



Conference of

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Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, State of Qatar

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In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Humanity suffers from natural disasters, like droughts, earthquakes, floods, forest fires, and Tsunamis .

Natural disasters, like those have recently struck on all continents, leave a trail of destruction on their wake .

No country is immune, and no country can cope with these forces alone .

Scientists tell us that because of climate change we can expect even more frequent natural disasters in the future. There is no way to predict where and when. But you can be sure that it is only a matter of time until the next catastrophe strikes .

So, we have to ask: are we prepared ?

This year's earthquake in Haiti offers some lessons. The world watched in horror at the scenes of devastation – more than 200,000 Haitians killed, and tragedy for the United Nations that lost 100 staff. There was a vast outpouring of sympathy and solidarity, matched by huge amounts of aid .

For its parts, Qatar sent a C-17 aircraft loaded with 50 tones of urgent relief materials to Haiti, along with a rescue team. This is in addition to 20 Million Dollars which the State of Qatar donated for reconstruction in Haiti during the UN Conference held for that purpose. We have undertaken similar search and rescue efforts in Indonesia and Pakistan, as well as other States .

But disaster relief cannot just be a number of well-meaning national initiatives. If too many ambulances rush to a catastrophe at the same time, there will be a traffic jam. This does not help those in need .

Instead, there must be a clear view of the immediate needs of the ground. There must be coordination. And the necessary skills and equipment must be deployed quickly in order to save lives .

Guidelines exist on the rapid deployment of military and civil defense assets: the so-called "Oslo guidelines" which are overseen by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). I salute the great work that the entire UN system, with its limited resources, is doing in difficult situations around the world .

My concern, however, is that these excellent procedures, which have been painstakingly worked out, cannot depend on advance official commitment of relief assets. Nor is there standardized, certified training for disaster relief staff around the world. This is a major handicap in turning plans into action .

So let me ask again: are we prepared ?

In answer, let me say, that today I am proposing the establishment of a Humanitarian Operation Force, also known as HOPEFOR .

Such a force would draw on existing military and civil resources (material and human), to bring hope and emergency relief quickly and efficiently to the victims of natural disasters – staying long enough to close the so-called "humanitarian gap ."

The HOPE Force would build on lessons learned from similar initiatives, like stand-by high-readiness humanitarian brigades, existing disaster relief forces, and other proposals that have been made to create a humanitarian rapid reaction force. I have asked IPI to help in this task .

I foresee that HOPEFOR would have a small, permanent headquarters to act as the nerve-centre for rapid deployment, to coordinate certified training, and to keep track of committed assets around the world which have been ear-marked for HOPEFOR's possible use. It would ensure sufficient regional coverage to provide well-equipped and well-trained rapid humanitarian deployment at short notice, anywhere in the world .

In response to a humanitarian crisis, HOPEFOR would establish a rapidly deployable field headquarters, augmented by regional experts, capable of assisting local area emergency management (together with national authorities). It would cooperate with civil society, NGO's and other humanitarian actors .

Because HOPEFOR is different, it must look and act differently. We must recognize that, when deployed in disaster relief, the military – due to its traditional role – is sometimes perceived as a threat by local inhabitants, or civil society, even though it has the best intentions .

HOPEFOR personnel would therefore have a distinctive colored helmet, beret, shoulder flash and vehicle marking to identify them as a visible force for good, and to insist an ethic of humanitarian assistance and pride in delivering hope – among those serving in HOPEFOR operations .

Ladies and Gentlemen ,

I anticipate considerable support for this initiative. Indeed, a number of foreign ministers that I have spoken to about HOPEFOR are very enthusiastic. We shall continue with our consultations at this level in order to explore the possibility of creating HOPEFOR .

Certainly, we shall draw on the work of experts on this field .

Based on the opinions made in the consultations and the expert opinion, we shall present the ideas and opinions to a meeting along the side of the next session of the General Assembly of the UN to which we shall invite all member States , in an effort to carry out the idea

To work, HOPEFOR will require participating States or organizations that will commit to have their forces trained to the OCHA standards .

It will also require contributing States which make a firm advance commitment of deployable assets .

And it will have to be sufficiently funded .

By establishing a humanitarian operation force along these lines, I am confident that we will be in a better position to deliver hope and save lives after humanitarian disasters .

Thank you for your attention.