

OCHA: Environmental Mandate & Activities

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Environmental mandate

In December 1991, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 46/182, designed to strengthen the United Nation's response to both complex emergencies and natural disasters. In addition it aimed at improving the overall effectiveness of the UN's humanitarian operations in the field. Soon after, the Secretary-General established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and assigned the ERC the status of Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Humanitarian Affairs with offices in New York and Geneva to provide institutional support

As part of the Secretary-General's programme of reform in 1998, DHA was reorganized into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. Its mandate was expanded to include the coordination of humanitarian response, policy development and humanitarian advocacy.

OCHA carries out its coordination function primarily through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which is chaired by the ERC. Participants include all humanitarian partners, from UN agencies, funds and programmes to the Red Cross Movement and NGOs. The IASC ensures inter-agency decision-making in response to complex emergencies. These responses include needs assessments, consolidated appeals, field coordination arrangements and the development of humanitarian policies.

Environmental activities

OCHA plays a key role in addressing the immediate challenges to humanitarian assistance. It plays a role in identifying, monitoring and providing technical and policy support both before and after a crisis. A main component of OCHA's work involves effectively responding to environmental emergencies. The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit is a partnership between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and that serves as the integrated United Nations emergency response mechanism to activate and provide international assistance to countries facing environmental emergencies. The role of the Joint Unit is to rapidly mobilize and coordinate emergency assistance and response resources to countries facing environmental emergencies and natural disasters with significant environmental impacts.