 per cent or more each year - indicating that millions more people have been reached with CERF funding than what was originally set out. The Chief also reminded the Advisory Group about the launch of CERF's online allocation module that provides real-time information on CERF allocations as soon as they are decided. The Advisory Group welcomed the presentations and stated that the number of people reached is impressive. The Group suggested that the CERF secretariat in future Annual Result Reports considers an increased focus on the impact of CERF funding.

6. The Chief of CERF, Michael Jensen briefed and consulted the Group on the update of CERF's Life-Saving Criteria (LSC) before final ERC sign off. He also informed the Group about updates to the CERF Secretary-General's Bulletin (SGB). The Chief reiterated that the updates have not revisited the core mandate of CERF or sought to significantly expand or change the range of activities supported by the Fund. Instead the objectives have been to clarify and update language in both documents to ensure the Fund remains true to its mandate while better reflecting the current humanitarian context. The Group expressed appreciation for the updates and reiterated that the lifesaving focus of CERF is unique and important to safeguard. The Group asked for proactive communications on allocations that involve exceptions to the LSC in order to keep the Group abreast on such cases. The LSC will now be submitted to the ERC for sign off.

7. While there was no substantive discussion on fraud at the meeting, the Advisory Group did reiterate its concern about some agencies' potential underreporting on investigations into suspected fraud cases that may involve CERF funds and requested that this continues to be closely monitored and discussed at the Group's future meetings.

8. The Chief of OCHA's Partnership and Resource Mobilization Branch, Marcy Vigoda, briefed on CERF's 2020 funding status and outlook for the remainder of the year, including risks and opportunities presented by COVID-19. She noted that projected income for 2020 stands at \$526.6 million and that the generous contributions received in December 2019 had led to an unusually high carry-over available for programming in 2020. The Chief also informed that some donors due to COVID-19 have provided additional 2020 contributions, but that additional year-end contributions are uncertain. The Chief informed that unless additional funding is pledged for 2020, CERF will need to revert to lower allocation levels for the remainder of the year. Members flagged UN75 as an opportunity and suggested that there could be a specific role for the Advisory Group and Permanent Representatives in New York, as well as heads of UN agencies in terms of promoting the role of CERF within the UN system. The Chief noted the information and multimedia assets available to show how CERF contributions helped kickstart COVID-19 related efforts and respond to ongoing operations.

9. The outgoing Chair, Ms. Alison Milton announced Ms. Marriët Schuurman (Netherlands) as the new Chair of the CERF Advisory Group and the ERC thanked Ms. Milton 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.