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INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION COORDINATION GROUP DISCUSSES PREVENTING AND CONTROLLING CORRUPTION IN EMERGENCY DISASTER RELIEF

BANGKOK, 23 April (UN Information Service) -- The International Group for Anti-Corruption Coordination (IGAC) yesterday discussed ways and means of preventing corruption in emergency disaster relief operations. The issue is of special relevance, following the tsunami of December 2004. The meeting took place on 21-22 April, during the Eleventh United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, in Bangkok, Thailand.

Besides the logistical challenges in handling disaster relief, there is increased concern in the international community that much of the help volunteered may never arrive due to fraud, corruption, mismanagement and the waste of resources. Besides the immediate loss felt by those in need, these factors also undermine the trust of the international donor community, and the individuals worldwide who have donated towards the cause.

Governments and the international donor community face an unprecedented challenge in ensuring that relief assistance funds are distributed rapidly and effectively to provide urgently needed food supplies, health care and shelter to the intended beneficiaries, as well as mid- and long-term rebuilding of infrastructure, and public services, with as few intermediaries as possible.

Though the organizations represented at the meeting have safeguards in place to prevent, investigate and sanction fraud and corruption, the risks for abuse have multiplied, given the massive financial scale of relief efforts, and the number of parties involved in managing and disseminating it.

The IGAC is coordinated by the United Nations *Office on Drugs and Crime* and is composed of international organizations active in the field of anti-corruption, including several United Nations agencies, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other regional development banks, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union and the Council of Europe, besides several international non-governmental organizations.

The Group also agreed to provide a platform for streamlining the initiatives of its members to guarantee the cost-effective use of disaster relief aid and reconstruction assistance.

In this context, the Group also agreed to cooperate in the follow-up on the draft conclusions and principles for action of the expert meeting on corruption prevention in tsunami relief, held in Jakarta on 7-8 April 2005, which was organized by the ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia-Pacific and Transparency International.

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