

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS - CERF ADVISORY GROUP MEETING – 23 NOV. 2021



1. The second Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Advisory Group meeting of 2021 took place on 23 November 2021, under the chairmanship of Ms. Mariët Schuurman (Netherlands), and with participation of the USG/ERC, Mr. Martin Griffiths.

2. In the first session, the Chief (a.i.) of OCHA's Pooled Fund Management Branch (PFMB) provided an update on key CERF allocations during 2021, noting that by mid-November, a total of US\$535 million had been allocated and that CERF was on track to reach the Fund's second highest total annual allocation level. The Chief highlighted noteworthy allocations for humanitarian operations in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti, and Yemen and provided an update on CERF's Anticipatory Action pilots noting that since August, the USG/ERC had endorsed Anticipatory Action frameworks for monsoon floods in Nepal, Typhoon storms in the Philippines and dry spells in Malawi. The Chief briefed the Group on the \$135 million Underfunded Emergencies (UFE) allocation of 2021, which included a dedicated envelope of \$10 million for disability-inclusive programming. She also noted that a large UFE allocation was planned for early 2022. The Chief also reminded the Group about the changes to CERF's annual reporting efforts and CERF's recently launched online data hubs that provide real-time information on CERF grants. Finally, the group was briefed on the work of the Gender and Disability Inclusion Contact Groups that were established in 2021 by PFMB to provide technical advice on how to strengthen consideration of disability and gender in pooled funds' allocations. The Chief noted that many of the contact group recommendations reinforced ongoing processes and that PFMB was on track to implement them to further strengthen CERF's and the Country-Based Pooled Funds' (CBPF) impact in these areas.

3. The Advisory Group applauded CERF on its continued role as a key vehicle for enabling fast and timely lifesaving support around the world. The Group asked for insight into CERF allocation decisions and prioritization of CERF funding and inquired about the rationale behind the recent \$45 million allocation to support 'basic services' in Afghanistan. The Chief of PFMB noted that the allocation had been instrumental in addressing critical needs that otherwise could have resulted in a collapse of the country's health system and that it was done before funding from the Afghanistan pledging conference became available. The Chief of the CERF secretariat also described the analytical processes behind allocations from CERF's Rapid Response and Underfunded Emergencies windows. The Group recommended that a more in-depth discussion about CERF decision-making processes should be organized.

4. In the same session, the Advisory Group commended CERF's increased attention to support programming for gender and gender-based violence (GBV), as well as for people living with disabilities and expressed support for the recommendations of the Contact Groups on Gender and Disability Inclusion. The Group agreed on the importance of ensuring that the conclusions of the Contact Groups, and the findings of the studies on innovative CERF allocations, including in support of protection against GBV, are shared with the wider humanitarian community for broader learning and to support positive system change. The Group also applauded CERF for the improvements to its reporting efforts and development of online tools while reiterating its earlier suggestion on exploring reinforced reporting on humanitarian outcomes. The Advisory Group expressed concern about the limited number of fraud cases being reported to the CERF secretariat by recipient agencies. The Chief of the CERF secretariat referred to the CERF guidelines on communicating potential fraud cases approved by the Group in 2015 and highlighted the commitment of recipient agencies to reporting such cases to CERF. The Chief of CERF also noted that the CERF secretariat proactively reminds agencies about this requirement and that the Advisory Group in earlier discussions with Inspector-Generals of recipient agencies had concluded that the perceived underreporting by agencies was not a CERF specific issue, but rather reflected a system-wide challenge in linking potential cases to specific funding sources. Finally, the Chief of CERF informed that the number of potential fraud cases reported to the CERF secretariat had increased steadily since 2015 and that OCHA appreciated bilateral donors' continued efforts to raise the importance of fraud identification and direct reporting by the UN agencies. Finally, members of the Advisory Group reiterated their concern about the limited staffing capacity of the CERF secretariat with reference to the increased efforts relating to Anticipatory Action, as well as CERF's recent innovative allocations.

5. In the second session, the USG/ERC provided an update on the broader humanitarian landscape and the humanitarian system's response capacity, as well as his views on CERF's role as an enabler of humanitarian response. The USG/ERC noted that the humanitarian system was facing unprecedented challenges, emphasizing the concerning humanitarian developments in Tigray (Ethiopia) and Afghanistan, as well as the alarming humanitarian situations in many other contexts that receive little international attention. Coupled with decreasing funding availability, the USG/ERC underlined that the global humanitarian situation was becoming increasingly dire. The USG/ERC also outlined three priority areas for ensuring that the humanitarian system can continue to provide the best possible support to people in crises. First, he highlighted the need for a clearer 'direction of travel' for protracted crises and more coordinated and defined roles across the triple-nexus. The USG/ERC referenced the crisis in Syria as an example of an emergency where large investments by the humanitarian system had failed to successfully meet the needs of the affected population, and where a clearer plan for long-term progress was required. Secondly, the USG/ERC highlighted the importance of improved access in humanitarian crises, noting that the humanitarian system needed to be better at holding leaders accountable for enabling humanitarian access to people in need. Thirdly, the USG/ERC emphasized the need to ensure improved protection for vulnerable people caught in humanitarian crises. He noted that protection, including for women and girls, was too often underfunded in humanitarian responses and that ensuring increased attention to- and funding for- protection in humanitarian context was among his key priorities.

6. In the same session, the USG/ERC shared his views on CERF's role in the humanitarian landscape, noting that the Fund had evolved in recent years to assume an increasingly prominent position in the international financing architecture, employing its comparative advantages in a more strategic manner. The USG/ERC particularly highlighted CERF's ability to enable fast, agile, and strategic funding towards key priorities. In this context, the USG/ERC referenced CERF's response to the Haiti earthquake in August where funding from CERF was confirmed in less than 36 hours following the disaster. He also referred to the \$45 million allocation in support of Afghanistan's health system as a good example of CERF's strategic gap-closing function given the allocation's critical role in preventing further loss of life and displacement. The ERC also highlighted the relevance of Anticipatory Action as a key tool for CERF's efforts to contribute to saving lives in a timely and cost-efficient manner and stressed that CERF's future role in this area would be informed by the ongoing pilots. Finally, the USG/ERC called upon the Advisory Group to support the CERF fundraising and advocacy efforts and to help ensure that CERF remains aligned with the priorities of the evolving humanitarian context.

7. The Advisory Group expressed support to the USG/ERC's priority areas. The Group underlined the importance of maintaining CERF's agility and innovative efforts and highlighted its catalytic effect in supporting broader positive developments throughout the humanitarian system. The Group noted that at the same time it was important for CERF to remain true to its mandate and continue its 'traditional allocations' from the Rapid Response and Underfunded Emergencies windows.

8. In the last session of the meeting, the Chief of OCHA's Partnership and Resource Mobilization Branch (PRMB), briefed on CERF's funding status for 2021 and outlook for 2022, including the upcoming High-Level Pledging Event for 2022 (HLPE). The Chief noted that despite continued donor generosity, the funding projections for the year remain far short of CERF's annual funding target of \$1 billion. The Chief also updated on progress against the CERF Resource Mobilization Action Plan for 2021-2022. Whilst collective efforts of resource mobilization around the Action Plan have been successful in some respects, the Chief noted that more work is needed in translating this into increased funding to reach the level of resourcing that CERF requires to effectively respond to humanitarian needs. In line with this, the Advisory Group agreed to continue ongoing efforts through peer-to-peer outreach with Member States, including through communication efforts to strengthen CERF's branding, and noted the importance of promoting CERF for another successful year during its 15th anniversary and to secure robust pledges at the upcoming CERF HLPE on 8 December.