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- Operational Strategy 2007

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**Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid - ECHO**

**Operational Strategy 2007**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the European Commission has been confirmed as one of the world's most important providers of humanitarian aid. Through its Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) the European Commission provides massive assistance to the victims of humanitarian crises. The European humanitarian policy is an example of the founding values of the European Union - solidarity, respect of human dignity, equality and tolerance.

The European Commission has a mandate to save and preserve life in emergency and immediate post-emergency situations, whether these are natural or man-made. The Commission is also careful to ensure the best possible transition between the humanitarian emergency and the development phases of a situation and works closely together with the other relevant services of the Commission and international partners. In addition, the Commission assists in strengthening disaster preparedness measures and the reduction of the vulnerability of the populations most exposed to these risks. Its activities also seek to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian aid provided by others, with the Member States and on a global level, where it supports in particular the coordination role played by the United Nations through its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

If European humanitarian aid is based on the principles of humanity and solidarity, its implementation depends on the application of international law, and in particular international humanitarian law, and on the fundamental principles of impartiality, non-discrimination and neutrality. Following these principles, the Commission is committed to assisting the most vulnerable people in the world, adopting an impartial approach based on need. The European Commission places a particular emphasis on aid to the victims of "forgotten crises", where there is low media coverage, little political interest and scant presence of other aid providers.

Aware that humanitarian aid must not only be based on the above-mentioned principles, but that it must also be provided at the correct terms, efficiently and in an appropriate manner, the Commission, through DG ECHO, is intent on implementing the "principles and good practices of humanitarian actors" as defined and adopted at the June 2003 Stockholm meeting of the "Good Humanitarian Donorship" initiative.

Over the last few years, the emergence of new forms of conflict and the growing complexity of humanitarian crises have brought about a multiplication in those engaged in humanitarian activities: these new actors include military and civil protection teams. The presence of humanitarian actors alongside other types of players in crisis situations demands a clear definition of their respective roles in order to avoid a negative impact on the humanitarian space. The Commission and other humanitarian actors push for the respect of the humanitarian space within which aid can be delivered according to need and in accordance with international law and fundamental humanitarian principles. Nevertheless, recognizing the need to make use of military logistical resources, particularly when dealing with major natural disasters, the Commission supports the Oslo guidelines of May 1994 on the use of civil defence and military equipment following natural disasters as well as the March 2003 guidelines on the use of such equipment in complex crises (MCDA guidelines).

In pursuing such aims, the Commission will ensure the coherence of a European humanitarian approach based on the needs of the victims in order to guarantee the efficiency of the aid as well as the protection of the humanitarian space and the respect of humanitarian law and the fundamental humanitarian principles.

All this has to translate into the mobilisation of logistical resources as well as to a better coordination in the field. The Commission/ECHO offices and experts – which have been increased during the last few years – will have a key role to play in this coordination. The methods of mobilisation and coordination both between headquarters and in the field will have to be re-examined in order to meet the desire of the European Union to increase its reaction capacity, to take into account the multiplicity of actors in the field and to ensure a positive image for the European action. Strengthened coordination will also help unlock synergies between the different humanitarian, military and civil protection actors. A closer relationship with the UN family on the strategy – in particular thanks to thematic funding – as well as at the operational level will further reinforce the effectiveness of this action.

While it has already been thoroughly evaluated twice during its existence, the Commission/ECHO will have to respond to its third global evaluation which was completed in 2006 and which focuses on the structure of the DG, its method of operation and its international presence. While there are many points for reflection, it is already clear that among the priorities will be the qualitative strengthening of operational and coordination capacity of the humanitarian services of the Commission, and a particular attention to developing sectoral strategies for humanitarian aid as well as its role in initiatives like the above-mentioned "Good Humanitarian Donorship".

## **2. OVERALL SITUATION AND PERSPECTIVES FOR 2007**

While 2005 was marked by major natural disasters, 2006 has seen the severe worsening of several longstanding complex crises, as in Darfur, Sri Lanka and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In 2007 the Commission will closely follow any development in such crises which become chronic.

One of the major events of 2006 is certainly the war in Lebanon in July and August which led to 1,187 dead and more than 4,000 wounded<sup>1</sup> in addition to nearly a million people who had to flee the conflict and an almost total destruction of infrastructure and housing, leaving further millions virtually devoid of everything.

In these situations, as had happened almost systematically during recent years, the Commission/ECHO needed to call on the Commission's emergency reserve in order to be able to help further victims of humanitarian crises (new crises or ongoing ones which had severely worsened). Thus in 2006 the Commission/ECHO allocated funds almost 35% higher than its initial budget.

The majority of the current conflicts are of an internal nature, pitting government forces against rebels with various, mainly local, causes. These ever more complex conflicts often escape any attempt at resolution by the international community. At the heart of these conflicts, the situation of the civilian population, which has often become the prime target of the combatants, has deteriorated, despite the provisions of international law. The humanitarian actors themselves are regularly the object of deliberate attacks and pay an increasingly heavy levy, particularly in Sri Lanka, Darfur and Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> OCHA – Situation Report – Lebanon Response – 28 August 2006

As far as **natural disasters** are concerned, 2006 has seen major climatic phenomena, which have increased even further the list of countries in crisis. Several areas of the globe have suffered a chronic drought which has created food insecurity for the inhabitants. Examples are the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, certain Central and West African countries as well as several countries in Latin America and Asia. A serious nutritional situation is threatening many of these countries where high levels of malnutrition had already been registered. In addition to droughts, in 2006 floods affected Algeria, Bolivia, China, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India, North Korea and Suriname. In 2007, the Commission will continue to seek to relieve the humanitarian consequences of natural disasters, with special attention to the speed of its response which is crucial in this type of crises.

As far as **uprooted people** are concerned, figures at the beginning of 2006 offer some hope. The number of refugees was some 12% lower than at the beginning of 2005<sup>2</sup> reaching 12.7 million, the lowest level since 1980. The 4.3 million Palestinian refugees being considered separately, Iran and Pakistan remain the countries hosting the greatest number of refugees, the two of them hosting about 15% of the refugees in the world. Afghanistan continues to be the main country of origin of refugees with some 1.9 million, even if 2005 saw their number decrease by 21% compared to the previous year. Burundi, Iraq and Liberia also saw a reduction in the number of their national refugees elsewhere.

At the end of December 2005, the number of people **displaced** within their own country was almost 23.7 million<sup>3</sup> but had nevertheless diminished for the first time in almost 10 years. Despite such encouraging figures, the extent of the problem remains worrying. Thus among the displaced, some 14 million in 2005 were living in a high risk situation in areas such as Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Burma/Myanmar, Somalia, southern Sudan and Uganda.

In 2007 the Commission will have to react to several challenges. Despite inevitable budgetary constraints, the Commission will seek to face up to new crises while maintaining its close interest in numerous ongoing crises. The Commission will also have to continue its attempts to ensure that aid is provided in an appropriate, efficient and timely manner while working towards a better coordination of aid and improving the ability of the local populations and humanitarian actors to react to disasters. The security of humanitarian staff and the ability to reach the affected populations remain crucial factors in determining the effectiveness of international aid.

It will also be necessary to continue to monitor the situation in countries emerging from a crisis so that the link between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) is implemented by competent actors to secure the stabilisation process, to encourage the safe return of displaced populations and to avoid the resurgence of the crisis. 2007 will see a particular effort from the respective competent Commission services to ensure improved articulation between humanitarian and development assistance. To this end, the Commission/ECHO, in consultation with the other DGs concerned, has established a tentative list of pilot countries where the LRRD approach will receive particular attention. This non-exhaustive list includes Kenya, Liberia, Mauritania, Sudan and Uganda.

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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, "2005 Global Refugee Trends", Geneva, June 2006  
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/statistics/opendoc.pdf?tbl=STATISTICS&id=4486ceb12>

<sup>3</sup> IDMC (International displacement monitoring centre), "Internal Displacement – Global overview of trends and development in 2005", Geneva, March 2006.

2007 will be the first year that humanitarian food aid will be managed directly by the humanitarian services of the Commission, resulting in additional funds to be allocated in response to food crises. This transfer will allow the Commission to programme food aid as an integral part of a humanitarian response offering the opportunity to link it more effectively to related sectors such as nutrition and livelihood support. The programming of food aid will follow the same principles as that for other forms of humanitarian aid with the needs based approach being the overriding consideration. In this context it will be of vital importance for DG ECHO to maintain a close and continuous dialogue with those services of the Commission and other stakeholders who monitor the status of food security in food insecure countries.

As for the management of food crises, which threaten to be particularly severe in the years to come, it is important to recognise that humanitarian food aid in an emergency, even if it saves lives, can never replace investing in increased structural food security for the threatened populations. In this case as well, a special coordination effort is necessary both inside the Commission and beyond to ensure that emergency assistance in countries affected by chronic famine and food insecurity is followed by longer term development programmes.

Equally, the Commission services in charge of development aid will see to increased streamlining of disaster preparedness and prevention in their respective strategies.

### 3. GENERAL PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES

The Commission, through DG ECHO, decides on its aid on the basis of an assessment of the humanitarian needs of the population affected by a crisis, whether it be natural or man-made.

The Commission/ECHO has developed a global methodology<sup>4</sup> to rank third countries according to their overall vulnerability (vulnerability index - VI) and as to whether they are undergoing a humanitarian crisis (crisis index - CI). The VI takes into account the different indices which identify these countries more likely to suffer than others on the humanitarian front in the case of a natural disaster or of a conflict. The CI shows these countries which are indeed undergoing a humanitarian crisis following a natural disaster, a conflict or the presence of refugees or displaced people on their territory and covers the situation for either the current year or for the two previous years. The juxtaposition of the two indices therefore enables one to identify these countries potentially most in need of humanitarian assistance. As a result of this exercise 50 countries or territories have been identified as undergoing a crisis (for the 2007 strategy), of these 23 are identified as the most vulnerable, of which 18 are in sub-Saharan Africa. These latter include Burundi, Chad, DR Congo, Ivory Coast, Somalia and Sudan, while the others are Afghanistan, Chechnya, East Timor, Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. These results are then matched with the evaluation undertaken in the field by the experts and geographic units of the Commission/ECHO in order to define a strategy for the countries and regions concerned.

As for the **forgotten** crises, their identification is undertaken by a mixture of the following elements: a high level of vulnerability as shown by the VI, low or zero coverage by the media; a low level of interest from the international community and donors as shown by the aid given

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<sup>4</sup> Global Needs Assessment – GNA

and a field evaluation undertaken by the experts and geographical units of the Commission/ECHO.

For the 2007 exercise, the following forgotten crises have been identified:

- the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria,
- Chechnya and the neighbouring republics affected,
- the separatist conflict in Jammu and Kashmir,
- Nepal with the persisting crises of the Bhutanese refugees as well as the Maoist insurrection,
- the population affected by the conflict in Burma/Myanmar both within the country itself as well as in its neighbouring countries,
- the populations affected by the crisis in Colombia as well as in the neighbouring countries.

With the exception of Colombia, all these were already listed as forgotten crises in 2006.

In addition, in 2007 the Commission/ECHO will, in the framework of the evaluation of its activities, put emphasis on the evaluation of its activities in the field at the sectoral level. It will also seek to undertake joint evaluations with Member States and other donors.

## **4. GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITIES FOR 2007**

### **4.1 Africa, Caribbean and Pacific**

#### *4.1.1. Horn of Africa*

##### Ethiopia

Despite some improvements in 2006, the overriding humanitarian outlook remains bleak, characterised by chronic food insecurity, pockets of persistent malnutrition, and continued outbreaks of epidemics. There are serious gaps in the provision of health care compounded by drought-induced destitution and conflict-displaced populations. A multi-sector response is critical in order to obtain increased food security, reduce levels of malnutrition, enhance resistance to disease and minimise overall human suffering. LRRD will continue to be assured through a hand-over where possible to the "Water facility" run by DG AIDCO for water interventions and where possible the pastoral, livestock approach in DG ECHO's programmes will be implemented and co-ordinated with both the EC Delegation and other donors to ensure synergy.

##### Eritrea

The year 2006 was highly tense and difficult in political, economic and social terms. The six year long unresolved border dispute with Ethiopia and climatic hazards have continuously led to decline in many sectors: livelihoods, health, food security, leading to even higher levels of poverty. Eritrea is classified as a structural food deficit country. The proposed strategy aims to



provide humanitarian aid in different sectors such as water, nutrition, health, livestock, including support to IDPs. After focusing on the water sector over the previous years, health and nutrition could gradually become the principal targeted sectors. Food needs are considerable, but the current government policy represents an obstacle to food distribution by humanitarian operators. If the situation improves, this could be reviewed, and non-traditional food interventions (such as "cash for work" or "food for work" as opposed to bags of food being delivered directly to the beneficiaries) could be envisaged.

### Somalia

The ongoing instability and conflict since 1991 continue to create urgent humanitarian needs, which are regularly aggravated and compounded by cyclical climatic shocks, such as droughts and flooding. Despite marginal improvements in the political situation, notably the renovated dialogue between the Transitional Federal Government and the Union of Islamic Courts, the humanitarian crisis continues to be dramatic and it is estimated that approximately half of the population live in extreme poverty. The proposed strategy will aim at addressing the humanitarian needs of the vulnerable population with a focus on the core issues of health, nutrition, food security, water and sanitation. The geographical focus will be on the central and southern areas. It is proposed to maintain the level of aid in 2007, if the overall situation, including in terms of access and security, allows for it. No food aid is envisaged at this stage.

### Sudan

The three year long conflict in Darfur has led to 3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 2 million IDPs and 200,000 refugees in Chad. Since the signing of the peace agreement in May 2006, the situation has further deteriorated: The conflict has become increasingly fragmented, with rising insecurity, new waves of IDPs, as well as additional violations of International Humanitarian Law. On the other hand, the peace agreement of January 2005 putting an end to 20 years of civil war between the north and the south has given hope for an improvement but has also opened the door to the return of thousands of refugees and IDPs to an already depleted area, thus generating further humanitarian needs. One of the consequences of this has been a series of disease outbreaks: yellow fever, meningitis and cholera, requiring swift humanitarian response. The humanitarian situation in large parts of Sudan remains therefore highly precarious, requiring a continued substantial level of engagement to assist the most vulnerable populations through a multi-sector approach focused on water and sanitation, food aid and security, nutrition, health, protection of civilians and security and transport of humanitarian personnel.

### Uganda

Despite hopes generated by a recent cessation of hostilities agreement, Northern Uganda continues to experience large scale humanitarian needs after 20 years of protracted conflict between the Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). There are an estimated 2 million IDPs in Northern Uganda and 1.5 million of them have received food aid and other direct assistance, mainly in over 200 substandard camps where neither minimum services nor adequate protection are ensured. Over 250,000 refugees from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda add yet another dimension to the humanitarian context as well as decades of under-development and cattle raiding. Climatic hazards such as drought, crop diseases, floods or volcanic eruptions, add an extra degree of risk to already vulnerable populations. The security situation has recently improved, allowing for better access to IDPs, more access to agricultural land and leading to spontaneous return of tens of thousands of

IDPs. Despite an increased international humanitarian response, significant needs remain to be addressed. The proposed strategy, in which LRRD remains at the forefront, aims at relieving the suffering of IDPs, host communities and returnees and refugees in the north, via improved water and sanitation, health and nutrition, livelihoods and food security, non-food items, education, protection, camp management and planning, as well as via the enhanced coordination of humanitarian interventions. The selection of Uganda as a pilot country for LRRD in 2007 will probably place specific emphasis on synergies between food security and livelihoods interventions throughout EC services. Such interventions will evolve according to the process of IDP return to their land of origin.

### Kenya

With a view to an eventual exit strategy, protection activities and support in the domain of human health (including nutrition) continue to be necessary. This is because there is continuing insecurity in the region and an increasing number of pastoralist drop-outs in and around urban centres, creating additional needs in the domains of human health and nutrition. The continuous drought cycle is gradually eroding livelihoods and leading to an increase in vulnerability. Malnutrition rates across the northern provinces of Kenya are pointing to an impending major humanitarian disaster. Whilst the effects of drought cannot be reversed, assistance provided will contribute to alleviating human suffering. The situation of the increasing numbers of refugees from Somalia will be closely monitored. Furthermore, given the number of agencies currently working in Kenya and the traditionally developmental focus of coordination mechanisms to date, the humanitarian coordination mechanism of UNOCHA should be considered for support.

#### *4.1.2. Great Lakes, Central Africa, Indian Ocean*

### Burundi

The current negative evolution of the political situation could have a detrimental impact on the already fragile humanitarian outlook. The presence of refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, for whom the perspective of return is contingent upon a number of complex variables, adds to the precarious overall situation. Present circumstances are not favourable to the return of Burundian refugees from Tanzania. In terms of international humanitarian response, and especially at the level of the various Community instruments, an LRRD approach represents the logical option, including in neighbouring countries. However, at present it is still necessary to foresee substantial funds to provide a classical humanitarian response, with focus on the health and water sectors.

### Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

That DRC is faced with crushing poverty and a desperate lack of essential services is unquestionable, nonetheless the requirement to meet new emergency humanitarian needs has reduced considerably, even if security concerns remain high on the agenda. If political stability is ensured, and considering also the gradual return of central government services and the ever increasing presence of development donors, the European Commission's humanitarian response should be able to focus on the return of some 1.5 million IDPs and 350,000 refugees, in line with an overall LRRD driven approach. The east of the country (Ituri, Kivus and Katanga), where insecurity is most problematic and population movements most significant, will remain the primary concern. The proposed strategy will continue to make sure that people have access to a minimum package of health services and that displaced

people and returnees are sustained until they re-establish their livelihoods. This will entail support with food and non-food items, seeds and tools, water and sanitation, the rehabilitation of basic infrastructures and the provision of logistic support. Children and women will continue to receive particular attention. The Commission's humanitarian air support service (ECHO Flight) will be continued.

### Tanzania

Interventions will continue to address the needs of some 350,000 refugees, mainly Congolese and Burundian. Implemented mainly by UNHCR, UNICEF and the Red Cross, they will support the care and maintenance of refugees in a number of camps in terms of health, education, non-food items and protection, as well as the voluntary repatriation of those who wish to return to their countries of origin. Also contingent upon the evolution of the situation in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, neither an increase in refugee numbers nor an increase in the demand for organised repatriation can be excluded. It is therefore desirable to plan at least maintaining the same level of current engagement. The humanitarian situation in the rest of the country, which is periodically subject to drought and food shortages, deserves monitoring, in order to react quickly should the need arise.

#### *4.1.3. Southern Africa*

The sub-region as a whole remains chronically vulnerable to drought, floods, cyclones and epidemics, aggravated by high incidences of HIV/AIDS. Food shortages are frequent among the most vulnerable segments of the population. Though the 2006 harvests have generally been much better than before, particularly in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, economic access to food remains extremely precarious for many people. WFP puts the numbers of people who will remain food insecure until the 2007 harvest at 800,000 in Angola, 833,000 in Malawi, 200,000 in Swaziland, with pockets of food insecurity in Mozambique and Zambia. Although no initial allocation is proposed from the humanitarian budget, close monitoring will be ensured in order to be ready to react quickly should the need arise. Specific interventions may be required to tackle epidemics (mainly cholera, but wild polio and measles have also reappeared in 2006), with particular attention being paid to Angola, whose weak health structure has a very limited coping capacity.

### Zimbabwe

The needs of the vulnerable population groups in Zimbabwe, including internally displaced persons, will continue to be addressed. Apart from dramatic economic decline during recent years, HIV/AIDS continues to be a major factor contributing to increased vulnerability and food insecurity. Interventions will support identified needs in the sectors of: water and sanitation; health; HIV/AIDS prevention; non-food items and emergency food security, as well as food aid. In view of the multi-year allocations from food security budget line and EC Water Facility coming online, the support of the Commission's humanitarian services to food security and water and sanitation will be gradually scaled down, though the coordination of these sectors will be still supported through UN agencies. In spite of a significant improvement of its maize harvest in 2006, Zimbabwe is still faced with a cereal deficit. The Commission/ECHO will continue to support food aid distributions, focussing on the most vulnerable segments of the population. For the last few years, Zimbabwe has received significant food aid contributions from the DG AIDCO-managed food aid and food security budget line, mainly through WFP and NGOs. Due to the specific context, the EC Delegation has launched an "Impact Assessment of Food Aid Programmes in Zimbabwe", in which DG

ECHO has been invited to take part, whose results and recommendations, expected to be available at the beginning of 2007, will be taken into account when deciding about ECHO's further funding of food aid in Zimbabwe.

#### Indian Ocean (Comoros, Madagascar)

Close monitoring of the humanitarian situation in the Comoros, which remains vulnerable to volcanic activity and which is entirely dependent on rain for its water supply, will be ensured, although no specific initial allocation is proposed.

A close monitoring of the serious food situation in Madagascar will continue to be ensured, in particular in view of the persistent malnutrition.

#### *4.1.4. West Africa*

##### Chad

The country hosts an estimated 45,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the South, and some 200,000 refugees from Sudan in the East, where the security situation has deteriorated in the course of 2006, with considerable risks also for humanitarian operators. The proposed strategy aims at maintaining a substantial level of humanitarian aid, in support of the most vulnerable refugees, displaced, or local populations. Protection, health and nutrition, food, water and sanitation, the provision of non food items, as well as primary education, co-ordination, information and logistics, including humanitarian air transport, will be the priority sectors. A particular attention will be paid to the most vulnerable regions of Eastern Chad.

##### Liberia

Despite improvements since the new Government took office in January 2006, Liberia remains a fragile State for two main reasons: the Government has limited capacity to take over from the international assistance in providing basic services, and security still depends on the presence of 15,000 UNMIL troops. The return of 314,000 camp-based IDPs was completed in April 2006 and attention is focused on addressing residual caseload and closing the camps properly. According to UNHCR, by mid September 2006, 140,793 Liberian refugees were still registered in countries of asylum. The completion of their repatriation is set for end of 2007, and then durable solutions will have to be found for the residual caseload. Although it is expected that in 2007 the need for large scale humanitarian aid will be reduced as longer term aid becomes more readily available, the same level of EC humanitarian support is required in the health sector, whereas a phasing down is envisaged in the water and sanitation, livelihood and repatriation sectors. In 2007 support to WFP humanitarian air service will continue for Liberia.

##### Ivory Coast

After serious disorders, especially in the West, in January 2006, political developments have been generally positive in Ivory Coast, although the overall situation remains fragile. Nationality, disarmament and land ownership remain unresolved issues that expose the population to vulnerability with regard to the humanitarian impact. Because the humanitarian crisis is over, the Commission can complete its phasing out of humanitarian assistance. However, given the volatile situation, a careful watching brief will be maintained.

## Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger)

High Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates of over 15% and consequent extremely high infant mortality continue to plague the Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Poor health services, poor access to water and sanitation, low literacy rates, excessive population growth and a rapidly degrading environment contribute to a situation where a large percentage (30%) of the population is in a permanent high risk status. Economic access to food remains a major challenge. Drought or locusts can aggravate this, as in 2004/5. Population coping mechanisms have been severely damaged by the recent sequence of shocks with the most vulnerable in a very fragile situation on the edge of survival.

The extent of the suffering and death in 2005 crisis took the international community by surprise. Improved understanding of the causes of the vulnerability of the population and the national and regional dynamics is an essential element of the response. Better health access for children under 5, a better early monitoring of the nutritional status of the population and a clearer understanding of the food accessibility are seen as fundamental to the humanitarian response.

The Commission's proposed operational strategy in the Sahel is based on three pillars: (i) preparedness/data analysis, (ii) response and (iii) advocacy. The establishment of a baseline (i) to understand the humanitarian scope of the nutritional crisis as well as creating/increasing preparedness will be a priority. Response activities (ii) will include nutritional feeding programmes and improved access to basic health care for the most vulnerable children and lactating and pregnant mothers. Assisting the short-term rehabilitation of household coping mechanisms/livelihoods will help reducing the risk of child malnutrition. Advocacy (iii) will aim at achieving a higher level of focus amongst key government and donor stakeholders on the humanitarian dimension to the problem and at fostering the effective implementation of aid policies and programmes that take a more integrated approach to vulnerability in the Sahel.

The exit strategy for humanitarian aid in the Sahel is through a more effective articulation of aid instruments. An important objective is the introduction of food security and rural development in the development agenda, including at regional level, and increased focus on the health sector.

### *4.1.5. Caribbean and Pacific*

Monitoring of 22 Caribbean and 15 Pacific countries will continue, responding when necessary with relief operations. Assessment may show short-term food security needs in Haiti. Disaster relief will be decided in light of needs created by recurrent natural disasters, in particular hurricanes and floods in the Caribbean region.

## **4.2 Middle East and Mediterranean**

### West Bank and the Gaza Strip

The humanitarian situation in the **West Bank and the Gaza Strip** deteriorated rapidly in 2006 as a consequence of the fiscal crisis facing the Palestinian Authority (PA) following the election of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative Council (PLC) elections, increased Israeli security and access restrictions, and a resumption of Israeli military operations. Israeli-

Palestinian violence continues with a mounting death toll on both sides, especially the Palestinian one. The lack of salaries and essential supplies undermines the delivery of key services that serve the bulk of the Palestinian population (the PA operates 62% of primary health clinics, all major hospitals, 75% of primary and secondary schools and provides social services to 45,000 chronically poor families).

The humanitarian outlook for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for 2007 is extremely bleak and may even worsen further if the political situation remains unchanged. Violence and closures are not only harming agriculture, but also contributing to a further reduction in people's purchasing power, prompting increased dependency on food aid and income support. Food insecurity is increasing as households have exhausted all their coping mechanisms. GDP is estimated to fall by another 27% by the end of 2006 and absolute poverty, which already affects 70% of households in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, is predicted to rise even further. At the same time, institutional and development support, including international assistance to the PA, have been cut following Hamas' takeover. Although a Temporary International Mechanism has been set up under the auspices of the Commission to channel direct donor funding to some groups of Palestinians (such as lower wage PA employees), in the absence of development and budgetary assistance programmes, the humanitarian response will need to be maintained at high level throughout 2007. In doing so, the humanitarian services of the Commission envisage continuing to target the most vulnerable populations by supporting the following sectors: food; health; water and sanitation; emergency employment; psycho-social support; protection and co-ordination.

#### Lebanon, Jordan and Syria

The one-month long conflict (12 July – 14 August 2006) between Israel and Hezbollah resulted in the death of over 1,100 people, injury of a further 4055, displacement of more than 900,000 people in **Lebanon**, and widespread damage to homes and civilian infrastructure. The process of rebuilding, whilst already under way, will take some time. The Commission's response to the humanitarian crisis has been prompt and substantial. Operations will continue to address remaining humanitarian needs of the affected population in the following sectors: clearance of unexploded munitions, shelter, water and sanitation, emergency health needs, specific food needs, and income generation activities.

**Lebanon, Jordan and Syria** host collectively some 2,675,000 **Palestinian refugees**. Those in Jordan (1,800,000) and Syria (430,000) are well integrated into society. In Jordan, 16% of them live in 10 official camps. In Syria, 27% of them live in 10 official camps. In Lebanon (445,000), where they are discriminated against, 53% of them live in poor conditions in 12 official camps and a number of unofficial gatherings. The Lebanese government declared its intention to reduce the current legal impediments for access to more than 70 jobs. However, it is unlikely that such measures, even if implemented, would result in substantial improvements in the short term. Humanitarian operations envisaged in 2007 will focus on Lebanon and target the following sectors: shelter rehabilitation; health; water and sanitation; job opportunities; assistance to vulnerable groups (children, elderly, handicapped people). In Jordan and Syria, the rehabilitation of shelters, particularly in camps, will be considered in cases where the conditions of the latter are life-threatening for the occupants.

An escalation in violence in **Iraq** over the last seven months has led to a substantial increase in population movements towards Syria, Lebanon, Jordan as well as Turkey and Egypt. The Commission/ECHO will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian situation of these

refugees and, if necessary, provide a response to the unmet humanitarian needs developing as a result.

### Yemen

An evaluation of the humanitarian assistance operations funded by the Commission in **Yemen** concludes that the situation for the most vulnerable groups remains very difficult and that there is no sign of rapid improvement, specifically in rural areas. However, as the Yemeni context has to be considered as being more of a rehabilitation and development nature, development instruments are more appropriate to respond to the structural needs of the country. Based on the results of an external evaluation conducted in 2006, the Commission/ECHO is currently reviewing its strategy to ensure an appropriate LRRD process in view of phasing out in 2007.

### Sahrawi refugees

The **Sahrawi refugees** who have lived since 1975 in the camps of the desert region of Tindouf in Algeria are the victims of one of the longest standing and forgotten humanitarian crises. They remain fully dependent on humanitarian aid to cover all of their basic needs. In 2007, the Commission's humanitarian assistance will therefore have to continue to cover practically all sectors and notably the food aid sector. A special effort will be made to improve the quality of the assistance, through sector analysis and evaluations, specifically in the water and sanitation, nutrition and health sectors. In addition, the dialogue with the Commission's partners and with the Sahrawi authorities will be strengthened in order to improve the quality, targeting, implementation and monitoring of projects.

## **4.3 Caucasus and Central Asia**

### Chechnya

The situation in **Chechnya** has visibly evolved during 2006 towards some degree of stabilisation in the security situation. Military operations have become more targeted and geographically limited. However, even though the security situation has significantly improved in Chechnya, it deteriorated elsewhere in the North Caucasus.

2006 has also been a pivotal year from a different perspective: after years of lack of progress, reconstruction work has started in the centre of Grozny and the rest of the republic, showing already tangible results. In general and in spite of the scope of the destruction and the associated substantial humanitarian needs in certain sectors, the socio-economic situation shows signs of improvement. In late 2005 the humanitarian services of the Commission had started reorienting its operations to take into account the evolving needs. Those strategic orientations will be maintained and strengthened in 2007 and the Commission/ECHO intends to discontinue its programmes in the food aid and water distribution sectors in Grozny and to phase out in the sector of primary education. To the extent that the authorities can take responsibility and ownership of the medical programmes, those could also be reduced and emphasis will continue to be on the primary health facilities in rural areas, as well as on mother-child health, which remains a major concern in view of the destruction of the health facilities and the general living conditions of the population.

In parallel with this selective phasing-out, the Commission/ECHO will focus on those sectors where the needs are henceforth most pressing: rehabilitation of housing destroyed by the war, food security and income generating activities, protection and psycho-social programmes.

### Ingushetia and Daghestan

Outside Chechnya, the humanitarian services of the Commission will continue to assist the most vulnerable displaced persons in the neighbouring republics **Ingushetia** and **Daghestan**. Programmes will however be phased down in Ingushetia and the main focus will be on the transfer of responsibilities to the local authorities, notably for the educational programmes and water and sanitation activities.

This strategy, which is conditional on continued access to Chechnya for humanitarian organisations, will be implemented in parallel with the first rehabilitation programme in the North Caucasus in the frame of the TACIS programme (cooperation with CIS), which aims at initiating a transition process towards longer term activities.

### Georgia

In **Georgia**, the humanitarian services of the Commission are gradually handing over its activities to other Commission services. This will be the case for the programmes in western Georgia. The situation in Abkhazia remains specific, because of the delays incurred for the implementation of rehabilitation programmes and the humanitarian nature of the needs in those areas which were inaccessible because of security reasons. There the Commission/ECHO will continue its assistance and will finance the basic rehabilitation of housing for returnees, as well as food security activities.

### Azerbaijan

In **Azerbaijan**, the Commission/ECHO will continue its support, initiated in 2006, to some 2.500 Chechen refugees who do not hold refugee status and live in very precarious conditions, compounded by acute protection problems.

### Tajikistan

In 2007, the Commission/ECHO will complete its exit strategy in **Tajikistan**, which had been initiated in 2003. The transition towards development programmes progresses successfully as those sectors which the Commission/ECHO has supported are gradually taken over by operations in the frame of other programmes, such as TACIS. The Commission will however remain vigilant in Central Asia, a zone of chronic instability, and will extend its presence in the region with the DIPECHO programme.

## **4.4 Asia**

### *4.4.1 South Asia*

#### Afghanistan

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2002, over 4 million refugees (around 20% of the population) have returned to **Afghanistan**, to a country wrecked by 23 years of civil war. High levels of need and vulnerability persist in many areas, exacerbated by climatic hazards such as drought and flooding. In the south progress continues to be impeded by an ongoing conflict between a



range of local forces and the government and international military presence. More refugees and IDPs are expected to return in 2007, and many of these will have high levels of vulnerability.

The Commission's humanitarian aid aim at meeting needs in particular in relation to shelter, water and sanitation, and protection. There will be a focus on areas with high numbers of returnees which are not covered by rehabilitation and development assistance, both rural and urban, and especially in undeveloped southern Afghanistan, which is the area of origin for most of the remaining refugees. As a core part of its intervention in 2007, the Commission/ECHO will continue with its commitment to UNHCR's **Afghanistan/Pakistan/Iran** refugee return and assistance programme, which is planned to terminate in 2009. With a view to eventually phasing out, interventions will continue at a slightly lower level than in the previous two years, though emergency food aid may also be required to address specific humanitarian needs if the drought situation in certain parts of the country continues to worsen.

### Sri Lanka

Since mid 2006, the return to civil war in **Sri Lanka** has already created 240,000 new IDPs, and UN estimates that it can go as high as 900,000 if the war continues to develop on the present lines. The country is still trying to find lasting solutions for the previous caseload of 350,000 conflict IDPs and has been unable to cope with this new humanitarian crisis. IDPs are therefore wholly reliant on the humanitarian community.

ICRC and the UN have both launched emergency response appeals (EUR 20 million and EUR 30 million respectively) for the period to the end of 2006 and new appeals are expected for 2007. The Commission, as the main humanitarian donor in the North East of Sri Lanka, will continue to support both the newly displaced IDPs and the previous caseload. The Commission may also be required to intervene in Tamil Nadu, India, where the Sri Lankan refugee population is now 80,000 (an increase of 14,000 this year). In line with the increase in IDP levels, the humanitarian budget in Sri Lanka will be more substantial than in 2006. Furthermore, it should be noted that post-tsunami reconstruction efforts have encountered considerable difficulties meaning that tsunami-affected populations may still be in serious humanitarian need at the end of existing humanitarian programmes in mid-2007.

### Nepal

**Nepal** is the theatre of two humanitarian crises, which developed differently over 2006. The popular movement of April 2006 has facilitated the restoration of a democratic system as well as the ceasefire between the new authorities and the Maoist insurrection. This window has allowed the violence to subside and international development assistance to come on stream. The situation remains however fragile and the western regions went through a serious food crisis. Humanitarian operators continue to face difficulties to gain access to those rural areas, because of bureaucratic obstacles and increasing interference by the rebels. In spite of those difficulties, the humanitarian services of the Commission will continue its assistance in the sectors of protection and water and sanitation, while initiating the hand-over of its operations in the field of food security and assistance to the disabled to rehabilitation and development instruments (LRRD).

In addition the Commission/ECHO will continue – at a slightly lower level - its contribution to food aid to the 107,000 Bhutanese refugees in overcrowded camps at the border with India,

for who no solution is in sight. The Commission will continue to work closely with other donors to encourage the authorities to find a solution to the crisis.

### India

The situation of the victims of the separatist conflict in **Jammu and Kashmir (India)** is to be qualified as a 'forgotten crisis'. Protection and psychological support are the main components of the assistance provided by the Commission.

### Bangladesh

In **Bangladesh**, the Commission/ECHO will consider operations in support of victims of flooding linked to the monsoon or other major natural disasters in contexts where the response capacity of the authorities is insufficient, and could intervene if circumstances allow.

### Iraq

Finally, in parts of **Iraq** the humanitarian situation has deteriorated over the past year, with figures of 400,000 new IDPs being stated, in addition to the existing caseload of 1.2 million. DG ECHO will closely monitor the situation.

#### *4.4.2 South-East and East Asia*

### Burma/Myanmar

The main theatre of operations in South-East and East Asia is likely to be in **Burma/Myanmar**, which is the forgotten crisis in Asia where the Commission is present most prominently and will continue its support, notably to the 530,000 displaced persons. The Commission/ECHO will continue to do so, even though the Burma/Myanmar authorities continue to impose substantial restrictions on humanitarian organisations and the fact that major parts of the country remain inaccessible, in particular the border areas with Thailand and China where most of the very vulnerable ethnic minorities are concentrated. Activities in Burma/Myanmar will focus on water and sanitation and protection. The Commission/ECHO will gradually withdraw from the sectors of primary health, nutrition and food aid, which will be progressively taken over by other community instruments with a longer term perspective. The 155,000 Burmese refugees living in the camps near the border in **Thailand** will continue to receive food aid and medical assistance. It is anticipated that several thousands of refugees might leave the camps as they head for third countries, but camp population numbers are unlikely to drop for reasons of natural population growth and new refugee arrivals from Burma/Myanmar.

### Indonesia

In **Indonesia**, the humanitarian services of the Commission is gradually phasing out. The humanitarian programs addressing the consequences of the December 2004 tsunami and the May 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake are being followed by two multi-donor reconstruction funds that are both partly funded by the EC. The Commission will stand ready to intervene if necessary in this country, which is regularly hit by natural disasters.

## Timor Leste

In **Timor Leste**, the Commission/ECHO will continue to assist the populations displaced by the political and security crisis in 2006 and facilitate their return. The operations will focus on the reduction of the prevalence of acute malnutrition, exacerbated by the crisis, in coordination with other actions planned by the Commission in order to ensure proper LRRD.

## North Korea

In **North Korea**, the Commission/ECHO is phasing out, given the relative stability of the humanitarian situation, and is not planning any new interventions in 2007. However, the risk of a relapse into famine, as long as there is no progress in resolving the wider political issues and the economic opening of the country, means that the possibility of new interventions cannot be ruled out.

## Cambodia, Laos, Philippines

In **Cambodia, Laos** and the **Philippines**, the Commission/ECHO is in the early phase of the implementation of its exit strategy. For all those countries, as for **Vietnam**, the Commission could assist in case of major natural disasters if the local reaction capacity proves insufficient.

## **4.5 Central and South America**

### Colombia and affected neighbouring countries

In Latin America **Colombia** will remain by far the most important intervention for the humanitarian services of the Commission. The internal conflict in the country has tended to escalate since June 2006. Prospects of peace negotiations between the Government and the main guerrilla group (FARC) are very poor and the outcome of the demobilisation process for paramilitary groups is not clear. Each year more than 200,000 new IDPs, spread throughout the country and local populations who are unwilling to leave conflict-affected rural areas often find themselves isolated and confined in their villages by armed groups. The flow of people into Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama is increasing, with UNHCR indicating almost 500,000 'persons of concern' in these three countries. Therefore the level of assistance required will be similar to the 2006 one.

Assistance in Colombia will target newly displaced people for a period of up to 12 months, with emergency aid during the first three months after displacement. It will be focused on areas where there is little or no government presence, especially remote rural locations. The Commission/ECHO will provide early recovery funds to help the newly displaced to regain a minimum level of self-sufficiency. Assistance will also be provided to populations isolated or confined by the armed groups in order to ensure access to basic services. In Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama the Commission through DG ECHO will support UNHCR and other partners in providing assistance to refugees and persons of concern with a special focus on reaching the so-called 'invisible cases'. Finally both within Colombia and in neighbouring countries the Commission intends to contribute to the strengthening of the overall protection framework for refugees and IDPs, whilst also funding actions to increase the protection of conflict-affected populations at local level.

## 5. HORIZONTAL PRIORITIES

### 5.1 Food Aid

In line with the Commission's communication (COM(2004)101) which has established the principle of "*one instrument per policy area*" in order to improve the efficiency of Community action as well as with the Commission's Communication (COM(2004)487) on the financial perspectives 2007-2013 it was decided that the responsibility for the management of the humanitarian part of food aid would be transferred from DG AIDCO to DG ECHO. As a result a new budget line<sup>5</sup> was created to cover this part with an allocation of EUR 217.8 million for the 2007 budget. As regards the non-humanitarian aspects of food aid, they will continue to be implemented by DG AIDCO through the geographical instruments as well as the Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP)<sup>6</sup>.

The transfer of the management of the humanitarian food aid instrument to DG ECHO from January 2007 will have major consequences for DG ECHO, i.e.

a) The need to effectively programme and manage the additional funds allocated for humanitarian food aid.

b) The need for extensive articulation with the Commission's development services to make sure that food security is included in their programming of development cooperation in particular for countries where the humanitarian services of the Commission want to phase out (LRRD). Considering that the new Food Security Thematic Programme (FSTP) will address food insecurity in exceptional situations such as countries in transition and fragile states, close coordination and harmonisation between humanitarian assistance, the FSTP and the geographical instruments will have to be ensured. In protracted, post-crisis and transition situations, DG ECHO's support to food aid and short term food security projects must therefore be articulated with longer term food security strategies, with particular attention to the LRRD aspects linking the various EC financing instruments, in particular when these instruments are used in parallel.

c) The need for more transparency on food aid programming (country & modalities), its relation to nutrition (since it will remain for 2007 a separate instrument of the humanitarian response), its relation to livelihoods resilience under climatic and/or economic stress, and – last but not least – the different modalities to be used (in kind, in cash, etc).

d) Being the Commission's only source for the funding of humanitarian food aid DG ECHO will need to coordinate and articulate with other food aid donors, bilaterally or in international fora.

DG ECHO will manage the food aid budget within the framework of its mandate to save and preserve life during emergencies and their immediate aftermath. Allocation of humanitarian food aid will be strictly needs based and in accordance with the guiding principles of impartiality and objectivity.

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<sup>5</sup> This budget line BL 23 02 02 was created under title 23 Humanitarian Aid

<sup>6</sup> The FSTP is budgeted under the chapter 21 02

Medium to long term development food security matters will continue to be dealt with by DGs RELEX, DEV and AIDCO through the bilateral aid programmes and through the new Food Security Thematic Budget line which will come into force in 2007.

One of the challenges but also potential benefits emanating from the transfer of humanitarian food aid to DG ECHO is the fact that food aid and short term food security is now managed by the same service. Therefore, there is a need to look more systematically at the needs for agricultural recovery/short term food security so as to move vulnerable populations out of food aid dependency as soon as possible.

2007 will be the first year that DG ECHO has to manage the full portfolio of humanitarian food aid, and it will be a year of transition. Programming of food aid will, therefore, also take into account the funding the Commission has provided to ongoing crises to the extent these crises require humanitarian response. At this stage, DG ECHO expects that, as in previous years, much of the food aid budget will need to be allocated to ongoing complex crises with substantial food security issues such as Sudan, Tanzania, Burundi, West Africa and the Middle East. However, an operational reserve will be kept to enable a quick response to new crises as they develop.

## **5.2 Disaster preparedness and DIPECHO**

In several regions of the world the Commission, through DG ECHO, supports disaster preparedness as part of its mandate. This is done in the context of the DIPECHO programmes, through mainstreaming of disaster preparedness action in relief operations and through specific interventions such as the drought preparedness decision for the Horn of Africa which was launched in 2006.

In 2006 the Commission supported DIPECHO programmes in the Caribbean, Latin America, Central Asia, South East Asia and South Asia. It is foreseen to continue these programmes in 2007 although not all of these programmes require funding from the 2007 budget but can be carried on using allocations from 2006. Those programmes will be articulated and coordinated with those implemented by the Commission's development cooperation programmes (DGs DEV and/or Relex).

In the **Caribbean**, the **6th DIPECHO Action Plan** is scheduled for September 2007-February 2009, allowing time for appraisal of operations currently implemented in the framework of the 5<sup>th</sup> DIPECHO Action Plan and for consultation with partners. Some likely priorities are to reinforce DIPECHO in Haiti, to consolidate Disaster Preparedness in urban settings, to include more English-speaking Caribbean countries plus countries new to DIPECHO, such as Suriname or Guyana.

In **Central Asia**, an evaluation of the first three DIPECHO Action Plans has been carried out in 2006. It has found that activities implemented in the region through these Actions Plans have been both pertinent and necessary, and that the reduction of the communities' risk and vulnerability was justified. Furthermore, the evaluation recommended continuing the programme. Using funds of the 2006 budget, a fourth Action Plan will be implemented in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

New DIPECHO Actions Plans for disaster preparedness are also foreseen for **South East Asia** (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Timor Leste and Vietnam) as well as for **Central America** (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama).

Furthermore, two new Action Plans will be initiated in **South Asia** and **South America** following consultations with stakeholders in each of the countries concerned.

For all DIPECHO programmes the focus will be on small scale projects responding to the specific needs of the local communities in the area of disaster preparedness and mitigation.

Special attention will be paid to establishing a link to more ambitious risk reduction activities in the context of the implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action* decided in Kobe/Japan at the beginning of 2005, and which are funded by development donors.

In the **Horn of Africa** region a regional decision on disaster preparedness for pastoralist populations in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda will be implemented in the course of 2007. This programme has been developed in close cooperation with DG Development and EuropAid.

Under its DIPECHO programme the Commission/ECHO will continue to support **early warning systems** at a local level focusing on people rather than on technology. DIPECHO partners are encouraged to include this element in their proposals submitted for funding. Furthermore, the Commission/ECHO will remain closely associated to efforts made at a global level to establish early warning systems with a wider scope such as the tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean which received financial funding from the Commission/ECHO and which will be continued to be supported by the Commission (DG RELEX) in 2007.

Finally, the Commission will continue and reinforce its advocacy activities so as to make sure that development donors afford sufficient prominence to disaster risk reduction in development programmes.

### **5.3 Thematic Funding and Grant Facility**

The Commission's/ECHO's thematic funding, which was initiated in 2002, aims at strengthening the institutional capacity of the UN organisations and of the Red Cross movement to address humanitarian crises in an efficient and coordinated manner.

The preliminary results of thematic funding are encouraging, as a number of independent evaluations conducted over the last years have revealed. The Commission will continue to complement thematic funding in the future, bearing in mind that the funding horizon is not open-ended in time, as sustainable capacity enhancement consolidates and alternative funding sources are identified.

There is a clear multiplier effect in supporting capacity building within the UN and Red Cross families: these organisations often hold a pivotal role in the provision and coordination of the total humanitarian effort in a given crisis. Clear division of labour and the underlying identification of lead agencies for specific sectors is a key element of international humanitarian reform. It should benefit the operational quality, preparedness and surge capacity of the global humanitarian community at all levels, down to country level. Ideally, these should be some of the expected dividends of enhanced coordination, including under the "cluster approach", which can only come to the benefit of those most in need of humanitarian assistance.

Through its thematic funding, the European Commission has been contributing to the objectives of the cluster approach, even before consensus on the concept in the humanitarian community started building. Against the background of the political commitment to support reform of the humanitarian system, the Commission will explicitly focus the 2007 thematic funding towards supporting enhanced coordination and the cluster approach. This could include supporting the role of identified agencies and organisations as lead agency for particular clusters.

In addition, thematic funding will, as much as possible, be programmed in such a way as to ensure predictability and coincidence with the budgeting requirements of partners. This approach would further strengthen the Commission's contribution to the reform process and reflect its commitment to Good Humanitarian Donorship principles.

With regard to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Grant Facility was established by the humanitarian services of the Commission in the nineties to finance capacity building of non governmental partner organisations on the most relevant humanitarian aid issues. This was done by supporting the development of studies and learning materials and the provision of training and by strengthening the institutional capacity of European non-profit-making humanitarian networks.

Through the grant facility the Commission/ECHO has reinforced its political dialogue with NGOs and tried to respond to partners' expectations, notably following the debate on 'quality partnership' launched in 2001 and subsequently developed within the Annual Conferences.

In 2007, the grant facility will focus on developments in the humanitarian arena and their operational implications. Against this background, the Commission/ECHO has identified two main needs: first, to trigger effective synergies within the civil society for representation and advocacy purposes, notably in respect to the humanitarian space; and second, to contribute to improving the performance of the international response system, in particular by addressing the gaps identified in the framework of humanitarian reform (notably in terms of staff qualification). The need to improve the quality of humanitarian aid by strengthening NGOs' management capacity and accountability will be addressed on a standing basis.

#### **5.4 Visibility, Information and Communication**

The broad objective of the Commission's communication work is to boost understanding in Europe and developing countries of the concrete contribution made by humanitarian aid to the EU commitment of solidarity with third countries.

The EU is the world's largest humanitarian donor and the Commission is the leading relief founder in the Union. It therefore has a leadership role in communicating the values that underlie European aid.

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

The Commission's/ECHO's communication strategy in 2007 will, therefore focus on:

- Efforts to boost awareness of the Commission's humanitarian role and to communicate key messages. Actions will be undertaken in the EU 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).

- Young Europeans. Effective communication with youth, who are generally receptive, can have longer term benefits. Communication actions targeting this group will therefore continue to be implemented.
- High-impact activities. Priority will go to actions with a significant multiplier effect, notably where media coverage can be generated.
- Collaboration to disseminate broader European messages. Joint work with other services in the 'Relex' family to highlight the 'bigger picture' of EU external action will be continued and developed.
- Developing a wider information reflex. The Commission recognises the value of 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.