

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS CERF ADVISORY GROUP MEETING-18 NOVEMBER 2020



1. The Central Emergency Response Fund (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 Advisory Group met on 18 November 2020, under the chairmanship of Ms. Mariët Schuurman (Netherlands), and with participation from the ERC, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

2. In the first 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 pandemic has reached every country, but that the most devastating and destabilizing effects will be felt in the world's poorest countries. The ERC noted that throughout the pandemic, the humanitarian system has pulled together to deliver aid to the most vulnerable and that CERF has been instrumental in supporting the response. In response to the pandemic, CERF has provided four allocations totaling more than \$200 million to address the primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19 in 46 countries. These allocations have been timely, flexible, record-setting and innovative. Allocations have included CERF's first block grants of \$95 million disbursed directly to nine UN agencies at the global level, a \$25 million allocation to support 24 front-line NGOs in six countries – also the first of its kind in CERF's history, and an \$80 million allocation for cash-based programmes to help urgently address alarming levels of food insecurity that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 in six countries in Africa and the Middle East. The ERC also announced an upcoming innovative allocation of \$25 million to address gender-based violence (GBV), with a focus on supporting women-led local organizations in target countries. Finally, he informed that CERF has extended maximum flexibility to organizations, allowing them to adjust ongoing CERF projects to changing needs and to the operational constraints caused by the pandemic. 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 underlined that CERF's COVID-19 response has further demonstrated the unique added-value of CERF and emphasized the need for increasing funding for CERF in line with its \$1 billion funding target. The Group expressed concern about the potential impact of COVID-19 on the availability of funding for other humanitarian crises, and acknowledged the challenges relating to the growing humanitarian needs and limited resources available. In continuation hereof, the Group reiterated the need for CERF to ensure prioritization of the most imminent and greatest life-saving needs.

3. In the same session, the ERC provided an update on the current humanitarian needs and the humanitarian system's response capacity informing that the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance – estimated at 433 million in 2020 - has nearly tripled since the beginning of the year (168 million). The ERC also informed that the need for humanitarian assistance will remain at unprecedented levels in 2021. In continuation hereof, he emphasized the critical part CERF plays in ensuring the system's ability to respond quickly, and in helping to promote system-wide innovations. He noted that the staunch support of CERF's donors has been fundamental in enabling CERF to undertake innovative allocations to tackle complex humanitarian challenges in a more effective and efficient way. He highlighted the operationalisation of Anticipatory Action pilots in Somalia, Bangladesh and Ethiopia as key milestones. Against this backdrop, the ERC emphasized the need for a larger CERF that can respond to the growing challenges and maintain the humanitarian system's ability to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The Advisory Group acknowledged and praised CERF for being a catalyst for efficiency and effectiveness in the humanitarian system and expressed support for the innovations introduced in response to COVID-19, CERF's Anticipatory Action pilots, and its focus on achieving better results in four consistently underfunded areas of humanitarian response (support for women and girls; people living with disabilities; education; and protection). The Group emphasized the importance of documenting and disseminating learning from these initiatives to ensure continued improvements and contribute to driving reform across the humanitarian system.

4. In the second session, the Chief of the Pooled Fund Management Branch, Alice Armani Sequi provided an update on CERF allocation informing that so far in 2020, an unprecedented volume of grants (totaling \$824 million) has been disbursed by CERF to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance in 52 countries. Beyond

elaborating on CERF's innovative response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief highlighted other noteworthy allocations for humanitarian operations including in Lebanon, Chad, Madagascar and South Sudan. The Chief informed the group about the second Underfunded Emergencies allocation of 2020, and the attention provided to GBV programming. The Chief also updated the group on the initial results achieved by CERF in strengthening support to the four underfunded priority areas; ongoing potential cases of fraudulent use of CERF funding as reported by UN recipient agencies; and internal initiatives to make CERF processes more efficient and effective. Finally, she briefed the Group on the learning plans for the innovative allocations and informed that a consultancy will be launched to look into how to better measure and communicate the operational and strategic impact of CERF. The Advisory Group reiterated its praise to CERF for the Fund's response to humanitarian need in 2020 and for the innovations introduced to better address specific humanitarian challenges. The Group agreed on the importance of documenting impact and sharing learning, and supported the work being undertaken to advance support for the underfunded areas. The Group also expressed interest and support for the work being undertaken on the complementarity between CERF and CBPF allocations. Finally, the Group reiterated its concern about some agencies' potential underreporting on investigations into suspected fraud cases that may involve CERF funds but acknowledged that this is a broader system issue and not CERF specific.

5. 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, as well as resource mobilization plans for 2021-2022. The Chief noted that despite growing generosity of its donors, funding to CERF in proportion to global humanitarian giving has decreased over the years. The Chief informed that the CERF Resource Mobilization Strategy was being updated for 2021-2022 with the fundamental goal of *mobilizing the necessary political and public support to advance towards the \$1 billion target, endorsed by Member States during the General Assembly in December 2016*. She asked the Advisory Group to consider approaches for engaging more Member States in diversifying and deepening CERF's donor base and flagged that the combination of CERF's innovation agenda, and its unique position to contribute to systemic change, is raising the profile of CERF as an effective mechanism that helps donors achieve more with limited resources. The Advisory Group discussed the idea of a global campaign to increase and diversify funding for CERF and noted that the group should explore this further alongside other fundraising avenues. The Group also flagged the need to communicate a compelling story about the value for money that CERF offers and acknowledged their own role as Advisory Group members in advocating for robust funding to CERF, including through peer advocacy.