Improving Partnership can Improve Humanitarian Action
Summary of Global Humanitarian Platform Discussion- Amman, Jordan, 19 May 2008

On 19 May in Amman, a meeting on partnership was held with representatives from the NGOs, the Red Cross/ Crescent Movement, and UN agencies from Syria, occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), Iraq and Lebanon. This meeting took place in the context of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP), a process, which has been in place since 2006 in recognition that they share the responsibility to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action. The meeting in Amman discussed humanitarian partnerships in the region and how these partnerships can be improved especially in the context of limited humanitarian access to oPt and related to 'remote programming' as a way of operating in Iraq. The Principles of Partnership (PoP), which were adopted by the GHP in 2007, helped to frame the discussion. Following is a summary of the main outcome of the meeting. A matrix, which provides recommendations and an overview of action points, is also attached.

Strengthening Partnership
Given the interdependence of the humanitarian community, it is crucial to strengthen partnership. Instead of defining priorities together, which would reflect true partnership, too often partnerships have been dominated by contractual arrangements, in which one agency, usually an NGO, is sub-contracted to do a job, usually for a UN agency. It was noted that the attitude of UN agencies that is complained about, is also demonstrated by international NGOs when they work with national or local partners. Lack of trust between organisations, and lack of trust between local government and organisations on the ground often result in questions on the legitimacy of humanitarian action. While all humanitarian agencies need to work on their relationships, they must not loose sight of the 'external' environment with civil society, governments, and beneficiaries with whom they also have to develop better relationships. Training of staff on the Principles of Partnership (PoP) and taking steps that will change organizational behaviour are needed.

Managing Expectations
Before getting into partnerships, we need to get to know each other better, and in order to know each other better, we need to understand our organisational strengths and weaknesses. The added-value that NGOs bring to humanitarian action relates to their speed, flexibility, operational presence. In some situations, such as in oPt, however, NGOs may be even more constrained in their access than the UN. The added value of the UN in humanitarian action lies in its responsibility to provide leadership, advocate on humanitarian principle, and protect humanitarian space. Sometimes the UN is constrained by political and other factors to carry out advocacy. Honest and frank dialogue in a humanitarian country team (HCT) or at the cluster level, which in the context of Iraq are known as sectoral outcome teams (SOTs), could resolve potential misunderstandings on mutual expectations and clarify roles and responsibilities. The HCT and the SOTs should be representative of the humanitarian community taking into account capacity and equity. Non-UN agencies who are interested in participating in more strategic coordination mechanisms, such as a HCT, must realise that they need to have the capacity to do so. Such a coordination role goes beyond the project-orientated approach that has long dominated, in particular within the NGO community.

Opportunities and Constraints for Partnership
Humanitarian access and security management provide both an opportunity, as well as a constraint for collaboration. Organisations can be complementary, for example by using different methods, in

calling for unfettered humanitarian access. However, we must also recognise that our systems to manage the security risks for operational staff are very different. For example, some organisations may have to distance themselves from agencies that co-locate with international military forces in Iraq. The UN safety and security systems may prevent humanitarian action, and therefore put pressure on national organisations to intervene. It is often felt that national staff may be obliged to take security risks, which in turn, creates double standards for national and international staff. We should also be aware of the perceptions that have been created by remote programming, as many international agencies or international staff have been confined to Amman and may give a bad impression to local NGOs, and national and local staff.

Knowing and Supporting Local Partners
Supporting local capacity is key to improving humanitarian action, as is better preparedness and mapping the presence and activities of humanitarian actors (a "Who does What Where"). It is important to understand capacity and access. The meeting noted in particular the complexity in identifying local and national partners.

Role of the Donor Community
The GHP process should not forget to reach out to the donor community. Donor governments have a particular responsibility in ensuring respect for humanitarian principles and in ensuring that their funding allocations are needs-based. Humanitarian agencies expect the donors to demonstrate greater flexibility in funding and be quicker in disbursing funds.