



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 17 July 2017
(OR. en)

11334/17

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
On: 17 July 2017
To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on addressing the risk of famine (17 July 2017)

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on addressing the risk of famine, as adopted by the Council at its 3557th meeting held on 17 July 2017.

Council conclusions on addressing the risk of famine

1. Humanitarian needs have been unprecedented in 2017. They include numerous chronic food security crises, with four countries facing an alarming risk of famine: Yemen, north-east Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan. Overall, about 20 million people are at risk of starvation in these countries. The impact on the affected populations is severe. In addition, these crises put women and girls at particular risk and there are reports of extensive sexual and gender-based violence. These are overwhelmingly man-made crises driven by conflict and instability and exacerbated by extreme weather conditions.
2. The EU and its Member States have taken action, immediately stepping up their response to these crises through increased humanitarian funding, including through various donor pledging conferences dedicated to the four crisis countries and their regions. The EU and its Member States collectively have provided more than EUR 1.2 billion this year alone for humanitarian assistance in the four countries at risk of famine.
3. While these efforts have helped to raise attention and funds for the humanitarian response, gaps still persist and much remains to be done. The Council calls on all traditional and emerging donors to join the EU and its Member States in stepping up funding for the four crisis areas. Moreover, it is crucial that all pledges made translate urgently into delivery of assistance to the affected people.

4. Funding is only part of the solution, however. These crises are man-made, with their roots lying in conflict, and they require political solutions going beyond humanitarian assistance. Conflict triggers or exacerbates food insecurity and acute malnutrition; it undermines the foundations of resilience to absorb shocks including natural disasters and rising food prices. The adverse effects of climate change and environmental changes can also aggravate food and nutrition insecurity through water scarcity, drought, desertification and land degradation. This can be compounded by demographic trends such as population growth and urbanisation. Food insecurity, in turn, can trigger or exacerbate social and political tensions, which can culminate in conflict and other situations of violence.
5. The Council stresses that only political solutions can end these cycles of needs. The international community must continue to apply political pressure on all parties to end conflicts, and more actively support political processes leading to sustainable settlements. Investing in upstream conflict prevention is of the utmost importance. The Council reiterates the need for enhanced political attention and investments in this sector, including mediation and joint analysis by EU institutions, EEAS and Member States, and where relevant in conjunction with the United Nations and the World Bank. Accurate early identification of the risks and dynamics of violent conflict, together with early action, is the most efficient way to mitigate potential new risks.
6. As a result of violence, insecurity and bureaucratic impediments, humanitarian access is extremely limited and sometimes impossible. The EU calls on all relevant parties to allow unimpeded humanitarian access to all populations in need and to remove all obstacles preventing the delivery of life-saving assistance. All parties must respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law as well as humanitarian principles. If hunger is used as a weapon of war, this constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law, which the EU condemns in the strongest terms. The EU supports all efforts by its Member States, the UN and the UN Security Council, as well as the broader humanitarian community, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, improve humanitarian access and resolve conflict.

7. All stakeholders, including the EU and its Member States, should implement agreed policy commitments to increase the efficiency of humanitarian action, including in crises with the risk of famine. This requires implementing World Humanitarian Summit commitments – including the Grand Bargain for those parties which have signed up to it – on transparency, accountability and targeted action based on a solid analysis of the affected populations' needs, giving priority to the most vulnerable. More multi-year funding and unearmarked assistance can increase efficiency and support more strategic interventions. Flexibility in funding is also needed to enable our partners to adapt to changing needs and realities on the ground. A more systematic use of cash transfers to beneficiaries can, where appropriate, increase efficiency, ensure dignity and support local markets and recovery.
8. The regional impact of these four crises, which have led to large-scale movements of refugees to neighbouring countries and thus created unprecedented humanitarian needs across regions, should be reflected in individual country response plans. The EU continues to support neighbouring countries' efforts to host refugees, and supports the roll-out of initiatives such as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework for more appropriate and long-term solutions to refugee situations, in particular in situations of protracted displacement.
9. The Council believes that humanitarian, development and political actors need to work more closely together to achieve sustainable, collective outcomes in support of Agenda 2030 and in line with the United Nations' proposed 'New Way of Working'. As also outlined in the recent Joint Communication on resilience¹, this includes building state and societal resilience to the factors that can lead to famine; addressing vulnerabilities and pressures lying at the root of severe food insecurity and acute malnutrition; and continuing to monitor and act quickly in response to early-warning systems – before crisis points are reached and already strained coping capacities are further eroded. This could be achieved by building local capacity, strengthening governance and investing in sustainable food security systems that can cope with long-term fragility and absorb sudden shocks. Lessons must be learned from these four crises for enhancing the response to these and other food insecurity situations.

¹ 10184/17

10. The Council will continue to advocate for greater complementarity between humanitarian and development assistance, in line with the conclusions on operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus². Development actors and international financial institutions have an essential role to play in improving access to healthcare and education and helping to preserve livelihoods and mitigate the effects of environmental degradation and climate change on development.
11. The Council deems it essential to increase coordination efforts, not only among humanitarian and development actors but also with national government response plans, where appropriate. Strengthening a country's or a region's resilience to humanitarian crises should become an integral part of the political dialogue with partner countries. Democratic national and local ownership is essential in our prevention and resilience efforts. This means a stronger focus on the governments' primary responsibility to cater for the basic needs of their people.

² 9383/17