London, 20th December 2010

Joint Submission for UK Government’s Humanitarian Emergency Response Review

Dear Lord Ashdown,

We are writing in response to the publication of the Inception Report on the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR) to offer some comments and suggestions, which we hope will contribute to your review. Collectively, we represent the combined experience of professionals, both within the UK and overseas, concerned with the built environment. We have also had inputs from leading academics involved in international capacity building programmes related to disaster management.

We note that the power to provide humanitarian assistance is granted to the Secretary of State for International Development by the Development Act 2002. We consider it vital that humanitarian assistance should be considered as a foundation and not an end in itself. We are keen to ensure that DFID’s position as a leading donor in humanitarian relief is undertaken in ways which provide an effective foundation for medium and long term social, economic and environmental recovery and development.

As representatives of the UK’s built environment professions, our members have extensive experience in supporting disaster risk reduction (DRR) as well as supporting recovery in the aftermath of disasters, often with DFID support and funding. In recent years, the training for built environment professionals has modified, especially as many of the British professional institutions have globalised, to ensure built environment professionals can work more effectively with humanitarian and development professionals.

As part of their wider ‘public interest’ mandates, all of the built environment institutions have also been promoting initiatives which support greater humanitarian and development work in partnership with local humanitarian agencies. As a recent report¹ has demonstrated, British and local built environment professionals can help humanitarian and development actors address key disaster reduction and response priorities:

- Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation
- Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning
- Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience
- Ensure reduction in underlying physical and social risk factors
- Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels
- Turn the rhetoric of ‘build back better’ into reality

Of course, humanitarian emergency needs must be met and amply resourced. However, experience has demonstrated that modest investment in disaster risk reduction can substantially reduce the damage to lives and livelihoods posed by both natural and man-made disasters. There is also increasing evidence that disaster risk reduction offers significant value for money; for example, every $1 spent on disaster risk reduction prevents losses of $7.² Secondly, the ways in which humanitarian disaster relief is provided can, and must, facilitate early recovery and the transition to

reconstruction.\textsuperscript{3} This ‘disaster risk management spiral’\textsuperscript{4} offers the opportunity of achieving sustainable development in the disaster management process. Such issues are becoming increasingly critical due to increasing vulnerability caused by mass urbanization, environmental degradation and climate change.

Therefore, we urge the review to include disaster risk reduction and also the transition to recovery and reconstruction as core areas, not secondary concerns as presently indicated in DFID’s inception report.

We also strongly believe that DFID would realise the maximum short and medium term impact and thereby achieve the best long term value for money by supporting greater involvement of British professional and institutional expertise, which often also leverages considerable private sector support, for humanitarian assistance.

As DFID reviews its policy and programmes to be ‘fit for purpose’, it is essential that, despite the separate review processes, the findings of DFID’s HERR should be part of an overarching aid strategy that emerges from all these reviews; to ensure a focus on reducing risk and building resilience, provision of effective emergency assistance which also minimises the ‘gap’ between the emergency phase and recovery as well as longer term development.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues and options for action further in any way considered helpful.

Signed:

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