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Lessons from the 2005 “annus horribilis”: improving effectiveness, timeliness and equity of the international humanitarian response

The European Commission's view on the reform of the international humanitarian system

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Inter Agency Standing Committee

Geneva, Palais des Nations, 12 December 2005

Mr. Egeland, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to warmly thank you for the invitation to address you at today's IASC meeting. I am very grateful for the opportunity that you have given me today as I am told that it is not very usual that you invite non IASC members to your meetings. I know you have a heavy agenda today so I will go straight into my presentation.

I dare to say this year 2005 has been an *annus horribilis* from a humanitarian viewpoint. The Tsunami, the earthquake in South Asia and many other crises which receive less media attention all represent an unprecedented burden on the humanitarian community as a whole, both for donors and humanitarian organisations.

I would like to seize this opportunity to commend the efforts, the commitment and the professionalism of your organisations and your relief staff in alleviating the plight of the victims of these humanitarian tragedies.

But the year 2005 has also been a stimulating year of in-depth reflection on a possible reform agenda for the international humanitarian system. Many valuable contributions and ideas have been put on the table. I think we the humanitarian community, that is UN system, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the NGO family and the donors, are all committed towards the same objectives of improving the overall effectiveness, timeliness and equity of the humanitarian response.

We must keep the momentum created this year. I hope that in 2006 we will be able to turn many of these ideas and proposals into concrete actions and measures.

As far as it is concerned, the European Commission is fully committed to contribute to this reform process. I would like to share with you my thoughts and priorities as well as proposals in this matter. Let me start by underlining that I globally share the overall analysis that has been made. Despite the progress achieved over the last years, the humanitarian system has not always been able to provide an adequate and timely response to humanitarian needs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must do more and we must do better. To succeed in our reform process, we must create an international consensus.

In my view, we need the equivalent of MDGs (*Millenium Development Goals*) in the humanitarian domain i.e. some sorts of *Millenium Humanitarian Goals!*

In concrete terms, we need :

to increase the overall humanitarian funding.

to ensure equity in the response to humanitarian crises, particularly to those so-called forgotten or neglected crises

to improve the response capacity to humanitarian emergencies

to improve risk reduction and preparedness strategies

Let me develop these four points.

1. Increasing the overall humanitarian funding

The number of natural disasters with devastating consequences is on the rise. Current conflicts tend to last longer and to be more destructive. New forms of crises emerge with failed or failing regimes. All these crises generate higher number of victims most of whom live in developing countries. The humanitarian challenges ahead of us are immense.

We need an international commitment of donors to increase the total volume of humanitarian aid worldwide. We have the 0,7 % target for Development aid. Why not having a specific target for humanitarian aid? It should be easier to reach, as we are talking of smaller amounts.

I am convinced that an annual increase by \$ 2 billions of the total humanitarian funding would make a huge difference and would help us to serve adequately all the humanitarian crises.

This increase should be made in accordance with some basic principles:

Principle of additionality = These funds must be fresh/additional money. It should not be diverted from development.

Principle of burden-sharing: humanitarian aid should not be seen as a 'western business'. We must engage non traditional donors in the process.

Principle of benchmarking: using transparent and objective indicators for the assessment of needs and the allocation of funds.

The European Commission will remain one of the major humanitarian donors. In the context of the new financial perspectives of the European Union for the years 2007-2013, the Commission has proposed to bring the level of its humanitarian (incl. emergency food aid) to over € 900 million per annum.

2. Ensuring equity in the response to humanitarian crises

The principle of equity is the direct translation at the donors' level of the fundamental humanitarian principle of non-discrimination in the delivery of aid. All humanitarian crises must be addressed and served; there should not be a discrimination among victims based on the level of media attention or political agenda: only the level of needs and the degree of vulnerability should be considered.

Each donor has its own historical and cultural tradition. There is nothing wrong with this. What is wrong is that there are 'orphan' humanitarian crises that nobody cares about. Each donor should accept to free up part of its funding for these crises. Or when there are new emergencies, it should refrain from shifting funds from an ongoing crisis to respond to the new one. As we say in French, "don't undress Paul to dress up Pierre".

For years now, the European Commission has given and will continue to give priority to the so-called forgotten crises. DG ECHO has developed a methodology (the Global Needs Assessment Indicator) to identify them. We have shared this methodology with other donors in the context of the *Good Humanitarian Donorship*. And we hope this may contribute to more equity in funding policies.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me now turn to the third point.

3. Improving the response capacity to humanitarian emergencies

As I said before, we need to do better. The capacity to respond in a timely and effective manner to a crisis depends on a number of factors which go beyond the availability of funds. That is, we need to improve the operational capacities of the humanitarian system. The Tsunami and the South-Asia Earthquake have shown us where the main loopholes are and what we need to strengthen. As far as I am concerned, there are some priority issues to be addressed:

The prepositioning of key-humanitarian supplies must be reviewed. A real international mapping and network with regional and sub-regional hubs must be built to mobilise resources as quickly as possible in the face of new emergencies.

I know that the *Humanitarian Response Review* has also identified this priority. The Commission is ready to participate together with the main continental and regional organizations and with the humanitarian organisations in this mapping of hubs and warehouses.

The quality and quantity of certain key-supplies. I think in particular of the shelter sector. Modern technology should allow us to provide something more adapted than tents. Tents may be the most practical shelter to install in the immediate emergency. But too often, people have to live in these tents for months if not years in the wait for more permanent housing. We should identify what I would call 'second-wave' temporary shelter that could be deployed easily. I receive every week on my desk interesting housing proposals from engineering companies. It is a pity that these practical solutions are not turned into concrete relief items for the homeless. I would welcome any initiative that could be taken by the IASC to commission a study in this domain and a public-private partnership that would allow for the production of these shelter-kits.

The humanitarian logistics must be bolstered. The UN Joint Logistical Center (UNJLC) and UNAS (the UN Aviation Service) are excellent professional organisations which in the context of the South Asia quake, have once again proven their worth. But we need more capacity especially air-lift capacity. In the wake of the Tsunami, the EU has elaborated an action plan whose aim is to strengthen its Disaster response capacity. This includes a proposal to pre-identify logistical modules, made of military or civil assets, in each EU member states that could be mobilised on request. A joint Commission/Council structure would ensure the coordination of these assets and would coordinate with the UN for their mobilisation. I hope that in 2006, we are going to make concrete steps in this direction. The European Commission has stressed that the mobilisation of such assets for humanitarian purposes, must be in line with the UN guidelines on the MCDAs (Military and Civil Defence Assets).

The on-the-spot coordination capacity must be strengthened. I am informed that you will be deciding today on proposals to reinforce the Humanitarian Coordinators. Without having seen the detailed contents of these proposals, I could not agree more with those I am aware of such as the improvement of the selection, appointment and training processes. Good coordination is an essential element of an effective humanitarian response. I therefore welcome measures aimed at improving the key position of Humanitarian Coordinators.

I would also like to refer to the so-called cluster system aimed at improving sectoral strategy-setting and coordination. This system has been put to the test in Pakistan with mitigated initial results. I understand that you are also likely to make some decisions on Cluster Action Plans later today ... The European Commission supports the improvement of the coordination system and therefore welcomes any progress in that direction. I would only stress the necessity to have an inclusive approach in defining and operating the cluster system if it is to work. All humanitarian partners, including NGOs and donors are stakeholders and actors that must be involved.

I would like to indicate how I envisage the Commission's concrete support in this domain. Through ECHO thematic funding, the Commission is already financing the emergency preparedness and response programmes of key humanitarian partners.

Examples (for information): The Commission is supporting UNHCR's, UNICEF, IFRC and WHO's emergency response teams with suitable emergency staff to be deployed to emergencies within 48 hours.

To prepare and train staff for such deployments, the Commission is financing different training programmes such as the IFRC FACT and RDRT training, the UNHCR Workshop on Emergency Management (WEM) or the recently developed HEAR-NET WHO programme for the rapid deployment of Health Emergency Assessment and Response Teams (HEART).

In the field of logistics, the Commission is supporting International Organisations with the pre-positioning of stocks (UNICEF, WHO and the IFRC) and supporting the UN Logistic Support System to ensure the tracking of humanitarian supplies and the coordination of procurement.

I am committed to focus even more our thematic funding on emergency response and preparedness capacity, in line with the findings of the Humanitarian Response Review and the cluster lead process.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me turn to the fourth and last point

4. Improving risk reduction and preparedness strategies

It was coincidental that the Kobe conference on risk reduction took place last January only a few weeks after the Tsunami struck.

But it only demonstrates how important risk reduction and mitigation strategies are.

I remember that Jan Egeland made then the proposal that at least 10 % of the development funds should be earmarked to mainstream risk reduction in development strategies. While it might be difficult for many donors to make such earmarking, I can tell you that as far as the Commission is concerned, we follow a dual-track approach :

Through ECHO we fund disaster-preparedness programmes, called DIPECHO, that aim at building local capacity and systems in the regions most exposed to natural hazards.

Through development cooperation, we are now starting to integrate risk reduction in our country strategy programmes. I have agreed with Mr. Jarraud the Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), that the next generation of Country strategy programmes for the ACP will be prepared with the WMO expertise, this in order to map the risks for each country and integrate the risk factors in the development programmes.

I hope other donors will follow us.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am aware that all these issues I have mentioned are familiar to you. There are some proposals more discussed than others. I think in particular of the CERF. On this very topic, I told Jan Egeland that the CERF might be a good instrument. But I have still some questions about its exact functioning, its governance and its accountability.

I am also worried that funding contributions to the CERF will not be additional but will come from existing financial envelopes. As I have explained to you, the European Commission is well armed to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the new CERF directly. And we are certainly committed to working in complementarity with the CERF.

To conclude, The European Commission will remain actively and constructively engaged in the reform of the humanitarian system. I hope that my reflections and some of the ideas I exposed today can usefully contribute to further the reflection and to improve the international humanitarian system.

Maybe a final suggestion: It is important that both the humanitarian organisations and the donors discuss together about these issues in order to build a strong consensus.

If this can help, I am ready to convene a meeting gathering your assembly with the EU Member states. The EU is not the whole world – although, it keeps on extending its membership! - but at least you would have a significant number of major donors around the table.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for your attention.