Basis for Declaration of a Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Response "L3"
Syria crisis

Under the IASC Transformative Agenda, the IASC Principals have agreed that major humanitarian crises triggered by natural disasters or conflict which require system-wide mobilization (so-called 'Level 3/L3' emergencies) are to be subject to a Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation ('L3 activation'), to ensure a more effective response to the humanitarian needs of affected people.

The designation of an L3 emergency, in consultation with the IASC Principals, is to be issued by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), on the basis of an analysis of 5 criteria: scale, complexity, urgency, capacity, and reputational risk.

The IASC Emergency Directors met on 4 January 2013 to discuss the classification of the Syria crisis, based on these five criteria. They agreed that:

• Some four million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, representing nearly 20% of the population. More than 1.2 million people are internally displaced and more than 580,000 Syrians have registered as refugees in neighbouring countries. Based on the latest information from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 60,000 people were killed between mid-March 2011 and November 2012. Contingency plans currently forecast 1.1 million Syrian refugees in the region by mid-2013, and 7 million people in need in Syria With the pace of the crisis growing at an alarming rate, the _scale_ of the crisis warrants an L3 declaration.

• The conflict is increasing in intensity and severity, particularly in major urban centres. The increased risk of epidemics and diarrheal diseases is compounded by the destruction of public facilities and infrastructure, continued population movements, the onset of winter and interruptions in food and non-food supplies, including fuel. Market distortions have led to price hikes on basic commodities, including bread. Coping mechanisms among the general population and particularly host communities are collapsing, leaving those both trapped and fleeing the conflict destitute and subsisting in appalling conditions. Therefore, the _urgency_ of responding effectively to life-threatening humanitarian needs warrants an L3 declaration.

• The Syria crisis presents a highly challenging operational environment, given the proliferation of armed actors now operating inside Syria, the severe constraints on humanitarian access, the escalating security risks to humanitarian staff, the urban context in which much of the fighting takes place, and the widespread human rights violations perpetrated. The impact of the crisis can be felt throughout the Middle East, and continues to negatively affect and destabilize neighbouring countries. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the conflict is becoming increasingly sectarian in nature, with increased sectarian targeting by both Government forces and armed opposition groups. Given the above, the Syria crisis presents a highly _complex_ emergency which warrants an L3 declaration.

- National actors' ability to respond to humanitarian needs has been overwhelmed and international humanitarian organisations are facing extraordinary operational challenges in Syria and in neighbouring countries. Out of an estimated 4 million people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in Syria, only 1.5 million are receiving food assistance. Humanitarian agencies have also been largely unable to reach major population centres to deliver aid during conflict. The current shortage of financial, material and human resources available to respond warrants the activation of a L3 scale-up in _capacity_.

- Meeting the humanitarian needs of people in Syria, and the needs of refugees in neighbouring countries displaced as a result of the crisis, remains the IASC community's foremost concern and absolute priority. The high public and media profile of this crisis, the expectations of affected people, donors, the public, national stakeholders and partners on the ground, and the consequential _reputation_ risk also warrants L3 activation. All the while, expectations on the humanitarian community's ability to assist, given access and security constraints, will need to be managed.

Based on the above, the Emergency Directors recommend that the IASC Principals declare an L3 IASC System-Wide Emergency Response to the Syria crisis and propose that this declaration trigger the concrete measures outlined in the L3 accompanying measures attached.

L3 accompanying measures for the Syria Crisis

1. Establishment of the Humanitarian Country Team with the current Resident Coordinator re-hatted as Humanitarian Coordinator, pending decision of the most appropriate leadership model

Recommendation: A Humanitarian Coordinator a.i and Humanitarian Country Team are already in place. Therefore, no action is required on this point.

2. Deployment of a Senior/Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator within 72 hours of the onset of the crisis for up to 3 months, to lead the overall humanitarian response.

Recommendation: The appointment of an experienced Senior/Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator at the Assistant Secretary General (ASG) level is recommended. The most senior and experienced leadership possible for the response is advisable, not only due to the complexity of the function, but also as it sends a clear and unequivocal message that a significant change and increase in capacity is underway.

3. Activation of the "empowered leadership" model

Recommendation: The "empowered leadership" model will be automatically activated upon appointment of the Senior/Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator by the ERC, on behalf of the IASC, per the Specifics of Empowered Leadership in the Syria crisis (attached).

4. Recommendation of the optimal cluster configuration for the response.

Recommendation: There is an urgent need for cluster activation inside Syria, with support at the regional level as required, to strengthen coordination. The appointed Senior/Emergency HC should consult with the HCT and provide recommendations on which clusters should be activated within 5 days of his/her deployment.

5. Deployment of the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (IARRM) core team, on a 'no regrets' basis, taking into account existing and already deployed emergency capacity, and possibly other context-specific capacities as required, upon decision by the IASC Principals.

Recommendation: Elements of the IARRM should be deployed to strengthen operational capacity in support of the current response, including to enable activation of the optimal cluster configuration. IARRM should also be deployed to the regional hub in Amman to strengthen planning and support capacity. Agencies should provide an overview of plans to deploy IARRM staff upon declaration of an L3 to the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

6. Immediate implementation of a Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA), particularly the Preliminary Scenario Definition.

Recommendation: Given the access constraints in Syria, it is recommended that the measure on needs assessment should focus on MIRA, Preparedness, Community Profiling and Secondary Data Analysis.

7. Elaboration of an initial strategic statement by the HC/HCT, which lays out priorities and a common strategic approach, and serves as a basis for performance monitoring.

Recommendation: Building on the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP), the appointed Senior/Emergency HC, in consultation with the HCT, should prepare a brief strategic statement on the updated scale and scope of the crisis (including more fully sectors like protection, that have been considered sensitive) and prioritization of the response within 5 days of their deployment.

8. Immediate initial CERF allocation of between US$10-20 million.

Recommendation: Significant CERF allocations have been provided to agencies operating in Syria (total of US$52,769,707 in 2011 and 2012). However, given the scale of underfunding, it is recommended that the ERC authorize a further allocation of US$10 to 20 million based on an official CERF request from the Senior/Emergency Coordinator.

9. Triggering of a Real-Time Evaluation (RTE) of the response

Recommendation: That a Real Time Operational Review[1] of the response be initiated. It is also recommended that a Coordination Performance Report[2] be prepared when time is available for a more in-depth assessment of the quality of cluster operations and production of key deliverables. The Coordination Performance Report should be completed three months after clusters are activated and every six months thereafter.

10. Meeting of IASC Principals to review the effective functioning of the coordination and leadership arrangements, within 7-10 days after activation.

Recommendations: It is recommended that this be implemented.

11. Duration of the L3 activation (up to 3 months) and responsibilities for defining an exit strategy.

Recommendation: That an initial L3 of 3-months duration be accompanied by a review of the decision by the IASC Principals (supported by the Emergency Directors) at the 2-month mark. As this is a complex emergency, exit planning is premature at this stage.

12. Common advocacy priorities for the humanitarian system and the ERC's communication strategy/common messaging with regards to the emergency situation.

Recommendation: That communications and information-sharing receive highest priority under OCHA leadership. Agencies agree on the need to update the ERC Key messages on the reasoning for and impact of L3 activation, with clear messages on how the activation has been modified for the Syria context, in order to manage expectations. Agencies also agreed that OCHA should continue to strengthen its information management and public information coordination capacity at the local level. The messages should include a call to all concerned to fully respect principles of humanitarian law, and to immediately cease the detaining of UN staff.

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[1] NOTE: Per the IASC Transformative Agenda Reference Document on *Responding to Level 3 Emergencies: The Humanitarian Programme Cycle,* the Real Time Operational Review will be based in part on the concept of the Real-Time Evaluation (RTE), but place much greater emphasis on the validity of the strategic response plan and how the system is performing against agreed targets. The RTOR will focus on "why" any response targets are not being met, with corresponding immediate and medium term recommendations to overcome challenges. At the request of the HC/HCT, HQ support can be provided to the RTOR.

[2] As referred to in the IASC Transformative Agenda Reference Document *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level* p. 23.