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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 20/11/2008
SEC(2008) 2899

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid - ECHO

Operational Strategy 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union's humanitarian aid policy reflects its founding principles – solidarity, tolerance and respect for human dignity. Humanitarian aid, while not a crisis management tool, is one of the pillars of Community action for countries affected by natural or man made disasters as well as by complex emergencies¹. Through its activities in disaster areas and through its active contribution to promoting respect for and adherence to International Humanitarian Law, the European Commission has asserted itself as a major player in international humanitarian aid. Today it is one of the main donors in operations providing assistance, relief and protection to populations in third countries affected by humanitarian crises.

The Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) is the service of the Commission which is responsible for implementing the humanitarian response to emergency situations, complex crises and forgotten crises. Its mandate, described in the Council Regulation of 20 June 1996², gives it the task of saving and preserving lives, reducing or preventing suffering and preserving the integrity and dignity of populations in distress. By fulfilling this mandate, DG ECHO has always maintained its adherence to the fundamental principles of International Humanitarian Law, namely humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Indeed, its action is based on an objective evaluation of needs.

Since its creation, DG ECHO has adapted its strategy and its priorities to different humanitarian situations in order to improve the effectiveness of the aid provided to populations in distress. In the current geopolitical context, the major challenges which the international humanitarian community has to face are numerous. The main challenge is to protect a threatened humanitarian space and to promote adherence to International Humanitarian Law by all the parties involved in an armed conflict. Another challenge is the need to ensure the coordination of a growing number of humanitarian actors in order to bring effective and appropriate aid to those in need. With a view to promoting the principles and good practices of humanitarian action, DG ECHO has accepted, on behalf of the European Commission, the co-chairmanship of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative for the year 2008-2009.

The signing of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid by the Presidents of the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission on 18 December 2007, followed by the adoption of the action plan for its implementation on 29 May 2008, is a considerable step forward for the European Union which has finally given itself a common set of values, principles and objectives intended to strengthen the coherence of its overall humanitarian action. Significantly, the Consensus and its action plan stress the importance of the principle of diversity of the implementing partners – the United Nations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations and, as such, recognise that each of these bodies has comparative advantages in the response to specific situations or circumstances.

The effort of coordination of the European strategy on humanitarian aid and of ensuring its coherence will also be strengthened by the setting up of a specific working group of the

¹ COM(2008) 130, Reinforcing the Union's Disaster Response Capacity

² Council Regulation (EC) no 1257/96 of 20 June 1996, as amended by Regulation (EC) no 1882/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 September 2003 (OJ L 284 of 31.10.2003, p 1)

Council on humanitarian and food aid. This group will meet regularly from 1 January 2009 as a forum for debating and discussing humanitarian situations and issues.

2. OVERALL SITUATION AND OUTLOOK FOR 2009

Available statistical information confirms the clear increase in the number of natural disasters and their serious impact on human lives. Thus, if the figures for the past seven years (2000-2007) are compared with the figures for the previous decade (1990-1999), the number of disasters recorded has increased by 60%, with the number of people affected per year rising from 200 million to 245 million³. At the same time, the ongoing crises are becoming increasingly complex, characterised by the absence of structural and/or political solutions such as is the case, for example, in Somalia and in Darfur. The most worrying aspect is that, because of their very serious consequences, these crises compromise the future of current and coming generations.

These general trends take place against an extremely unfavourable economic cycle, recently marked by a surge in the price of food and raw materials. In addition to the current consequences of this economic background for the populations of developing countries, it is foreseeable that the recent international financial crisis will soon have consequences for the economies of these countries.

In view of these economic developments, it is clear that the Community's humanitarian aid is in ever greater demand. In fact it is an appropriate and effective response to the crises which have arisen from natural disasters and conflicts. In the case of complex crises, it often enables the most vulnerable populations to survive with dignity. This is why in 2008 the Commission again mobilised considerable additional resources so that DG ECHO could assist populations in distress.

2008 was characterised by a large number of crisis situations. The continuing effect of climate change is seen in particular through the increased number of small and medium-scale hydrometeorological natural disasters. In 2008, countries such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Peru, Bangladesh, Nepal and India, to name but a few, suffered floods, while Afghanistan was faced with a new drought. In addition, several countries were hit by major natural disasters. For example, the drought in Ethiopia affected more than 450,000 people⁴. A disaster of geophysical origin, caused by a severe earthquake in the Sichuan province of China, cost the lives of more than 87,000 people. Burma/Myanmar was seriously affected by cyclone Nargis, which was the most deadly disaster in Asia since 1991, and devastated the Irrawaddy delta on the south-west coast of the country, sweeping through the ancient capital Yangon, causing more than 130,000 victims. It was an unprecedented situation: of the 2.4 million people affected by this disaster, there were many victims who were unable to receive emergency aid as the military junta in power refused to allow foreign search and rescue teams to access the affected areas. Consequently, during the initial critical phase of the emergency, international humanitarian aid reached victims only very slowly, if at all. The case of Burma/Myanmar illustrates the increasingly complex nature of humanitarian interventions.

Even if climatic events do not necessarily turn into natural disasters, their increasing frequency impairs the ability of ever more vulnerable populations to cope with new dangers. Aware of the risks which these populations run, DG ECHO will increasingly have to adapt its

³ EM-DAT, <http://www.emdat.be/Database/terms.html>

⁴ Ibidem

response to the consequences of climate change in particular through efficiency in the allocation of funds. The DIPECHO programme which aims at helping the most vulnerable local communities to prepare for disasters, will be continued and extended to new parts of the world. It will form part of the new strategy currently being developed by DG ECHO, which is intended to promote disaster risk reduction.

The rise in the price of food and raw materials in 2007 and 2008 has negative consequences for many developing countries and their populations. Hundreds of millions of people experience greater poverty and the progress made recently in achieving the Millennium Development Goals is being put into question. Indeed, the general increase in the price of foodstuffs, which particularly affected the most vulnerable, caused riots, disorder and instability in several countries, adversely affecting the progress achieved by many years of investment in the political sphere, development and the maintenance of peace. At the same time, the very sharp rise in oil prices considerably increased the costs of delivering aid. In view of these major developments, the various external departments of the European Commission approached the situation in a holistic manner by combining humanitarian and development interventions. In particular, the Commission mobilised considerable funds to meet its obligations in terms of emergency food aid. In 2009, DG ECHO will continue to examine regularly the cost of humanitarian food aid operations and their humanitarian consequences in order to determine whether additional budgetary reinforcements are necessary or not.

Regarding situations of armed conflict, 2008 witnessed, among others, the war between the Russian Federation and Georgia. The Commission's humanitarian aid service intervened immediately to help the victims of this conflict. Some crises became more complex with the coexistence of conflicts and natural disasters: this was the case, for example, in Afghanistan. Moreover, the constant and continuous worsening of complex crises is a source of serious concern for the international humanitarian community. Insufficient food, violence and violent acts against civilian populations and massive population displacements are factors which make countries even more fragile and place populations in a position of permanent dependence on humanitarian aid, whilst NGOs experience more and more frequent problems with access. This is particularly the case in Sudan, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. In these difficult situations all the opportunities for a transition towards development programmes must be strongly encouraged through increased coordination between the various actors and the various aid mechanisms.

Finally, because of the increasing involvement of non-humanitarian actors in the response to humanitarian crises, the continued shrinking of the humanitarian space and the increase in the number of attacks targeting local or expatriate humanitarian aid workers, DG ECHO will continue to forcefully advocate for the respect of International Humanitarian Law in armed conflicts as well as respect for humanitarian principles. The protection of the humanitarian space is a condition sine qua non for effective, impartial and independent aid for those most in need.

3. GENERAL PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES

Through DG ECHO the Commission provides emergency aid to populations with the greatest humanitarian needs, irrespective of origin, religion or political creed.

For a number of years DG ECHO has been using a two-pronged approach to identify these populations. The first approach is the evaluation of the needs undertaken in the field by

experts and the geographical units. In addition to the immediate reports about crisis areas, analyses carried out in the field provide information about specific needs. At the same time, a comparative analysis is conducted to identify the countries which may require humanitarian assistance. This global analysis has two dimensions. First, the Global Needs Assessment (GNA), based on national indicators, classes more than 140 countries according to the existence of a recent crisis (caused by a conflict, a natural disaster or the presence of a large number of refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and the degree of vulnerability of the population. Second, the Forgotten Crisis Assessment (FCA) attempts to identify serious humanitarian crises in which the populations affected do not receive sufficient international aid.

The GNA and the FCA are important tools for ensuring coherence in the allocation of resources among the various countries according to their respective needs and independent of any type of pressure.

Using this method, the Commission this year identified 44 countries or territories currently in crisis. Of these, 17 countries were classed as "extremely vulnerable", which is an increase compared to last year (out of 41 countries in crisis, 15 were identified as such). One of the reasons for this trend is the increase in the number of natural disasters. Of the 17 countries or territories, 14 are in sub-Saharan Africa (including Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe), the others being Chechnya (Russian Federation), Afghanistan and East Timor.

For 2009, the following crises have been identified by DG ECHO as forgotten crises:

- The inter-ethnic conflict in Burma/Myanmar: the populations that are displaced internally and Burmese refugees in Thailand. The populations affected by cyclone Nargis.
- The populations affected by the internal armed conflict in Colombia.
- The populations affected by the conflict in the north of Yemen.
- The Sahrawi refugees in Algeria.
- The populations in India affected by the various conflicts in Kashmir, North East India, as well as the conflict relating to the Naxalite demands.
- The Rohingya refugees and the Chittagong Hill Tracts crisis in Bangladesh.

4. GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITIES FOR 2009

4.1 Africa, Caribbean and Pacific

4.1.1. Sudan and Chad

Sudan

In Darfur, the evolution of the humanitarian situation depends on a political solution to the conflict. The peace process is still blocked and depends, in the immediate future, on the reactions following the indictment of the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir by the Prosecutor General of the International Criminal Court (ICC) of war crimes, crimes against

humanity and genocide. The security incidents targeting civilians and humanitarian aid workers, incidents connected with banditry, inter-ethnic conflicts and conflicts between the rebels and the government – the latter conflicts being as serious as the attack on Khartoum by the JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) in May 2008 - are more numerous and more violent than ever in spite of the deployment of UNAMID (a hybrid peace-keeping mission). Because of this growing insecurity and also food insecurity, the number of IDPs is constantly increasing, while access of humanitarian aid workers to the camps and rural areas is becoming more and more difficult if not sometimes impossible. In Southern Sudan and in the transition areas, the political and security situation remains fragile, delaying the return of IDPs and refugees. In the east of Sudan, the arrival of Eritrean refugees in extremely undeveloped regions is worrying. In these generally tense circumstances, the involvement of DG ECHO in Sudan will continue to be considerable in order to help at least 4.5 million people in Darfur survive, 2.5 million of whom are IDPs, 50,000 refugees and 2 million people from rural and urban areas and nomads affected by the conflict. After 5 years of conflict and massive displacements in Darfur, DG ECHO will concentrate its aid on access to basic services (food, health, water, sanitation and nutrition) insisting that interventions be adapted to environmental constraints, on common services that are indispensable to the implementation of operations, and on responding to new emergencies. In the south of Sudan and in the transition areas, DG ECHO is planning to strengthen its response capacity to natural disasters and epidemics, as well as to emergencies caused by inter-ethnic conflicts and by north-south tensions. DG ECHO will maintain its aid effort promoting access to basic services for populations in areas where returnees and communities are facing extreme difficulties. DG ECHO will concentrate its efforts on the reintegration of refugees and IDPs in the south of Sudan rather than focusing on their return. Support for air transport, logistics, security and coordination activities will be maintained. DG ECHO will be ready to intervene in the east of Sudan if the situation of refugees and host populations were to worsen. Throughout the country, the response to natural disasters (drought and flooding) and to epidemics will be strengthened. Cross-cutting issues, such as the environment, child protection, gender and HIV/AIDS, will receive special attention. The efforts deployed with other Commission departments to link humanitarian aid to future development programmes, particularly in Southern Sudan, have been slowed down by the refusal of the Sudanese authorities to ratify the 10th European Development Fund (EDF), which contains a reference to the ICC.

Chad

In 2008, in spite of the deployment of the European force EUFOR and the early deployment of the United Nations mission MINURCAT, the security situation deteriorated. The year was characterised by the attack on the capital Ndjamena by the armed Chadian opposition; by the increase in the number of security incidents linked to banditry, which were particularly violent in the east of the country; by an escalation of tension with Sudan marked by inter-border attacks; by new population movements following the open conflict in west Darfur between the JEM and the Sudanese government and finally, by chronic insecurity in the north of the Central African Republic. This insecurity and violence contributed to the increase in the number of refugees from Sudan and the Central African Republic. In the east of the country, the shrinking humanitarian space led some organisations to leave their area of work permanently. The way the conflict has escalated in Darfur is unlikely to enable Sudanese refugees to return soon. The same applies to the south of the country where it seems unlikely that the refugees from the Central African Republic will return soon. Moreover, the numbers of displaced Chadians returning to their village of origin are not yet as high as expected. DG ECHO will continue to be involved in such a way as to continue its humanitarian assistance to

some 250,000 Sudanese refugees, 50,000 Central African refugees and 180,000 IDPs as well as to the host populations in the areas where the refugees and displaced persons have settled. If DG ECHO intends to maintain its support for access to basic services for populations affected by the conflicts, it will have to take account of the long-term nature of this crisis in an extremely fragile environment. In cooperation with development tools, DG ECHO should therefore give preference to the innovating initiatives of its partners designed to promote greater autonomy of the populations with regard to humanitarian aid. To this end, and in view of both internal and external instability, it will be necessary to maintain strengthened capacity for responding to emergencies. At the same time, DG ECHO will strengthen its support for logistics and security capacities of humanitarian organisations and for the improvement of coordination both between humanitarian actors and the military personnel of EUFOR, the MINURCAT mission and the Chadian authorities. This approach could be expanded if there were to be a massive voluntary return of IDPs in the east of the country during 2009.

4.1.2. Horn of Africa

Somalia

In Somalia, the number of people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance is constantly and continually increasing. Whereas at the beginning of 2008, they numbered 1.8 million, a few months later this figure reached 2.6 million, before culminating at around 3.25 million people at the end of the year. This humanitarian crisis is as much linked to insecurity as it is to an increase in fighting, the rise in the price of foodstuffs, the constant devaluation of the local currency and the prolonged drought. Because of the concerns and uncertainty concerning the harvests during the rainy season, and the poor prospect of an end to the conflict, the scale, degree and geographical extent of this crisis is likely to increase in the coming months. However, the limited capacity of DG ECHO's partners to act, due to insecurity, does not allow for a significant increase in humanitarian aid. The assassinations and abductions of humanitarian aid workers have only increased, with some 130 incidents recorded during the first 10 months of 2008. Furthermore, heavily-armed gangs of pirates have hijacked more than 30 vessels along the Somalian coasts, threatening, among other things, the delivery of food aid by the World Food Programme (WFP). The Djibouti peace agreement, involving the Federal Transitional Government and the moderate opposition (Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia) was signed on 19 August 2008. However, the radical militias (the Shababs), active on the ground, did not take part in the peace agreements. In this context of generalised crisis, DG ECHO will support activities in the following sectors: shelter and non-food items, health and nutrition, emergency food aid, water and sanitation. Coordinating activities will also be supported.

Eritrea

Access to the populations is made difficult by the authorities. A very limited number of humanitarian actors are authorised to operate in the country, and the data on the humanitarian situation is unreliable or is missing. Therefore, the definition of an overall strategy remains problematic for a country in which, were it for the effects of the drought which affects the Horn of Africa alone, humanitarian needs would be considered to be great. In 2009 DG ECHO will continue to support the few partners present in the areas of health and nutrition.

Ethiopia

The general context, marked by considerable administrative interference by the government and by restricted access to certain parts of the country, remains very difficult for humanitarian operators. In 2008, the combined effect of drought and the rise in the price of foodstuffs has caused a serious food crisis, with a very large increase in the levels of malnutrition, in particular in the Somali region (Ogaden). DG ECHO immediately responded to this situation by increasing its budget for food aid. In spite of a good rainy season in 2008, the prospects for the first half of 2009 are hardly positive if the consequences of the food crisis are taken into account. This is why food aid supplied by DG ECHO will remain considerable as will the aid to the sectors of nutrition and emergency food security. Furthermore, DG ECHO will increase its involvement in the areas of health, water and sanitation.

Kenya

In 2008, DG ECHO assisted victims of violence after the elections, in particular for people displaced from their place of origin. Although there are still around 20,000 IDPs, DG ECHO is no longer planning to intervene on their behalf in 2009, mainly because the government is taking adequate care of them. On the other hand, some 40,000 to 60,000 people displaced in spring 2008 in the Mont Elgon region need humanitarian aid. Furthermore, following the gradual deterioration of the situation in Somalia, the flow of refugees to Kenya is still increasing. During the first half of 2008, at least 36,000 new refugees were registered in the Dadaab camp, and some 20,000 other refugees are expected by the end of 2008, adding to the 210,000 refugees which the camp is hosting already. In this camp, the general conditions are very precarious and there are frequent epidemics. DG ECHO will contribute to the international assistance given to these refugees, including food aid. It will also intervene in response to the very considerable aid and food security requirements, in particular those of the pastoral populations in the north-east of the country.

Uganda

The situation has improved and stabilised in the Acholi region, with the gradual return of more than half of the IDPs, and this in spite of the impasse in the Juba peace talks following the refusal of the leader of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA), Joseph Kony, to sign the Global Peace Agreement. Food security should also improve thanks to the prospects of a good harvest in the areas to which the displaced persons are to return. Consequently, DG ECHO is planning a slight reduction in its involvement in the region of Acholi with the extent of the involvement also depending on the speed with which development programmes will be implemented. On the other hand, in the Karamoja region, the humanitarian situation is deteriorating, in particular because of the effects of the drought. Food insecurity, worsened by very limited access to basic services, including veterinary services, is increasing. There are high levels of malnutrition. Currently, out of a total of 1 million people living in the region, 70% are dependent on food aid; this is a situation which could worsen further if we take account of the pessimistic outlook for the coming harvest, as well as the constant increase in the price of food. The volatile security environment also makes the work of the humanitarian and development actors difficult in this region. The involvement of DG ECHO in the region of Karamoja will therefore probably increase in 2009.

Regional drought

At the regional level (Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Uganda), interventions to support pastoral populations will be supported within the framework of the regional drought initiative programme. During 2008, it was possible to start cross-border operations,

while maintaining an approach based on the direct involvement of the beneficiaries' communities and on local expertise. The implementation of the drought preparedness projects also helped strengthen the links between humanitarian operators and the local authorities, with the interventions resulting in a considerable increase in the ability of the pastoral populations to cope with the drought, in particular the projects financed made it possible to improve access to water, as well as to veterinary assistance. The network of expertise put in place, the trust of the local authorities and the direct participation of the communities also form a solid base for the effective implementation of the drought response operations. The efforts in the area of the Link between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) will be further strengthened and the operations will be implemented together with the humanitarian actions financed by DG ECHO in each of the countries. Almost two years after the activities were launched DG ECHO is planning an evaluation of the impact of its activities.

4.1.3. Central Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In spite of a gradual return to peace in most of the country, which has enabled a considerable improvement in the humanitarian situation in general, the conflict in the provinces of East Kivu and its humanitarian consequences continue and have even increased recently. In truth, the prospect for lasting peace in the Kivus following the Nairobi and Goma Accords did not materialise. The various factions did not disarm and the UN forces have not yet been able to compel the actual disarmament of the combatants. Consequently, violent exchanges persist, contributing to a climate of insecurity and uncertainty. The civilian population has paid the heaviest price in the conflict. The populations continue to be displaced from their homes and remain unable to return. In the Kivus, the local solidarity mechanisms are insufficient to absorb the 800,000 IDPs and the international community has had to gradually provide assistance, particularly by opening camps. Over the year, the need for food rations has increased from 3,500 to 7,000 metric tonnes per month. Outside the Kivus, the situation continues to improve, evidence of which is the return of refugees and IDPs to Katanga and Ituri, who, nevertheless, still need help to resettle. In 2009, emergency humanitarian needs will continue and will still be considerable, with hundreds of thousands of people needing basic humanitarian aid in all sectors. The reduction in the harvests plus problems of access to the fields means a continuous need for substantial emergency food security programmes. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the current crisis is limited to only part of the territory whereas in the country as a whole, emergency requirements are gradually receding. DG ECHO will continue assisting the return of refugees, but it has closed down its programmes in central Katanga and in most of Ituri province, in view of the use of development instruments. DG ECHO will continue to strengthen emergency preparedness capacity and to respond to epidemics, while supporting other donors taking over programmes at the right moment, in the rehabilitation, health and food security sectors in line with LRRD. This should not only make it possible to establish new priorities for DG ECHO funding, but could also lead to its possible reduction. In this respect, it should be borne in mind that there are other important sources of financing for humanitarian aid through the CERF and the Pooled Fund, and also that development aid and sources of government financing are on the increase. Moreover, according to the United Nations, more than 1.3 billion dollars have been made available by the international community to stabilise and rehabilitate Kivu provinces. Finally, as for all the ACP countries which ratified the 10th EDF, DG ECHO benefits from part of the B-envelope which could allow unforeseen needs to be covered.

To support humanitarian operations, DG ECHO will continue financing ECHO Flight.

Central African Republic (CAR)

The total halt to the conflict between the three rebel groups and the government has not been followed by the signing of political agreements. Recently, the north of the country saw resurgence in the fighting between armed factions. Added to this is the persistent problem of banditry ('coupeurs de route'). EUFOR, whose current mandate ends in March 2009, is deployed in the Vakaga region at the border with Darfur and in the south of Chad. The MICOPAX regional force (Peace consolidation mission), which replaced FOMUC (Multilateral Force for Central Africa), is trying to intervene in the north-west regions of the country. In spite of these initiatives, the areas of insecurity remain largely in the north, causing incessant displacements both inside and outside the country. This does not allow for a significant improvement in the humanitarian situation. In 2008, humanitarian aid, including the aid provided by DG ECHO, made it possible to assist more than 200,000 people directly. It was designed in such a way as to take into account the vital, basic needs of the population as well as the perspective for development actions which are implemented gradually, in particular those financed by other Community instruments. In view of the precarious security situation and the persistence of humanitarian needs, DG ECHO will continue to be present in 2009, while adapting its efforts according to changes in the situation and needs. Substantial humanitarian intervention will no doubt be necessary in view of the slowness with which development instruments are put in place. Their effectiveness may also be affected by the current deterioration in the security situation and the uncertain climate generated by the elections planned for 2010.

Burundi/Tanzania

Humanitarian and food aid for Burundi and Tanzania will be maintained during 2009. The rate of closure of the Burundian and Congolese refugee camps in Tanzania increased significantly during 2008: there will remain 1 or 2 camps in 2009 in Tanzania, as opposed to 5 camps at the beginning of 2008 and 11 camps in 2007. The logistical requirements needed to make it possible to carry out the repatriation of more than 150,000 Burundians and Congolese correctly are still just as great. At this stage, DG ECHO and the international community cannot end humanitarian and food aid, including aid to former refugees, without jeopardising the repatriation process. Even if development actions unfold gradually, DG ECHO will carry out an initial reintegration phase of these refugees so that a transition process is correctly put in place without creating destabilisation in Burundi. There is a certain tension in the country which risks increasing as the Presidential elections of 2010 get closer. For this reason, DG ECHO will only slightly reduce its aid in 2009, with the hope that the LRRD process, put in place several years ago, may finally bear fruit.

Zimbabwe

During 2008, the economic situation worsened dramatically, causing galloping inflation and scarcity of goods. Basic services (in particular in the health, water and sanitation sectors) have deteriorated further and food has become increasingly difficult to find. Malnutrition, chronic and acute, is increasing, with warning levels being reached in some parts of the country. In the absence of far-reaching structural measures, there is little hope of improvement in 2009. Furthermore, access to populations is still sometimes difficult for the NGOs. An in-depth assessment of the needs caused by political violence, displacements and the poor harvest remains essential. Due to the general deterioration of the situation in 2008, the challenges will be considerable. DG ECHO and its partners will have to assist a population experiencing a "retrograde development" process. The improvement in the access situation and humanitarian

actors' freedom to work will depend on how the negotiations go between the various political parties. Whatever the results of these negotiations, the humanitarian needs in 2009 will be at least equivalent to those of 2008 in the areas of food aid, security, health, water and sanitation. Even if there is a significant improvement in the political and economic situation of the country, humanitarian needs remain so urgent that DG ECHO cannot envisage phasing out its operations in the near future.

Cameroon

Around 45,000 refugees from the CAR live in Cameroon. Although they are accepted by the local populations, these refugees need humanitarian aid. Depending on the results of a needs assessment which is currently being carried out, DG ECHO might expect to make a contribution towards covering the needs of these refugees, including food aid.

Other countries of southern Africa

As in the past, DG ECHO's strategy in the rest of the region will be limited to responding to any emergencies, mainly caused by weather and/or epidemics, which could arise. The launch of the first DIPECHO Action Plan (Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi, and Mozambique) during the last quarter of 2008 will enable the establishment of a network of partners which would then be able to intervene rapidly in these countries in case of need.

4.1.4. West Africa

The Sahel

In the Sahel, acute malnutrition is an emergency: UNICEF estimates that more than 300,000 children die because of this every year. For more than ten years now, the levels of malnutrition have systematically exceeded the emergency thresholds. Currently, it is estimated that out of some 50 million people grouped together in the western strip of the Sahel, 1.3 million children under five years of age are in a state of acute malnutrition; more than 300,000 of them are severely malnourished and are therefore in danger. The Sahel is the poorest region in the world; basic services such as health are rarely accessible and are of very poor quality. Furthermore, drought, desert locusts, floods and epidemics are recurrent threats whose frequency is increasing. Combined with the recent surge in the world prices of foodstuffs and raw materials, these threats are reducing all the more the resilience of a growing number of people who are only just surviving. Due to its long-term effects on the child population and on successive generations, malnutrition is harming the countries ability to develop. The Sahel countries will need consistent and sustained emergency assistance, combining humanitarian, food and development aid. The global plan for the Sahel for 2009 will be part of an ongoing strategy aimed at helping to significantly reduce acute malnutrition in children less than five years of age in the region, thanks to levels of malnutrition being sustainably kept under the emergency thresholds. In spite of the unfavourable circumstances which prevail in the Sahel, there are relatively simple and effective solutions which are accepted by the populations in fighting against this scourge. This strategy which has been in place since May 2007 has three strands: 1) an improvement in basic knowledge including regular nutritional surveys, 2) support for appropriate and innovatory responses such as the introduction of ready-to use therapeutic foods or free health care for children under five years of age, 3) appropriate and effective advocacy directed at populations at risk and deciding factors for finding a sustainable and viable approach. This strategy has already made it possible to care for and save many children suffering from malnutrition and to improve

knowledge and nutritional practices and to show the indisputable link between malnutrition and the development of a country. By also placing nutrition at the heart of development plans for the Sahel countries, DG ECHO, with the support of other humanitarian donors, is proposing and putting in place strong impact innovatory activities.

Liberia

DG ECHO reiterates its commitment to continue to give humanitarian aid to Liberia in order to enable the transition towards development. However, the most visible obstacle to putting LRRD in place in Liberia is the serious lack of qualified staff in public administration. During the transition phase, the health sector remains a problem; according to UNICEF, the Ministry of Health would not be able to take over the assistance programmes before the end of 2010. Consequently, DG ECHO will remain active in this sector at least until the end of 2009. Important requirements also need to be met in the water and sanitation sectors, both in urban areas and in rural areas where very few development programmes have been started. The Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP) for food security operations and livelihoods is running but tangible results on the ground will probably not be visible before the end of 2009. The humanitarian situation in Liberia was made worse by the recent increase in food prices. Aid to target groups such as mothers and children will be continued, particularly in the areas of nutrition and health. In view of the current humanitarian needs in the country as well as the time needed to put in place instruments for development aid, DG ECHO will maintain its current level of assistance. At the same time, DG ECHO will continue developing an exit strategy, in particular in the health sector, with the help of the other actors involved in this sector.

Coastal States of West Africa

DG ECHO is currently intervening in Togo and Guinea Conakry through programmes tackling malnutrition running through to June 2009. LRRD must be guaranteed and, barring unforeseen events, no additional interventions are planned. In view of the regular breakdown of an explosive socio-political situation, Guinea Conakry requires special attention. In some Sahelian parts of the coastal states, figures show high levels of malnutrition, connected or not with the rise in the world prices for foodstuffs. In this context, it will be necessary to follow the impact of the actions started as part of the many funds mobilised in the fight against the rise in prices (FSTP, CERF, bilateral aid). The general evolution in the situation in Guinea Bissau and in the region of Casamance in Senegal will continue to be followed closely. Furthermore, due to the absence of a humanitarian emergency and the intervention of other donors, DG ECHO has decided to suspend its activities in Sierra Leone. The natural disasters and regular epidemics in the coastal states will be tackled, if necessary, by emergency decisions or specific decisions.

4.1.5. Caribbean

DG ECHO will continue to monitor closely the situation in the 22 Caribbean countries and will provide emergency aid when this proves to be necessary. Experience has shown that funds will be required to respond to the damage caused by hurricanes, tropical storms and floods. The cyclone season in the Atlantic Ocean normally runs from June to November but, recently, it has tended to last longer. DG ECHO's strategy in Haiti will be to reduce malnutrition and the mortality rate through multi-sectoral humanitarian aid, as well as to respond to disasters and start disaster-preparedness activities through the DIPECHO

programme. Food security will also form part of this strategy. Haiti is one of the pilot countries for the new initiative of the Commission and the Member States for Fragile States⁵.

The Seventh DIPECHO Action Plan in the Caribbean is planned for 2009/2010 and due to the fact that many communities have not yet benefited from a DIPECHO programme and to the increase in costs in the region, its budget will be increased by 25%. DG ECHO will continue to work together with other Commission departments implementing programmes to prevent and reduce the risks of disasters in this region. The evaluation of the Sixth DIPECHO Action Plan will be finalised in March 2009. The constraints linked with the programme include security and problems with access and natural disasters. Particular attention will be paid to LRRD because of the difficulties of making the main sectors of the EDF coincide with those of DG ECHO. In some vulnerable regions, there are sometimes very few partners to work with. Furthermore, they tend to concentrate in their own language area, which often makes regional cooperation difficult.

4.1.6. Pacific

DG ECHO will continue monitoring 15 countries in the Pacific, if necessary financing relief operations. DG ECHO's last emergency decision goes back to the Tsunami which hit the Solomon Islands in 2007. This region experiences many earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions.

4.2 Middle East and Mediterranean

Occupied Palestinian Territories

In spite of the resumption of political negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, there are increased restrictions and bans on movements and the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem continues. Similarly, Israel keeps up the blockade of the Gaza Strip, imposed on this part of the Territories following Hamas taking power in June 2007. Since the closure of the crossing points with Israel, the isolation of the population of the Gaza Strip remains one of the major concerns. This blocking of key imports (in particular of raw materials intended for the agricultural and industrial sectors) and exports have resulted in the collapse of the economy and have created dependency on humanitarian aid for a growing proportion of the population. Furthermore, in many parts of the West Bank the population remains economically vulnerable. In the areas most affected by the restrictions on movement, there are violations of basic rights such as access to health and the confiscation of agricultural land.

In this context of permanent crisis, pledges made at the Paris Conference in December 2007 are starting to materialise on the ground through development projects. Furthermore in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority is increasingly assuming its responsibilities by implementing reforms. These positive developments are enabling DG ECHO to start reducing its programmes in the water sector where other Commission services have not only launched rehabilitation projects but have also started to build new infrastructure. The same applies to

⁵ In collaboration with other stakeholders, the Member States and the Commission intend to draw up action plans for Fragile States, aiming to bring concrete improvements in the following areas: political sphere; coherence between actions with diplomatic, humanitarian, security and development aims; effectiveness of aid.

the health sector where the competent ministry is assuming some of its responsibilities again. Therefore, the link between emergency and development should be re-established. Nevertheless, in order to safeguard the household economy and to maintain protection mechanisms, humanitarian aid will continue to be given to the most vulnerable populations of the West Bank and Gaza in 2009 in the following sectors: assistance to households through food aid and food security, as well as through income-generating activities; health, water and sanitation, psycho-social aid, protection and coordination. DG ECHO will finance projects which are part of this where the multi-sectoral response is preferred.

Finally, DG ECHO will propose specific operations intended to promote International Humanitarian Law, stressing the importance of respecting humanitarian space. It will also support operations conducted by its partners in this area.

Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

The situation of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has not improved. Almost half a million Palestinians in this country (10% of the population) have no social or civic rights and have only limited access to public services in the areas of health and education. In spite of the decision of the Lebanese government to limit the legal impediments for access to more than 70 types of jobs, it is unlikely that these measures will yield results in the short term. 53% of the refugees live in poor conditions in 12 official camps and in a number of unofficial camps. Furthermore, in 2009 a large proportion of the 30,000 former inhabitants of the Nahr El Bared camp will stay displaced. The most vulnerable people live in precarious shelter and poor hygiene conditions, only receiving very little attention from the international community. Consequently, DG ECHO's humanitarian aid will continue, in particular in the sectors relating to rehabilitation of shelter, health, psychosocial aid, water and sanitation, job opportunities, assistance to vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and the disabled, as well as in the areas of protection and coordination. This involvement should lessen over the next few years with the gradual rebuilding of the Nahr el Bared camp and neighbouring areas in which other Commission departments are involved.

Iraq crisis

The humanitarian situation in Iraq appears to be stabilising in spite of an ever greater number of uprooted Iraqis, both inside and outside the country. Their exact number is not known but estimates are high, ranging from several hundreds of thousands to several million. Refugees from other countries who were in Iraq before 2003 are also suffering from the consequences of the conflict, in particular 15,000 Palestinians who are in great need of protection.

The political and humanitarian situation in Iraq remains complex and the violence is sectarian. Even though the number of violent incidents fell in 2008, it still remains high (approximately 200 per week as against 1,500 two years ago), which makes Iraq one of the most dangerous countries on the planet. The humanitarian needs remain the same but are receiving increasing attention from donors and the Iraqi authorities themselves. Revenues from oil production, which have now returned to pre-war level, have enabled the government to become more engaged in the reconstruction of the country and to contribute to the appeal from the WFP. The relative improvement in the security conditions as well as the governments support for returnees has led to an increase in the number of displaced persons returning (8,000 to 10,000 returnees per month to Baghdad). However, according to the International Federation of the Red Cross and the National Societies of the Red Crescent, 70% of the population still does not have access to drinking water, 20% of children suffer from malnutrition and the hospitals lack

medical staff. Furthermore, the operating capacity of the humanitarian actors is severely compromised as much by the lack of security as by the distrust of the population towards the international organisations which they liken to the occupying forces. DG ECHO and other donors committed to a humanitarian response in line with humanitarian principles have therefore only a limited number of potential parties capable of intervening.

Most of the Iraqi refugees in the Middle East live in Syria (216,000 people registered by the HCR in August 2008), in Jordan (54,000), in Egypt (10,600), in Lebanon (10,500), in Turkey (6,400) and in Iran (3,700). While it has kept its borders open, since 2007 Syria has made its visa system more stringent for Iraqis while the Jordanian-Iraqi border is virtually closed. Large parts of the recently arrived poorer Iraqis live in very precarious conditions in these host countries which are suffering the full brunt of the rise in the price of foodstuffs. For all the refugees, without prospects of paid work or of returning in the short term, the situation can only worsen.

In view of the considerable humanitarian needs in Iraq and in neighbouring countries, DG ECHO is planning to maintain its aid for victims of this crisis, both in terms of basic services to the most vulnerable affected populations (health, water and sanitation, food, psychosocial aid and basic food products) and in terms of protection and help with coordination. The level and the methods used for humanitarian aid do, however, reflect the constraints of implementing humanitarian aid in the host countries and the subsequent security and access constraints inside Iraq.

Yemen

Yemen is currently facing two long-term humanitarian crises. In the south, the continuing flood of refugees from the Horn of Africa continued in 2008 and may increase in 2009. In the north, the armed conflict, a striking example of a forgotten crisis, which pits the Yemenite authorities against a rebellion, caused the displacement of at least 100,000 people in 2008. This has led to a humanitarian intervention by DG ECHO, in spite of the access problems, to meet the immediate needs of some of these IDPs. In view of the risk of an increasing flood of refugees in the south, the non-return of displaced persons in the north due to the vulnerability of Yemen, and of limited access to the north, it is planned to continue the assistance in 2009, particularly to the victims of the conflict in the north.

Sahrawi refugees

The Sahrawi refugees, living since 1975 in camps in the desert region of Tindouf in Algeria, continue to be victims of one of the oldest and largely forgotten humanitarian crises. As direct negotiations – the first for ten years – between the Polisario Front and Morocco in 2007 and 2008 did not lead to any solution to the political crisis, it is unlikely that the situation of the refugees in the camps will change in the short term. As the refugees continue to be heavily dependent on international humanitarian aid for their survival, humanitarian aid from DG ECHO will be maintained in 2009. It will cover the basic sectors, namely food aid, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter and basic non-food items. Sectoral coordination efforts to improve aid quality will continue in 2009. In addition, the dialogue with DG ECHO partners and with the Sahrawi authorities will continue in order to improve quality, targeting and project implementation and monitoring.

4.3 Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

Chechen crisis

The stabilisation of the situation in Chechnya since 2006 was consolidated in 2008 and security greatly improved. The last few pockets of resistance are limited to a few geographical areas and they target the armed forces. On the other hand, security has continued to deteriorate in the neighbouring republics. Most of the humanitarian organisations have kept an office open in Grozny, with the exception of the United Nations which is still based in North Ossetia because they were not given authorisation by the authorities of the Russian Federation.

Reconstruction is progressing throughout the Republic with spectacular results in Grozny. The socio-economic situation in general is improving. These improvements do not, however, always benefit the most vulnerable people. In response to this development, DG ECHO has started a process of gradual withdrawal from Chechnya, reducing its funding by 20% in 2007 and 40% in 2008.

DG ECHO's intervention in 2009 could therefore be its last and will be focused on the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable households, in particular in the areas of protection, shelter rehabilitation for returned families and programmes to help the households become economically independent. People displaced in Ingushetia and Dagestan could also be covered by these projects. This strategy accompanies the gradual disengagement of humanitarian agencies from the Northern Caucasus and corresponds to the resumption of certain activities by the social services of the Chechen government. A LRRD process, although it had been prepared, could not be implemented because of the opposition of the Russian authorities to continuing this type of assistance.

The implementation of this exit strategy will depend on how the situation develops. Access to the beneficiaries in Chechnya has improved even if several of DG ECHO's partners did not receive the necessary authorisation to work there as the Russian authorities do not want to prolong the presence of the many humanitarian organisations on their territory.

In Azerbaijan, DG ECHO will continue its activities started in 2006 to deliver assistance to 2,200 Chechen refugees who are awaiting clarification of their status. This small group depends entirely on humanitarian aid and lives in very precarious conditions in and around Baku. They are also confronted with protection problems.

Georgia

In Georgia, rapid and substantial humanitarian aid was delivered in response to the humanitarian consequences of the conflict with the Russian Federation in August 2008 which affected approximately 130,000 people. This support will continue to focus on the 20,000 IDPs who are no longer in a position to return home. Previously displaced persons should not be forgotten in this new crisis, particularly those who have returned to Abkhazia over the past few years, for whom humanitarian aid will have to be continued or even increased in view of their new needs in terms of protection.

4.4. Asia

The whole of Asia is highly prone to natural disasters, such as hurricanes, cyclones, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, landslides and floods, and the populations are extremely vulnerable. As in previous years, DG ECHO will continue to monitor the development of the humanitarian situation while remaining ready to carry out rapid evaluations, and, in case of need, ready to respond to natural disasters.

4.4.1 South Asia

Afghanistan – Pakistan – Iran

The marked deterioration in security in Afghanistan, aggravated by years of drought and the rise in the prices of basic food products, has caused a great increase in humanitarian needs. Consequently in 2009, the response from DG ECHO will be adapted to this new situation. The first priority will continue to be to help the refugees who have now returned to Afghanistan. However, new waves of refugees and IDPs are expected in 2009. The aim of DG ECHO's humanitarian aid is to meet their need for shelter, food, water and sanitation; it will focus on the largest host areas, in particular those which have received insufficient development or reconstruction assistance. The second priority will be to protect people. Food aid will also be supplied to people displaced by the conflict in the country itself as well as to people affected by the drought and the rise in food prices. Finally DG ECHO could envisage continuing its support for coordinating security and for financing humanitarian flights.

In Pakistan humanitarian access is a problem, and DG ECHO will, if necessary, respond to the humanitarian needs caused by the ongoing conflict or by any natural disasters.

Bangladesh

DG ECHO will continue to support the 10,000 Rohingya refugees who, since July 2008, have been living in the new Teknaf site financed by DG ECHO. The aim is to improve the infrastructure and living conditions in this new site, in particular the supply of drinking water and the sanitation conditions. Activities enabling the refugees to support themselves will also be introduced. Aid for the victims of cyclone Sidr in November 2007, financed from the 2008 budget, will continue in 2009. It will focus on supplying shelter and means of subsistence for the victims.

India

In India, the crises affecting the populations which are victims of the separatist conflict in Jammu and Kashmir and the Naxalite rebellion are still forgotten crises. In this context, the activities started for these populations are on-going: protection and psychological support in Jammu and Kashmir and assistance for the victims of the Naxalite rebellion in the state of Chattisgarh, mainly in the areas of health, water and sanitation. The level of aid will be the same as in the last two years.

Nepal

Politically, the situation remains fragile with 60,000 displaced persons and frequent violent episodes. In 2009, DG ECHO's humanitarian aid will remain similar to that of 2008 and will aim to help IDPs to return to their place of origin and help those who are incapable of returning to their homes. For those populations most affected by the conflict, the focus will be

on protection, health, water and sanitation, as well as on nutrition. DG ECHO will also continue to finance food aid for the 100,000 Bhutanese refugees stranded in camps in the eastern part of the country, while encouraging a sustainable solution to this crisis.

Sri Lanka

Since the end of 2007, the resumption of the civil war in the north of the country has led to the displacement of more than 200,000 persons and this figure could double in 2008/2009. Because of the protracted nature of this crisis, these IDPs are entirely dependent on the aid provided by the humanitarian community. DG ECHO will continue to provide them with emergency aid in so far as is possible, despite access problems. DG ECHO will also continue to help to re-settle IDPs and to provide assistance to the Sri Lankan refugee community in Tamil Nadu in India, which numbers more than 80,000 people.

4.4.2 South-East and East Asia

Burma/Myanmar - Thailand

Burma/Myanmar remains a largely forgotten crisis in spite of the considerable attention given by the media to the demonstrations in autumn 2007 and the disaster caused by cyclone Nargis in May 2008. This resulted in countless victims and caused serious damage. The operations launched in 2008 will continue in 2009, in a situation marked by a drop in donor interest compared with the beginning of the crisis. DG ECHO will also continue to provide aid to the stateless population of Northern Rakhine State and to IDPs in the Eastern States of the country, in spite of the constraints imposed by the authorities on humanitarian organisations and the problems of access to large parts of the country. The aid provided by the Commission's humanitarian aid service will remain at a level similar to that of the previous year (not including emergency aid to the victims of Nargis) and will concentrate on protection, health, water, sanitation and nutrition.

DG ECHO will provide food aid and health care to the 150,000 Burmese refugees living in the camps in Thailand, while efforts continue, in conjunction with other major donors, to find a permanent solution to this problem. The refugees who leave the camps to live in other countries are often replaced by new arrivals in the camps.

4.5. Latin America

Colombia

The response to the conflict in Colombia will continue to be the largest intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean. The internal conflict drags on, but, for the first time in 40 years, peace negotiations do not appear to be completely out of the question. However, "demobilised" paramilitaries continue to form new illegal armed groups. The violence against the civilian population and the violations of International Humanitarian Law are relentless. Consequently, the number of IDPs is on the increase, from some 200,000 in 2005 and 2006, to 300,000 in 2007. The exodus of Colombians affected by the conflict to neighbouring countries (in particular Ecuador and Venezuela) continues. According to the UNHCR, approximately 400,000 people are in need of international protection in these two countries. As regards these situations, the level of aid and protection required will be similar to that in 2008. The aid will supplement that provided by the government and will be given to the victims of the conflict who receive neither protection nor adequate assistance from the

authorities. The aid will target recently displaced persons (less than 12 months) and the communities which have restrictions on movement and access to basic services. Particular attention will be paid to the most vulnerable groups, specifically women, children and ethnic minorities. DG ECHO's support will consist of emergency humanitarian aid, as well as aid allowing the victims of conflict to regain at least minimum subsistence levels. In Ecuador and Venezuela, DG ECHO will provide emergency humanitarian aid and protection for new arrivals.

4.6. Central America and South America

In Central America and South America, emergency humanitarian aid and/or food aid will be provided for vulnerable populations whose humanitarian situation has deteriorated following a natural disaster. The region experiences many disasters such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes or even volcanic eruptions. They cause serious economic and social losses. In addition, because of their recurring nature, the ability of the local population to deal with the negative effects of the disasters gradually diminishes so that they resort more and more frequently to external aid.

5. HORIZONTAL PRIORITIES

5.1 Implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, adopted by the Council, Parliament and Commission in December 2007, was translated into an agreed Action Plan of practical implementation measures endorsed by the Council in July 2008, covering a five year period (from 2008-2013.). Through this initiative, DG ECHO marks its ambition to actively contribute to the definition of humanitarian policy, and to the strategic questions regarding the capacity to provide appropriate and effective humanitarian aid where most needed.

5.2 International Humanitarian Law

As part of the implementation of the action plan of the Consensus, a conference on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) was held at the European Parliament in September 2008. Following this conference, DG ECHO will strive to maintain IHL as a priority for the the European Union. Furthermore, DG ECHO will continue the promotion of the humanitarian principles and make people aware of numerous ongoing violations of IHL and the humanitarian space.

5.3 Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative

Measures to strengthen coordination between donors on the ground are essential. The same applies to initiatives promoting a shared understanding of crisis analysis and humanitarian needs. In this regard, DG ECHO will continue coordination with Member States and other partners, through existing mechanisms in the interest of avoiding duplication. On behalf of the European Commission, DG ECHO is co-sharing the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative with the Netherlands for one year, starting in July 2008. The aim is to strengthen the practical application of the principles and practices intended to improve the humanitarian response.

5.4 Sectoral policies and LRRD

In the past few years, DG ECHO has started to develop a certain number of sectoral policies aimed at better defining the context of its interventions and to provide clearer guidance on financing.

The work in the area of protection, children in crises, and health (including HIV/AIDS) is now well-advanced and, in 2009, emphasis will be placed on implementing these orientations, with, in particular, the development of a training programme. All this work has been carried out in close collaboration with other relevant Commission departments, in particular those responsible for development co-operation and external relations. The development of sectoral policies is furthermore the subject of wide consultation among partners specialising in the respective areas. Of course, one of the main components of these consultations is the link between the various available instruments.

DG ECHO has also started to address the question of aid in the form of cash (including vouchers). The guidelines for using cash in ECHO interventions will be finalised in 2009.

Another objective of DG ECHO is to take gender dimensions better into account, in particular specific needs and risks women face in crisis situations. As a first step, a review of policies and practices of donors and most progressive partners has been launched.

All of DG ECHO's sectoral policies will be shared with the Member States, in accordance with the commitments in the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid to promote the convergence of policies and practices between the European humanitarian aid donors.

LRRD

The transition phase between emergency aid and development co-operation in complex emergencies is always a difficult phase with persistent instability. However, humanitarian aid must give way as quickly as possible to more long-term approaches in which the building up and strengthening of local and national capacities has a central role to play. As there are many actors involved at the same time in this phase (humanitarian, reconstruction, stabilisation and security and development), the various types of action have to be coordinated appropriately. This requires a dialogue, if possible from the beginning of a crisis, between humanitarian and development actors to develop a common analysis of the crisis and appropriate responses in the short, medium and long term. DG ECHO will continue to work in close collaboration with the other Commission departments involved, both at the operational level in Brussels and on the ground, as well as at policy level, in order to promote a better link between the various instruments enabling a real transition to be established between humanitarian aid and development. A reference also needs to be made to the joint initiative of the World Bank, the United Nations and the European Commission in working on "*Developing a Common Framework for Post-Crisis/Disaster Needs Assessment and Recovery Planning*".

5.5 Humanitarian Food Aid

The key objective of DG ECHO in the field of humanitarian food aid for 2009 will be:

- saving lives and relieving suffering through the provision of emergency food assistance to vulnerable populations affected by crises.

DG ECHO will also continue its efforts to:

- help to restore and maintain a stable nutritional status amongst crisis-affected populations, through the prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition;
- protect livelihoods threatened by crises and assist with the early, short-term recovery of crisis-affected livelihoods, in post-emergency contexts, so that food security and nutritional stability can be re-established;
- enhance the effectiveness of aid-delivery in food aid and emergency food security.

In order to cope with the rise in food prices during 2008, the budgetary authority has made available 140 million euros of additional funds, bringing the budget line for food aid to 363 million euros in 2008.

As mentioned in the financial perspectives for 2007-2013, in 2009, DG ECHO will have to deal with an initial humanitarian food aid budget of 230 million euros. In order to best manage this budget line, DG ECHO will have to continue to meet the challenge set by the increase in food prices, which require the introduction of a range of short, medium and long-term measures. Indeed, the price of foodstuffs remains high compared with the reference levels. This structural change is the result of a whole range of factors such as the current growth in developing economies, the industrial use of foodstuffs, agricultural production not keeping up with demand and the uncertainty weighing on the economies of developed countries.

In 2009, DG ECHO will continue to promote decision-making based on an objective needs assessment. As in the previous year, during the planning process for its funds for 2009, DG ECHO performed an evaluation of the status of food insecurity and of the related needs in all the countries where it carries out large food aid operations, as well as in the places where it may have to intervene soon. The tools used for this evaluation have been adapted to take into account the factors linked to soaring food prices. This evaluation exercise will provide indicators which, together with the other data available, will enable DG ECHO to target more effectively the way it manages its food aid assistance.

The adoption of the regulation establishing a facility for a rapid response to the rise in food prices in developing countries, if it were to materialize, would be very important for the area of food security. It should be emphasised that these funds will not be directly used for humanitarian food aid, but that they should make it possible to strengthen the link between the relief, rehabilitation and development operations throughout 2009 and possibly in 2010. This facility would complement the efforts already undertaken by the Commission in 2008 to respond to the crisis such as the mobilisation of an extra 140 million euros for humanitarian aid, 200 million euros from the 10th EDF and the reorientation of 50 million euros from the FSTP. The mobilisation of additional funds would target mainly agricultural inputs for the poorest farmers and help also the poorest consumers. DG ECHO will continue its coordination efforts with other Commission departments and with other donors in order to achieve greater complementarity.

DG ECHO will also continue to strengthen the capacity of the international humanitarian agencies by financing cross-cutting activities, in particular by strengthening their ability to evaluate and accurately analyse humanitarian needs in the areas of food, nutrition, and the means of subsistence during the emergency and post-emergency phases as well as by introducing suitable responses. The quality of humanitarian food aid cannot be approached only through the strengthening of humanitarian actors' operational capacity; it also requires

continuous work to ensure that the food aid operations are effective throughout the project cycle.

In 2009, DG ECHO will also contribute actively, together with other Commission departments, to the revision of the Food Aid Convention (FAC). DG ECHO will continue developing strategic relationships with the main partners in the emergency food aid sector, in particular with the WFP with whom it will continue to conduct strategic planning and a political dialogue, both at headquarters and in the field, in particular through the strategic partnership dialogue with WFP for which DG ECHO is in the lead.

5.6 Disaster Risk Reduction including Disaster preparedness

As part of its mandate, DG ECHO finances activities to prevent and reduce risks for the most vulnerable communities and those most exposed to natural disasters.

In 2009, DG ECHO will consolidate its efforts in the area of disaster risk reduction through a range of targeted initiatives such as the DIPECHO programmes or the regional drought preparedness initiative in the Horn of Africa, while promoting the inclusion of a risk reduction approach in the relief activities and continuing its advocacy activities. Furthermore, DG ECHO will continue its close collaboration with other Commission departments involved in responding to natural disasters, in particular the Community civil protection mechanism.

With the launch of a new programme in southern Africa and the Indian Ocean (covering Mozambique, Malawi, Madagascar and the Comoros Islands) in 2008, DIPECHO is now present in seven parts of the world which are particularly prone to natural disasters. In 2009, new action plans should enable to continue the efforts already made in South Asia, in South America and in the Caribbean. These action plans should, as much as possible, take into account good practices and recommendations drawn from previous evaluations of the DIPECHO programmes and will be based on a broad consultation process organised in each region with all the actors concerned.

In **South Asia**, DG ECHO is planning to launch a fifth DIPECHO Action Plan to continue the effort to prepare local communities, but also to advocate for a systematic integration of disaster risk reduction measures in the emergency response and in development programmes. In addition to the consultation at national level, the strategy will largely be based on an evaluation of the programme performed at the end of 2008.

In **South America**, DG ECHO is planning to launch a sixth DIPECHO Action Plan. It will concentrate mainly on supporting the countries of the Andean Community, but will also include projects in other South American countries where awareness raising and training of communities in disaster preparedness have been identified as needs.

In the **Caribbean**, the seventh Action Plan should see an increase in its budget of 25%, compared with 2007, because of both the soaring costs in the region and the existence of many vulnerable communities exposed to disasters which have not yet benefited from a DIPECHO programme. Coordination efforts with other Commission departments which implement disaster preparedness and risk reduction programmes in the region will be maintained. An evaluation of the sixth DIPECHO Action Plan, which will end in March 2009, is planned for the end of 2008/beginning of 2009.

In the four other regions, **Central Asia, South East Asia, Central America** and **Southern Africa** and the **Indian Ocean**, the projects will continue to be implemented in accordance with the action plans financed from the 2008 budget.

Finally, because of the frequency and extent of the natural disasters in the **Southern Caucasus**, for the first time, DG ECHO is planning to launch a specific DIPECHO programme for the region, on the basis of the results of a programming mission which will be conducted at the beginning of 2009.

There are two main ideas at the core of DG ECHO's disaster preparedness approach: on the one hand, making communities more aware of the risks they face and, on the other hand, increasing their resilience. At the same time, activities have been started which are intended to strengthen the capacities of the local public institutions responsible for protecting their populations. Disaster preparedness activities are implemented through a wide range of partners who are working in close collaboration with local organisations, which makes access to the most vulnerable and marginalised communities easier.

In 2009, DG ECHO will continue its efforts to better **integrate the disaster risk reduction approach into its relief operations**. The experience, recently confirmed by an evaluation of mainstreaming, has shown that integrating prevention and preparedness measures during the response to a natural disaster phase is not only possible but also particularly effective because the populations affected are then more receptive to the idea of preparedness. This type of integrated approach will subsequently make reconstruction efforts easier. In this framework, particular attention will be paid to the Pacific Region⁶, strongly affected by a significant increase in intensity and frequency of climatic phenomena which threaten several small islands. Integrating this approach within relief operations also enables specific disaster preparedness activities financed by DG ECHO to benefit a larger number of people than with the DIPECHO programme alone.

DG ECHO will also continue to reinforce its **advocating and coordination activities** with the other Commission departments, the Member States and the GHD, but also with the main donors involved in development, the operational partners, the national and local authorities and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) in its capacity as UN leader for disaster risk reduction issues.

DG ECHO will also make additional efforts to strengthen the synergy between the different available instruments at the level of the EU as well as LRRD and will seek to identify exit strategies for its disaster risk reduction activities. Pilot projects combining short and long term financing sources are currently being studied with the aim of allowing a gradual phasing-out of DG ECHO from some countries. Disaster risk reduction will also be an important area in which DG ECHO will financially support the capacity building of its main institutional partners.

In the framework of disaster risk reduction, the orientations planned by DG ECHO are completely in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid as well as with the draft Communication on the European strategy for disaster risk reduction in developing countries which is planned to be adopted during the first quarter of 2009.

⁶ This region is integrated in the reflection of DG ECHO on the humanitarian impact due to climate change and is considered a candidate (in 2010) for a DIPECHO action or for another targeted intervention complementary to the actions planned under the "*Regional Strategy Paper for the Pacific*".

Finally, DG ECHO wishes to analyse the humanitarian impact of climate change and the increase in the number of natural disasters in order to see whether measures aiming to contain this impact can be proposed.

5.7 Capacity building policy and Grant Facility

The "thematic funding" programme launched in 2002 aimed at strengthening the capacity of the United Nations organisations and the Red Cross movement in order to make their response to humanitarian crises more efficient and better coordinated. In 2008, an external evaluation of thematic funding and the Grant Facility provided recommendations which enabled DG ECHO to redefine its approach towards capacity building of partners and strengthening the overall humanitarian response capacity. According to the external evaluation, the thematic funding programme has shown that it was *"a highly relevant tool for strengthening the capacities of DG ECHO's partners to respond to emergencies in a timely, effective, and predictable way. The programme enabled DG ECHO to play a more strategic role and build stronger relationships with its partners"*

From 2009, this new policy will replace the current thematic funding. Its aim is to provide guidance on the needs, roles and ways of strengthening capacity. Priority areas have been identified (logistics, needs evaluation, disaster preparation, etc.), as well as cross-cutting priorities (the involvement of civil society, local actors, multilateral approaches, integration of the gender dimension, to mention but a few).

In 2009, the Grant Facility mechanism will aim to improve the quality of humanitarian aid by strengthening the response management capacity and the accountability of non-governmental organisations.

5.8 Evaluation

In 2009, evaluations (ex-ante, real time, and intermediate and ex post) will concentrate mainly on the operations for supplying additional elements for decision making and operational strategy. Thematic evaluations (reviews and studies) will help focus discussions on sectoral policies. As in 2008, and in accordance with the aims of the Consensus, joint evaluations will be conducted with the Member States and other operational partners (United Nations, Red Cross or international NGOs partners) in order to improve the cost-effectiveness ratio and coordination. More attention will be paid to the use and dissemination of the results of the evaluations.

5.9 Communication, information and visibility

The objective of the Commission's information and communication work in the area of humanitarian aid is to improve the understanding, in Europe and in third countries, of the contribution made by humanitarian aid to the EU commitment of solidarity with these countries. The high profile and rapidly-moving environment of humanitarian aid means that media-oriented communication work must be central to the strategy.

The Commission, being a very large donor of humanitarian funds in the European Union, has therefore to play a leading role in communicating the values that underpin European aid.

Within the European Union, there is a high level of support for humanitarian action at European level, but most Europeans still have only limited knowledge of the subject. The

Commission's/DG ECHO's communication strategy in 2009 will, therefore, continue to focus on:

- Maintaining efforts to boost awareness of the Commission's humanitarian role and to communicate key messages as widely as possible, notably through the media. Actions will be undertaken in the European Union and in countries/regions where Commission funded aid operations are being implemented (particularly where there is an identified need to strengthen the wider EU profile). The European Commission's Delegations and Representations have an important role to play in these efforts.
- Effective communication with young Europeans. Maintaining effective communication with youth, who are generally receptive, can have long term benefits.
- High-impact activities. Priority will go to actions with a significant multiplier effect, especially where media coverage can be generated.
- Cooperation to disseminate broader European messages. Joint work with other services within the European Commission to highlight the 'bigger picture' of EU external action will be continued and developed.
- Developing a wider information reflex. The Commission recognises that messages can be effectively disseminated by involving staff more actively in communication actions, and will continue to encourage an information 'reflex' among its staff and partners, and to undertake activities that make use of their communication skills.

New guidelines were drawn up in 2008 to increase the visibility of the humanitarian operations financed by the European Commission. In 2009 DG ECHO will work in close collaboration with the operational partners to ensure that these visibility guidelines are actually implemented.