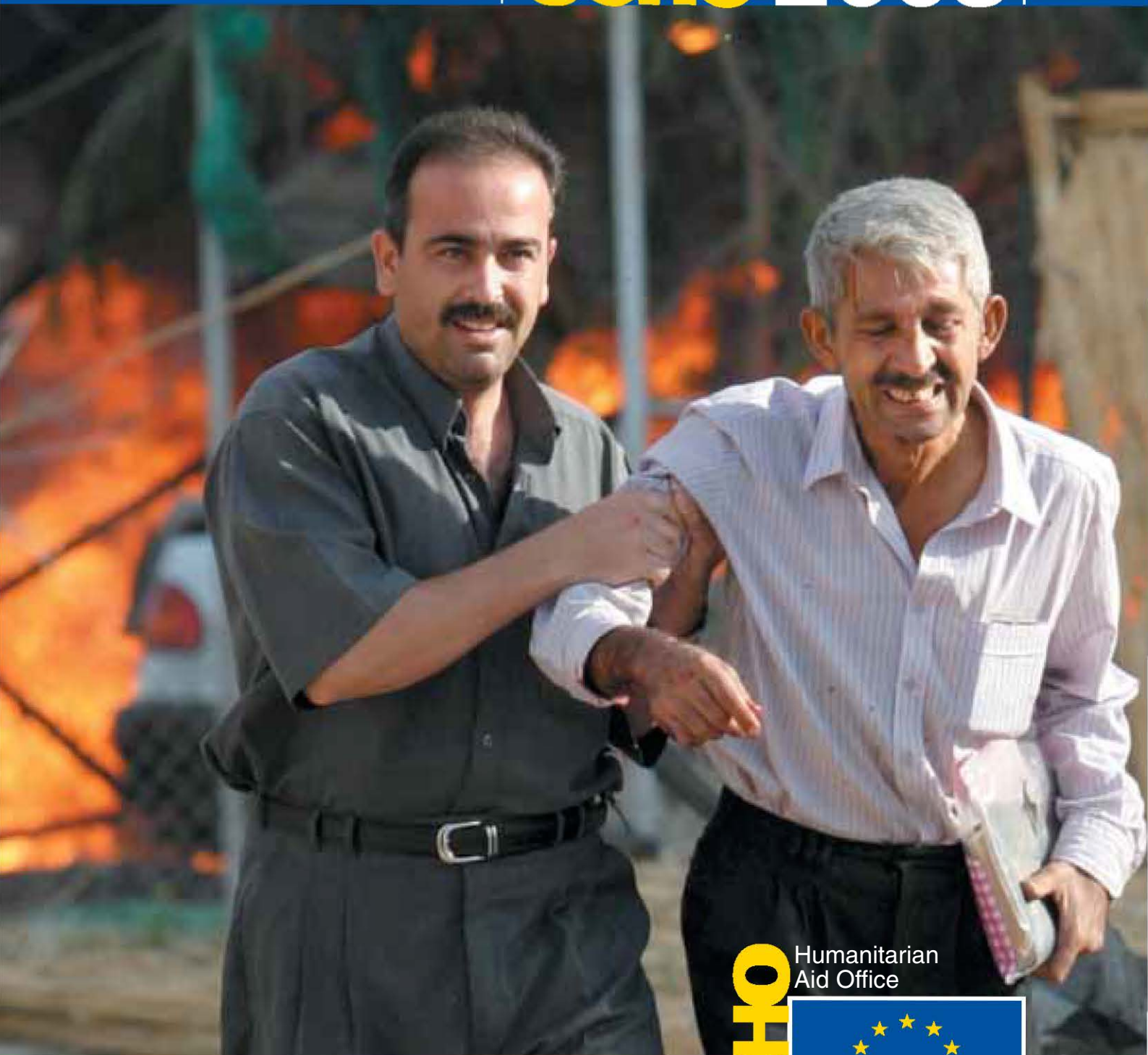


Protecting the humanitarian space

| **eCHO** 2003 |



eCHO Humanitarian
Aid Office



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

A wounded Iraqi being led away from the ruins of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) headquarters in Baghdad, after the bomb attack on 27 October, 2003.

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Courtesy www.alertnet.org



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Commissioner's Message

'Humanitarian missions must be respected'

Humanitarian crises in different parts of the world were rarely out of the headlines during 2003 and sadly, the majority of these were again due to man-made conflicts. In line with its commitment to provide needs-based assistance to the world's most vulnerable populations, the Commission, through its Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) provided substantial funding for relief operations in more than 60 countries.

At the beginning of the year, the prospect of war in Iraq loomed large. ECHO was already funding humanitarian programmes in the country and through comprehensive contingency planning, it was able to ensure that substantial extra assistance was speedily mobilised as soon as the fighting began.

Since the end of the war, the delivery of vital aid in Iraq has sometimes been hampered by a lack of security, but thanks to ECHO's flexible approach and the remarkable efforts of partners implementing projects on the ground (including many dedicated local staff), it has still been possible to commit more than 97% of the funds earmarked to help the victims of the crisis. These have been directed to projects benefiting hundreds of thousands of people.

In other crisis zones across the globe, notably in Africa and Asia, millions of vulnerable were assisted through ECHO-funded operations. Major programmes were implemented in Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Chechnya, Angola, Tanzania, Sudan and Liberia. There was also a continuing emphasis on the so-called "forgotten needs" of crisis victims in areas that seldom attract international publicity such as Myanmar, Nepal and Northern Uganda. In addition, immediate emergency aid was mobilised on a number of occasions following earthquakes and other natural disasters.

It is vital to ensure the existence of a 'humanitarian space' for the prompt and effective delivery of relief to people in extreme distress. While it is not always possible to prevent violent acts by rogue militias or terrorists, more can be done to uphold basic humanitarian values and strengthen the principle that humanitarian missions must be respected. Governments with forces engaged in conflict zones have a duty to protect local civilian populations and aid workers alike. More effort is needed to ensure full and secure access by humanitarian agencies to people who are in distress and to maintain a clear distinction between fighting forces and professional relief workers.

Delivering aid to the victims of humanitarian crises is, by definition, a risky business, particularly when most of the human suffering that aid agencies are trying to alleviate is caused by conflict. Those working to provide relief have always been

aware of the danger of being caught in the crossfire. In recent years, however, the risks of delivering humanitarian support in unstable situations have grown, in some cases dramatically, as relief organisations have increasingly become targets themselves. In 2003, this growing trend was exemplified by the bombings of the United Nations and International Red Cross headquarters in Baghdad. In Iraq, Afghanistan and other crisis zones, the space traditionally made available – indeed required under international law – for impartial aid workers to carry out their vocation is under siege.

During 2003, I took every available opportunity to emphasise the importance of protecting the humanitarian space. The Commission meanwhile, was actively involved in international efforts in this area, most notably through the 'Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship' that were adopted in Stockholm in June and the 'Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to support UN Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies'.

Arguing the humanitarian case is also something I have also been doing in the discussions on a proposed Constitutional Treaty for the European Union. In the draft text it submitted to the Intergovernmental Conference, the European Convention proposed a specific article dealing with humanitarian aid – the first time the subject would be mentioned in one of the EU's basic treaties. Humanitarian aid is described as a shared competence between Member States and the EU in the draft text. This should not, in my view, imply any modifications in the way humanitarian aid is delivered, but rather recognise the merits of the existing arrangements. ECHO is now acknowledged as a highly effective and respected actor in the humanitarian world and there is a strong case for applying the maxim 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

The draft article also specifies that EU humanitarian aid should be delivered in accordance with the principles of impartiality and non-discrimination. Much to our regret, no reference is made to the key principle of neutrality.

In the absence of agreement at the meeting of European leaders in Brussels in December 2003, further discussions on the draft Constitution are planned and there is still a possibility that the wording will be changed. I believe it is important for a future EU Constitution to contain a strong commitment to humanitarian values and principles and I will go on arguing the case for this so long as the debate continues.

Poul Nielson
*European Commissioner for Development
and Humanitarian Aid
March 2004*

Director's Message

An active donor advocating respect for humanitarian principles



© François Goemans, ECHO

2003 brought new challenges for the humanitarian community at large, beginning with the war in Iraq and ending with the terrible earthquake in the Iranian city of Bam. ECHO contributed to the international aid effort by ensuring that its €600 million budget was delivered promptly and effectively to the people and regions that needed it most. The geographical focus of ECHO's programmes continued to shift to regions of Africa and Asia worst affected by humanitarian crises. ECHO closed down its remaining operations in the Balkans because the situation there no longer required an emergency response.

As well as analysing needs on a geographical basis, ECHO took care to ensure that aid was allocated to sectors not covered by other donors.

Emergency actions funded by ECHO included the supply of food, clothing, shelter, medical provisions, water supplies and sanitation as well as emergency repairs and mine clearing. But as a major donor, ECHO is concerned about more than meeting the physical needs of crisis victims. It is also essential to ensure that human dignity is preserved – by providing people with the means to become self-sufficient whenever, and as soon as, possible. ECHO also understands that a humanitarian crisis can cause lasting psychological damage to the most vulnerable victims – especially children. That is why we fund psychosocial support in many zones.

The quality of ECHO's aid depends largely on the professional capabilities of our implementing partners. In 2003, ECHO completed fundamental revisions of the agreements governing its relations with UN agencies, with other international organisations (notably the ICRC and IFRC) and with non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

ECHO's relationship with partner UN agencies is covered by the European Community/United Nations Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA) that entered into force in April.

As regards NGOs, the new Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) was presented for signature at the ECHO-NGO partners conference held in Brussels in November. Its main purpose is to improve standards, while promoting more transparent and effective management of European public funding for humanitarian aid. All organisations adhering to the agreement commit themselves to uphold the fundamental humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and non-discrimination. For the first time, NGOs from the new member states (Hungary, Poland and

the Czech Republic) were among the signatories. 147 NGOs had signed the FPA by the time it entered into force on 1 January 2004.

The new partnership arrangements for international organisations were also finalised during the year. These govern ECHO's relations with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

For its part, ECHO committed itself to a code of conduct on the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship in Stockholm in June. This document calls on donors to allocate humanitarian funds according to needs and to support United Nations coordination efforts. The code, which is fully in line with ECHO's strategy, clearly states that donors have a duty to respect and promote the implementation of international humanitarian law and human rights.

ECHO continued to give support to and participate in the United Nations Consolidated Appeals (CAPS) for humanitarian crises, recognising that a multilateral coordinated response to the global humanitarian challenge is essential. The European Commission hosted the 2004 UN appeal in Brussels on 19 November.

ECHO was also active in supporting the establishment of the 2003 'Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to support UN Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies' (MCDA guidelines). ECHO hosted the launch of these guidelines in conjunction with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) at an event in Brussels on 26 June. The guidelines explain how the core humanitarian principles should be implemented in practice in conflict and post-conflict situations, and underline the importance of separating humanitarian aid from policy and military interests whenever possible.

As Commissioner Nielson has stated, any blurring of the distinction between military and humanitarian roles is detrimental both to the affected population and to the security of humanitarian aid workers. That is why ECHO takes every opportunity to build on its position as an active donor and to advocate and defend core humanitarian principles.

Costanza Adinolfi
Director of ECHO
March 2004

Key Events 2003



March: Bomb-damaged hospital ward in Baghdad. Medical facilities also suffered widespread looting at the end of the war in Iraq. © Première Urgence

January

Cyclone hits Fiji

Tropical Cyclone Ami hits Fiji, causing widespread damage. More than 130,000 people are affected by the disaster.

February

UN peace mission completes its work in Angola

The United Nations mission overseeing the peace process winds up its operations in Angola.

March

War in Iraq

The Coalition launches military operations in Iraq.

Peace agreement in the Republic of Congo

The government of the Republic of Congo signs agreements with Ninja rebels aimed at ending fighting in Pool region.

SARS outbreak

The World Health Organisation (WHO) confirms that Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a "worldwide health threat". Cases are reported in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines.

April

Fighting in north-eastern DRC

Fierce fighting breaks out between rival groups in the Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of Congo. A humanitarian crisis develops as thousands of people flee the violence.

Breakthrough for peace process in Sudan

President Bashir of Sudan and the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), John Garang, meet for only the second time in 20 years of conflict at landmark peace talks.

Baghdad falls

The Iraqi capital, Baghdad, falls to advancing US troops on 9 April. The collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime is followed by widespread looting of hospitals and other public buildings, as well as many private dwellings.

May

Earthquake hits Algeria

4,000 people are killed, 10,000 injured and 200,000 left without shelter after an earthquake measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale strikes northern Algeria.

Floods in Namibia

Twelve thousand people are affected by floods that submerge 20 villages in Caprivi, one of Namibia's poorest regions.

Violent storms in Sri Lanka

Torrential rain and hurricane-force winds provoke landslides and widespread flooding in southern Sri Lanka. 260 people are killed and more than 85,000 families are left homeless.

June

Conflict in Liberia

An estimated 700 people are killed and hundreds of thousands are displaced as rebel groups launch major offensives on the capital, Monrovia, and other key cities.

Key Events 2003

July

Major rebel attack in Burundi

The National Liberation Forces (NLF), Burundi's second largest rebel movement, launch an attack on the capital Bujumbura. Thousands flee their homes.

Floods in China

Landslides and floods provoked by torrential rain leave an estimated 4.5 million people homeless and cause massive crop destruction.

New transition government for the Democratic Republic of Congo

The inauguration of a national transition government in July 2003 officially ends seven years of civil war in DRC.

Children march for peace in Uganda

Twenty thousand Ugandan children take to the streets of Kitgum in northern Uganda, to demand an end to violence and fear in the country.

August

Bomb attack on UN's Baghdad headquarters

Twenty-three people, including the head of the UN mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello, are killed when a bomb planted in a lorry destroys part of the UN complex in Baghdad on 19 August. Ten days later, around 100 people are killed, when a car bomb explodes outside a mosque in Najaf while worshippers are leaving the building. One of the victims is Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, a leading Shia cleric.

Floods in South Pakistan

Almost 200 deaths are reported when Southern Pakistan is hit by flooding. In Sindh, the worst hit province, three and a half thousand villages and 860,000 people are affected.

Peace agreement in Liberia

The Government of Liberia, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) sign a peace agreement, putting an end to the fighting that has ravaged the country. President Charles Taylor goes into exile.

Ceasefire in Nepal collapses

Hostilities resume in Nepal when Maoist rebels announce the end of the ceasefire agreement with the government. Over the last seven years, the insurgency has resulted in the deaths of more than 8,000 people.

September

Peacekeepers arrive in Liberia

A UN-authorized ECOMOG peacekeeping force, composed of troops from a number of West African countries, is deployed in Liberia.

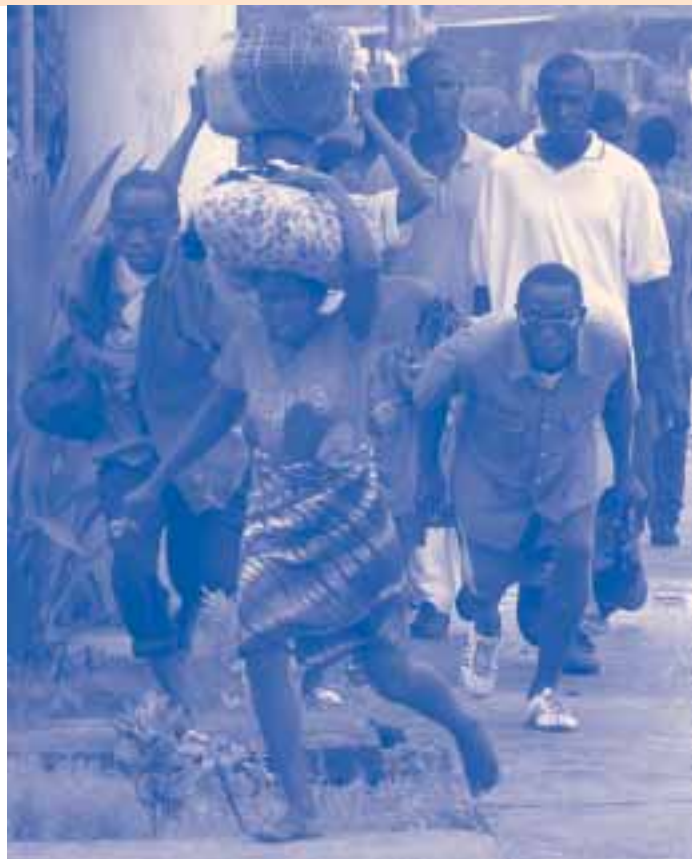
October

Bomb strikes Red Cross in Iraq

Thirty-four people are killed and more than 200 injured in a series of bomb attacks in central Baghdad. The headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is badly damaged.

July: Civilians flee bullets in the streets of Liberia's capital Monrovia.

© REUTERS/Morteza Nikoubazl. Courtesy www.alertnet.org



Key Events 2003

December: Iranian men dig through rubble looking for family members after the earthquake in Bam.
© REUTERS/Morteza Nikoubazi, Courtesy www.alertnet.org



Ceasefire in Burundi

Burundian President, Domitien Ndayizeye, and the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD) sign an immediate ceasefire agreement. A smaller rebel group, the Forces for National Liberation (FNL), refuses to take part in the peace talks.

November

Floods in Dominican Republic

Severe flooding causes widespread damage, destroying more than 200,000 hectares of crops in the Dominican Republic. 65,000 people are affected by the disaster.

December

International Court announces hearing on Israeli security barrier

Following a request by the UN General Assembly, the International Court of Justice agrees to hear arguments on Israel's construction of a 'security barrier' in the West Bank and around Jerusalem, with a hearing set for February 2004. By the end of the year, more than 180 kilometres of barrier have been built. A further 438 kilometres are planned and the UN estimates that around 200,000 Palestinians have already been adversely affected.

Earthquake hits city of Bam, Iran

More than 26,000 people are killed when an earthquake registering 6.9 on the Richter scale strikes south-eastern Iran on 26 December. Three quarters of the buildings in the city of Bam are destroyed.

FEATURE

Independent humanitarian action under pressure

by Jakob Kellenberger

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)



Jakob Kellenberger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross
© ICRC

Humanitarian action is not the exclusive preserve of one organisation, or any group of organisations. Indeed one of the features of the international system over the past 50 years has been the steady growth in the number of actors, including armed forces, claiming or perceived to have a humanitarian role. Add to this potential overcrowding the polarisation of the past few decades, the use of terror and the fight against it, it is valid to ask how independent and impartial humanitarian action can be preserved.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has been on the humanitarian scene for 140 years. Its action is based on a solid bedrock of international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Conventions. It has always worked closely with governments and the military in preserving its space for independent and neutral action. It has endeavoured to promote the rules of war while recognising that governments and the military also have a role in assisting and protecting vulnerable people in times of war.

Distinctive roles

In the recent war in Iraq there was constant talk in the media of aid and reconstruction work undertaken by the armed forces and the coalition commanders themselves spoke of this role as part of a coordinated military/civil approach. But while emergency aid and contributions to reconstruction by the armed forces may often be welcome, in a conflict they can never replace neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action.

For the ICRC, recognition of the distinctive role of each actor is important. In that sense the ICRC does not want to leave any doubt on its own role as an impartial and independent organisation whose action is conducted exclusively on behalf of prison-

ers, wounded combatants and civilian victims. It is also the best way to ensure security for its own staff. This second point was made all too relevant by the death of five ICRC staff in Iraq and Afghanistan last year. We cannot be certain who attacked us and why. But whatever the reason, our staff must be able to carry out their work in security, protected as they are by the ICRC's emblem.

The risk of rejection

Conventional armed forces and organised armed groups for the most part understand and acknowledge the ICRC's mandate. Indeed the ICRC has worked over many years to ensure the basic tenets of international humanitarian law are understood and practised by military and security personnel around the world.

Even in non-international armed conflicts and other situations of violence these rules apply and we need governments and their armed forces to continue to support our need to work freely everywhere and with everyone. We need to be able to "cross the lines" without our credibility being questioned, even when those lines are not physical ones between armies.

But how do we reach other armed groups - including those using terror - in order to ensure the ICRC can continue to operate? How will we deal with the threat of actual rejection of the ICRC's role by some groups? We do not know the motive behind it, but the bombing of the ICRC headquarters in Baghdad last year was a very worrying development.

In practical terms the ICRC already has significant experience in dealing with armed groups in places as different as Colombia, Sierra Leone and Sri

Lanka. The challenge is much more daunting, however, in situations such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and in the shadowy world of global terror. Nevertheless the ICRC is determined to open dialogue with such groups. But progress in such areas will not be helped by any blurring of the distinction between independent humanitarian action and the civil activities of the military as part of reconstruction.

Facing up to the risks

A strategy to deal with the threat to humanitarian space must involve effort from all involved. The ICRC for its part has been proceeding with its own analysis of the changing context of its work, with very welcome contributions from many external organisations and individuals. Part of the analysis, on the relevance of international humanitarian law in contemporary armed conflicts, was presented in a report in December last year to the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

An important means of dealing with rejection is to remain the key humanitarian actor, physically present and active in armed conflicts and situations of violence around the world. If the ICRC is to protect humanitarian space it must show its capacity to operate in an independent and impartial manner. In this way it creates a credible basis for dialogue with all actors having an influence on a conflict situation, including armed groups using terrorist methods against civilians.

It must focus on its strengths and develop them further. Action on behalf of people missing as a result of armed conflict and help for their families, one of the ICRC priorities in 2004, is one example. The ICRC has long experience and therefore credibility in this field; this is moreover an activity fully pertinent to the situations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere where respect for independent humanitarian action is an issue. It is noteworthy that this type of activity can also make a contribution to reconciliation and help to prevent the resurgence of conflict. The global nature of its operations is a visible proof of ICRC's impartiality. It has over 80 delegations and missions worldwide which, with sub offices at national level, means over 220 offices in all. To balance its visibility in communication terms in high profile conflicts, the ICRC is publicising its work in lesser known or forgotten ones that illustrate the fact that its activities are exclusively motivated by humanitarian needs and not influenced by headlines.

In this effort it is supported by one of its key partners, ECHO, which has recognised the importance of these "marginal" conflict and post conflict zones. They may be marginal in media terms but certainly not in terms of people's vulnerability.

ECHO has also committed itself to the ICRC's global protection programme in 29 lesser-known crisis zones as well as supporting activities in Iraq, and Israel and the occupied and autonomous territories. Overall ECHO is now the ICRC's fourth largest financial donor.

Getting over the message

Credibility through action on the ground and predictability based on principles applied in all contexts will remain the ICRC's strongest card. Even so groups or networks that are sceptical or openly hostile to its presence may question its motives. Here a major communication effort is needed to overcome any perceptions that the ICRC and humanitarian action in general is in some way tainted by association to other purposes than the will to protect and assist those affected by armed conflicts and situations of violence.

To convey this message needs sustained efforts. The ICRC is largely funded by governments in the highly industrialised world. It works directly with military and security forces to promote respect for humanitarian law. It has however a track record as a truly independent, neutral and impartial actor. Its legal basis and the strength of its professionalism also demonstrate that these links in no way compromise its impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Our messages have to be understandable to the very different actors we are in dialogue with in different cultural contexts. The internationalisation of the staff of the ICRC has no doubt strengthened this capacity. The close relationship with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, whose practical support in many operations is important, is equally relevant in this context.

Our message as an independent and neutral humanitarian actor is clear. We are not politically aligned in any way and we are not subject to political pressures should they occur. We have a convincing track record in that respect. We do not take sides in armed conflicts, neither directly nor indirectly. Our priorities are based solely on the desire to respond to the needs of people affected by conflict, whoever they are and wherever they are.

FEATURE

Reclaiming humanitarian space in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In most of the world's crisis zones, the space available for humanitarian workers to carry out their life-saving work is shrinking. In some areas, aid organisations are deliberately refused access to the victims by the authorities. In others they are unable to gain access due to intense fighting. Increasing numbers of humanitarian professionals have been abducted or killed. But not all the news is bad. The events in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the second half of 2003 show that it is possible to reclaim humanitarian space and carve out separate but mutually supportive roles for humanitarian and military personnel.

The complex conflict in the DRC is one of Africa's longest running and bloodiest. At the beginning of May 2003, the situation deteriorated in Ituri district in the north east when fierce fighting broke out between rival groups after the withdrawal of Ugandan forces. By 10 May, all aid organisations had evacuated from the region. Although the needs were great, relief workers could not be expected directly to risk their lives in the crossfire. Nobody wanted a repetition of the April 2001 tragedy when six ICRC employees were kidnapped and killed.

On 12 May, ECHO's field expert arrived in Bunia – the main city in Ituri - to assess the security situation. Working in cooperation with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), he began a dialogue between the blue helmets working for the United Nations mission in DRC (MONUC) and the aid agencies that had left Bunia. The aid workers said they had evacuated because MONUC had not been able to offer full protection. The blue helmets explained that, with a relatively small force of 700 soldiers and limited logistical means, they could not protect the area

inhabited by aid personnel on a permanent basis. They also warned that they did not have the means to provide medical aid and food to the ten thousand civilians that had gained access to the gardens of the MONUC compound to seek protection. With no-one to provide aid, the risk of large scale disease, death and rebellion was high. ECHO and OCHA began work on finding an agreement between aid agencies and MONUC. Within a few days, the blue helmets promised to provide the necessary security guarantees and the humanitarian organisations returned to Bunia. Military and humanitarian personnel agreed to keep their respective roles separate, while recognising that each needed understanding and cooperation from the other to fulfil their duties.

In the meantime, political developments at a national and international level turned in Ituri's favour. The inauguration of a national transition government in July 2003 officially ended seven years of civil war in the DRC. Recognising the need for a more effective response to the Ituri conflict, the UN authorised the European Union to send troops until a larger UN force with a reinforced mandate could be deployed. The EU's operation 'Artemis' successfully restored stability to Bunia during the three month period from June to August. The UN took over the entire operation with full peace-keeping powers, ten times as many troops, and strengthened military assets, as from 1 September.

Operation Artemis and the subsequent reinforcement of the UN peace-keeping mission helped to begin restore security, and enabled humanitarian organisations gradually to regain access to areas that had been cut off from outside assistance for over a year. Aid agencies found that the needs in the Ituri countryside were great – an estimated one million people had been displaced or otherwise directly affected by the conflict. ECHO responded to these newly-found needs with targeted assistance for vulnerable, displaced and returning populations. This humanitarian response was made possible by the international community's unprecedented political, financial and military commitment to Ituri and the subsequent restoration of humanitarian space to the troubled region.

Uruguayan UN troops survey the scene at a camp for internally displaced people near Bunia airport.
© François Goemans, ECHO



FEATURE

Iraq crisis highlights an alarming trend

One hundred and forty years have elapsed since Henri Dunant first pioneered the idea of a “humanitarian space”, after witnessing the terrible suffering at the Battle of Solferino in 1859. He was the driving force behind the first Geneva Convention (1864) which was designed to provide protection for medical personnel and their activities in battlefield zones. A special identifying symbol (nowadays usually a red cross or crescent) would be displayed to highlight the inviolate physical space where the wounded could be treated. In the intervening years, the idea has been extended to include protection for other groups such as non-combatants and prisoners of war. Clearly, there will always be problems in enforcing the rules in the fog of battle, as no emblem, however prominently displayed, can protect against stray bombs and shells. But it is a well-established principle of international law that those bringing succour to the suffering in conflict should not be targeted. Nor should the ‘space’ they occupy be exploited by combatants for military advantage.

Recent events in Iraq have confirmed an alarming trend already observed in crisis spots such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Liberia and the Palestinian Territories. Humanitarian agencies and their personnel have increasingly been drawn into the firing line, undermining their efforts to deliver relief to those who are most in need. The United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross – the two main pillars of the international humanitarian system – were subject to devastating and unprecedented attack when their Baghdad headquarters were bombed. There have also been many other deliberate assaults on aid workers, including NGO staff, resulting in death and injury. With their mandate to help the most vulnerable, relief organisations are always reluctant to withdraw from a crisis zone, but they also have an obligation to ensure the safety of their own staff. Various strategies have been adopted to minimise the risks of operating in Iraq while ensuring that basic relief activities can continue. In some cases, it is possible to monitor operations and even manage them from neighbouring countries. Inside the country, a few expatriate staff, as well as qualified and dedicated local employees, help to ensure that the humanitarian work continues.



Rescue workers search the rubble for survivors after a bomb explosion in Baghdad. It is a well-established principle of international law that those bringing succour to the suffering in conflict should not be targeted.
© Reuters/Ammar Awad. Courtesy www.alertnet.org

Awareness-raising among beneficiary communities helps to spread the word that the aid is offered impartially on the basis of needs.

Overall, a remarkable amount of humanitarian assistance (in ECHO's case, more than 97% of the amount allocated) has been mobilised in these highly difficult circumstances. While this reflects the courage and commitment of those involved, the fact remains that incursions into the humanitarian space in Iraq have forced some projects to be abandoned and others to be delayed or relocated. More resources have also had to be devoted to security, which means less is available for direct assistance to people.

It is not easy to convince radical armed factions that it is wrong to attack aid workers or civilians whether from the point of view of basic humanity, or from the perspective of international law. By their very nature, these groups operate in the shadows well away from any negotiating tables and do not necessarily recognise the values and neutrality of humanitarian operators. However, there are ways of helping the humanitarian community to reclaim its “space” in Iraq and elsewhere. One of the most important is to maintain the clearest possible distinction between military and humanitarian personnel. If the general population understands and embraces this distinction, the scope of action available to groups that deliberately target humanitarian operations can be reduced. Governments with forces deployed in conflict zones, whether on their own territory, or in other countries, have a particular responsibility here - especially governments of countries that have supported the establishment of international humanitarian law, are signatories to the Geneva Conventions and play a significant role in the UN-led system.

War, by definition, is not a “civilised” affair but the international community has long recognised that helping the weak and vulnerable in conflict situations is a basic principle of humanity. This is why it is so important to re-establish and protect the “humanitarian space” in Iraq and in other trouble spots around the globe where so many people are suffering.

ECHO AT WORK

In brief

Policy aspects

Crisis theatres in Asia, Africa and the Middle East featured prominently in operations funded by the Humanitarian Aid Office during 2003, reflecting ECHO's obligation to provide assistance to areas of greatest need. The largest programme was in Iraq, where an already difficult humanitarian situation worsened as a result of the war, widespread looting and subsequent insecurity. Significant extra resources were made available from the emergency reserve to tackle humanitarian needs in Iraq, as well as in Southern Africa. Other areas where major programmes were funded included Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, North Korea, the Palestinian Territories and Sudan, while particular attention was paid to meeting the needs of 'forgotten crisis' victims such as in Nepal, Northern Uganda and Myanmar. ECHO also responded promptly to a number of natural disasters, including the devastating earthquake that struck the Iranian city of Bam at the end of the year.

2003 once more confirmed that humanitarian aid operations, implemented in a volatile environment, are often unpredictable and subject to radical change. On the positive side, ECHO was able to phase out the last of its operations in the Balkans after 12 years, signalling the end of the humanitarian phase in this former conflict zone. The focus there is now firmly on longer term development programmes.

The European Commission's policy of linking relief, rehabilitation and development aid (LRRD) is designed to ensure an effective transition from emergency aid to longer term cooperation, and thus to maximise the effectiveness of its funding. ECHO paid close attention to this issue in its field operations and was also active in a Commission Interservice Group that proposed practical LRRD action for eight countries and two regions (Angola, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burundi, Cambodia, Afghanistan Tajikistan, West Africa and Central America).

During the year, ECHO participated in the debate leading to the draft Constitutional Treaty prepared by the European Convention. This included a specific provision on humanitarian aid in which it was stressed that operations should be carried out in accordance with the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular impartiality and non-discrimination. In the absence of agreement at the Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) on the draft Constitution, the issue was unresolved at the end of 2003. ECHO will continue to stress fundamental humanitarian principles and the importance of provisions designed to enhance and protect the "humanitarian space" in any future debate on EU external policy.

With a growing need to safeguard quality humanitarian aid in a changing environment, ECHO continued to

develop its "thematic funding" approach. Four decisions supporting the special mandates of major UN and Red Cross partners were taken. The conditions for allocating thematic contributions were that they provide added value in meeting humanitarian needs in the field, and that they strengthen the humanitarian community's response capacity (including coverage of staff security issues).

ECHO was a key player supporting the adoption in Stockholm, in June, of the Principles and Good Practices of Humanitarian Donorship. These confirm that humanitarian funds should be allocated in response to needs and on the basis of needs assessments. These principles are cornerstones of ECHO's own programming.

The Good Donorship Principles also call on donors to support the 2003 'Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to support UN Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies' (MCDA guidelines). ECHO organised the launch of these guidelines in conjunction with UNOCHA. This was an opportunity to underline ECHO's support for the philosophy underpinning the guidelines that humanitarian aid must keep its civil nature and be based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and non-discrimination. Reflecting its position as an active donor, ECHO chaired the Donor Support Group (the annual meeting of the ICRC's main donors) in June and hosted the Brussels launch of the UN Consolidated Appeals (CAP) for 2004 in November.

ECHO's relationships with its different partner groups are now fully governed by revised legal frameworks that focus on the definition of clear objectives and indicators to measure and assess the performance of operations financed by the Office (for more details, see the Director's message on page 2).

In addition to in-depth discussions on the instruments referred to in the preceding paragraph, ECHO maintained a close dialogue with its partners. The now traditional series of Strategic Programming Dialogues, in which ECHO and its main partner groups discuss common objectives and debate strategies, was held in the last quarter of 2003. These involved UN humanitarian agencies (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA and WHO), the Red Cross family (IFRC and ICRC) and NGO representatives. The meetings are designed to help consolidate ECHO's relationship with implementing partners and to promote coherence in humanitarian policies. The annual ECHO Partners' Conference, held in Brussels on 6 and 7 November, was another forum for extensive discussion with partners while ECHO also participated in meetings of the executive bodies of the UN agencies.

ECHO AT WORK

In brief

Finance and audit

ECHO's response to humanitarian crises in 2003 was channelled through 100 funding decisions totalling €600.3 million. €586.2 million was financed through the Commission's budget and €14.1 million was drawn from the European Development Fund.

Due to sudden and unforeseen crises as well as the worsening of existing ones, the initial budget of €441.7 million was reinforced on a number of occasions. The major changes were two transfers from the emergency reserve, the first for €79 million in April in response to the Iraq crisis and the second for €25 million in July as a result of the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Southern Africa.

799 humanitarian aid financing agreements were signed in 2003. The budget implementation rate, in

terms of commitments, was 100%.

There was a continuing emphasis on improving controls and standards to ensure that the resources managed by ECHO are properly and effectively deployed. 2003 saw a significant increase in the number of audits of external parties (partners and contractors) implementing ECHO funded activities. 120 were finalised and 24 were ongoing at the end of the year. These included audits both at headquarters and in the field. ECHO field offices are also subject to systematic audits, with six being carried out during 2003. An external firm is employed to carry out audits at partners' headquarters while field audits are undertaken by the ECHO audit team.

Evaluation

ECHO's focus on quality was also reflected in its evaluation activity covering geographical and thematic operations, as well the work of its implementing partners. All evaluations are undertaken by independent consultants.

As part of its core activities, ECHO organised evaluations of operations in Serbia, Sudan, Angola and Afghanistan. The evaluators found that the actions financed by ECHO in these countries were in line with its mandate. In some cases, it was suggested that ECHO place more emphasis, in its evaluations, on lessons learned with the adoption of more formal policies and specific standards.

ECHO also undertook an evaluation of cooperation with UNICEF, one of its key United Nations partners. This provided information about recent progress at UNICEF in areas such as information technology, and identified other potentially useful elements. For example, it was noted that UNICEF's supply division has considerable technical know-how that could be shared with other humanitarian actors. An important general recommendation was that ECHO and UNICEF should deepen their cooperative relationship, bearing in mind their common interest in helping children and young people affected by humanitarian crises.

As a part of the ongoing reform process, ECHO adopted new orientations for its evaluation section. These

involve working more closely with counterparts in EU Member States, being more involved in policy-making within ECHO and contributing to capacity-building among partners through the provision of information and tools.

In the first initiative of its kind, ECHO took part in a joint evaluation effort on IDP issues in collaboration with certain Member States and other humanitarian actors. All parties involved recognised the positive benefits of this approach in terms of both economies and synergies.

ECHO's approach to disaster preparedness was the subject of an in-depth evaluation that also provided models and tools for use by ECHO and its partners. The evaluators found that ECHO had been broadly successful in its disaster preparedness activities. Recommendations for the future included, in particular, the integration of disaster reduction into the LRRD process.

Finally, a review was initiated into standards and practices covering the security of humanitarian personnel as well as advocacy work designed to protect the "humanitarian space" in crisis zones. The aim is to provide specific documentation on humanitarian security issues for use by ECHO and its NGO partners.

ECHO AT WORK In brief

Information and communication

An updated information strategy was drafted in 2003 with a view to implementation during 2004-2005. This contains a series of adaptations and new proposals based on the objective of communicating the values, principles and achievements of EU humanitarian aid. During the year, ECHO sought to maximise the use of the internet and audio-visual media to promote its humanitarian message. The priorities reflected the demand for information about concrete projects and results, and about the workings of the EU's humanitarian aid system. Information products highlighted the role of ECHO in saving and preserving life during a humanitarian crisis – in accordance with its strategic objectives and mandate.

The ECHO website was continuously maintained and updated. Information posted included monthly eye-witness accounts and retrospective human-interest stories. In support of ECHO's objective to intervene in areas of greatest humanitarian need, special web sections ("In the field") were developed focusing primarily on high-needs areas where significant ECHO funding has been deployed. By the end of the year, the number of pages viewed monthly exceeded 100,000 and the figures were on an upward trend.

More attention was devoted to mass media outlets, with a view to appealing to a broader public. ECHO produced four series of video stockshots/documen-

taries featuring specific crisis zones (Afghanistan, the Balkans, Iraq and the Palestinian Territories) and a radio spot broadcast in the Middle East in French and Arabic. Media-related activities were organised in Athens, Brussels, Baghdad, Bangkok and Phnom Penh.

Publications in 2003 included the ECHO Annual Review, as well as brochures on ECHO's disaster preparedness programme, ECHO's 10 years in the Balkans, ECHO in Tajikistan, and on the ECHO-funded actions of NGO partners from Presidency countries. Several country specific leaflets were also produced.

Innovative information activities highlighting ECHO's role and objectives included a school education campaign in France and Germany undertaken in collaboration with UNHCR, billboard advertising (in conjunction with DG Development) at Brussels and Rome Airports and the broadcast of ECHO's information video at Roma Termini railway station (continuously for one week). Major preparatory work was also undertaken for a Youth Solidarity Day – to be staged in conjunction with the European Parliament in January 2004 – involving secondary school students from all fifteen Member States.

Training and studies

In the context of its operational partnerships, ECHO concentrated on providing in-depth training to ensure a smooth transition to the new legal framework referred to earlier in this section. A complete training programme was launched, to be completed in 2004, covering ECHO headquarters and field staff as well as NGO representatives.

Under the grant facility for training and studies, Oxfam-UK, Caritas-D and Solint-I organised seminars and training sessions, integrating them with the pub-

lication of CD-Roms and other learning materials. These activities will continue in 2004.

ECHO also continued to support the Network on Humanitarian Assistance (NOHA), which offers a one-year multi-disciplinary post-graduate diploma through seven participating universities. Students follow a curriculum that provides a comprehensive overview of the humanitarian aid environment. Their studies are complemented by an internship either in a humanitarian organisation or in ECHO.

Humanitarian funding by country/region

Afghanistan

Funding - €54 million

Since the end of major military action in 2002, almost 2.5 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran and a further 600,000 IDPs have gone back to their home areas. Meanwhile, new outbreaks of fighting in some areas have prompted further waves of displacement.

In 2003, ECHO provided substantial assistance for returnees and IDPs in the form of shelter, emergency healthcare, income-generating activities and food security measures. It also continued supporting Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran.

ECHO offered targeted support in southern and western Afghanistan where the effects of drought continued to undermine recovery efforts. Funds were used for drinking water, irrigation, primary healthcare and nutritional support. In mountainous regions, where severe winter conditions threaten vulnerable groups, almost 700,000 people were targeted for winter-needs assistance.

In addition, ECHO was active in improving the operating conditions for humanitarian organisations by funding air transport operations as well as an advisory security service for NGOs.

Algeria

Funding - €2 million

In May, a 6.6 magnitude earthquake struck northern Algeria, causing widespread destruction. Some 4,000 people were killed, 10,000 were injured and an estimated 200,000 were left without shelter. ECHO initially provided €1 million for immediate medical care and emergency relief. A second decision for €1 million was adopted in December to meet the ongoing needs of more than 10,000 families still living in temporary accommodation. Funds were also earmarked to strengthen health structures and provide psychosocial support.

Angola

Funding - €21.98 million

Since the end of the civil war in 2002, huge numbers of Angolans have returned home. ECHO supported the resettlement process, assisting more than two million people - both former IDPs and refugees returning from neighbouring countries. It funded a wide range of humanitarian projects including the provision of agricultural inputs (seeds, tools and livestock), emergency healthcare and essential household items as well as supporting demining, mine education and HIV/AIDS awareness programmes.

The above figure includes €13.9 million allocated in three separate humanitarian aid decisions for Angola during the year and €8.08 million from a €25 million regional decision for Southern Africa (see page 18)

Argentina

Funding - €1.39 million

Argentina's economic crisis had a serious impact on the health status of vulnerable groups. With food in short supply, many children from poor families faced malnutrition. ECHO helped finance a nutritional survey covering 31,500 households in northern provinces most affected by food insecurity. Basic food aid was supplied to approximately 12,000 people and 50 health centres received essential medicines. ECHO also assisted an estimated 15,000 people affected by floods that struck the Santa Fé area in April.



PACTEC provides a humanitarian air service for remote and otherwise inaccessible locations. © PACTEC

Reaching the most vulnerable

Access conditions are critical to the delivery of humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. With poor roads, harsh winters, and most importantly, rising insecurity, NGOs need a reliable and affordable air service to take them to remote and otherwise inaccessible destinations. As remoteness often goes along with vulnerability of the population, improved access for NGOs is vital for well-targeted humanitarian assistance.

ECHO has been supporting air operations in Afghanistan since 1996. With two ten-seater and one four-seater aircraft, PACTEC (Partners in Aviation and Communications Technologies), an NGO-based air service, offers regular flights to 17 destinations as well as a charter service for humanitarian missions. ECHO also provides funding for the ICRC's flight operations.

Thanks to PACTEC, ECHO was able to deploy quickly to Bam in neighbouring Iran, when the city was struck by a devastating earthquake on 26 December. This allowed needs to be assessed and aid to be despatched speedily to the victims.

Global reach

Burkina Faso/Niger

Funding - €0.945 million

ECHO supported meningitis vaccination and treatment programmes targeting an estimated 1.3 million people in Burkina Faso and 600,000 in Niger. In Burkina Faso, outbreaks of the disease in 2001 and 2002 killed more than 3,000 people and in 2003, recorded infection rates were three times higher than in the previous year.

Burundi

Funding - €15 million

Burundi continued to face an extremely precarious humanitarian situation. In addition to an estimated 300,000 deaths during ten years of civil war, almost a million people were displaced during the conflict. Large numbers fled to neighbouring countries but many remained as IDPs inside Burundi. Poor harvests in 2002 made the situation worse and by 2003, an estimated one in five Burundians was at risk of starvation.

The resettlement process, begun in 2002, was disrupted by fighting between the army and rebel groups. While insecurity continued to make access to humanitarian operations difficult, around 100,000 refugees have successfully been helped to return to Burundi in the last two years.

ECHO focused on reducing mortality and morbidity among the most vulnerable populations (refugees, IDPs, women and children). Funds were targeted at health and nutrition, food security, and water/sanitation.

In July, the National Liberation Forces (NLF), Burundi's second largest rebel movement, launched an attack on the capital Bujumbura. This provoked further population movements and ECHO played an important role in coordinating the humanitarian response. Towards the end of the year, the situation stabilised somewhat with the formation of a new transitional government which included three ministers from one of the main rebel groups.

Cambodia

Funding - €4 million

Although the humanitarian situation in Cambodia is no longer critical, many people are still threatened by natural disasters, instability and food insecurity. Only 26% of the population has access to adequate drinking water. In addition, the country has to cope with the lethal legacy of war in the shape of between four and six million mines and other unexploded ordnance. These represent a daily threat for the civilian population claiming more than 800 victims each year.

ECHO continued to fund emergency interventions and helped improve living conditions for vulnerable groups. Water and sanitation systems were rehabilitated and more than 200 new wells drilled. There was also financing for health actions, the provision of basic relief items, seeds and tools, and continuing demining and mine awareness activities.

140,000 Cambodians benefited from ECHO water and sanitation interventions and 500,000 people (including some 400,000 children) gained access to improved health services.

Chad

Funding - €2 million

By 2003, an estimated 65,000 Sudanese had sought refuge in eastern Chad, to escape internal conflict in their own country. ECHO supported these refugees with integrated emergency assistance. The main components of the aid were primary health care, water/sanitation, the provision of essential non-food items and measures to improve living conditions and security.

Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador)

Funding - €0.52 million

Serious environmental, economic and socio-cultural problems in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador have had an adverse effect on the food security of the poorest sections of society. Vulnerable groups faced food shortages and malnutrition, compounded by poor access to drinking water and insufficient healthcare. ECHO provided specialist training for up to 6,000 health workers with the aim of improving systems for detecting and treating malnutrition in the region.

China

Funding - €4 million

Landslides and floods in July left an estimated 4.5 million people in China without shelter and caused massive crop destruction. In some regions, more than 400 millilitres of rain fell in just over two days, prompting a major population displacement and causing extensive disruption to public services. Flooding also dramatically increased the threat from waterborne and epidemic diseases, particularly in remote rural areas.

ECHO funding helped meet the essential needs of the most vulnerable populations with a particular emphasis on providing emergency food aid and re-establishing basic health and education services.

Colombia and Ecuador

Funding - €8.206 million

The political situation in Colombia remained highly unstable with armed conflict still hampering recovery efforts. Although there was a substantial fall in the number of new IDPs recorded in 2003, around 182,000 people were nonetheless dislocated and with almost three million people forced to leave their home areas since 1985, Colombia still had the world's third largest displaced population. Many of these people live in shanty towns with inadequate water and sanitation facilities. Access to medical assistance is extremely limited in conflict-affected rural areas.

ECHO supported the ICRC's work in assisting recently displaced people (whether registered or not) with food aid for up to three months. It also funded the provision of complementary food assistance, building materials, improved water and sanitation, and psycho-social services. More than 150,000 newly displaced people benefited directly from ECHO funded projects in 2003.

Ecuador played host to increasing numbers of Colombian refugees during the year (approximately 1,000 a month). In response, ECHO contributed to the establishment of an effective protection mechanism for refugees in Ecuador.

Congo (Democratic Republic)

Funding - €44 million

The inauguration of a transitional government in July officially ended seven years of civil war in the DRC. While this offered an opportunity for establishing lasting peace the country still faced enormous humanitarian needs.

An estimated four million people have been displaced as a result of conflict, and years of fighting have devastated the health system, with the result that mortality rates attributable to common diseases such as malaria are soaring. HIV/AIDS is also growing rapidly. The health situation is exacerbated by widespread food insecurity.

In the past five years, ECHO has been the country's largest donor of humanitarian aid. In 2003, funds were deployed

Global reach

to alleviate the immediate suffering of vulnerable people and facilitate the resettlement of uprooted communities. Actions included the treatment of an estimated 60,000 malnourished children, while addressing the causes of the malnutrition by providing their families with food, seeds, and tools.

ECHO also supplied drugs, medical equipment and staff training, thus improving health service provisions for an estimated 4.5 million people in 55 health districts.

5 million was allocated specifically to Ituri District, where an estimated one million people have been affected by the fighting, including many who were forced to leave their homes.

Congo (Republic)

Funding - €4 million

The long-running conflict in the Pool region of the Republic of Congo has had severe consequences for the civilian population. Social and health structures have been destroyed and agricultural production severely disrupted.

ECHO helped improve living conditions for more than 200,000 vulnerable people affected by the conflict. Funds were used to provide food aid and healthcare, and to resettle displaced populations.

Following an Ebola outbreak in the Cuvette region in February, ECHO funded an integrated emergency operation which successfully contained the outbreak, provided urgent medical treatment and basic health training, and included measures to strengthen epidemic monitoring systems.

Côte d'Ivoire

Funding - €5.74 million

The humanitarian situation in Côte d'Ivoire remained very volatile following the internal conflict that broke out in September 2002. The fighting provoked substantial population movements and the country continued to be divided between Government forces and the "forces nouvelles" (former rebels). Public services in many regions, in particular in the north and west, were severely disrupted. A large influx of Liberian refugees as well as ethnic tensions further aggravated the situation.

Targeting conflict-hit areas, ECHO supported the resettlement and integration of uprooted populations, and activities relating to protection, health and nutrition.

Dominican Republic

Funding - €0.9 million

In November, severe flooding in the northern Dominican Republic caused widespread damage. 200,000 hectares of crops were destroyed and there was an increase in the incidence of epidemic diseases, notably dengue fever. ECHO provided an emergency relief package for some 65,000 flood victims, which included food aid and water/sanitation projects.

East Timor

Funding - €2 million

Floods and drought in the highlands of East Timor resulted in food shortages and malnutrition. ECHO funding enabled an estimated 120,000 people to meet their immediate food needs.

Eritrea

Funding - €1.3 million

The onset of a new and severe drought at the end of 2002 prompted ECHO to renew its activities in Eritrea. The lack of rainfall led to serious harvest shortfalls and

Protection for children

The conflict in Liberia exposed thousands of children and their families to human rights violations including rape, assault, abduction, forced recruitment into fighting forces and family separation. Displaced children - especially girls - have been abused when fleeing for safety, as well as in IDP camps, while vulnerability and poverty have also driven girls from low-income households into prostitution. Tracking the movement of people who have been driven from their homes is difficult because many have been displaced several times. In these circumstances, humanitarian protection and family tracing activities are vital.

ECHO is supporting a Save the Children UK project that traces separated children in the region and reunites them with their families. The scheme includes education on protection issues aimed at stimulating local communities to establish child welfare committees and take other concrete steps to protect vulnerable groups. Projects funded by ECHO also provide the most vulnerable victims of the crisis in Liberia with essential non-food items (such as clothing, cooking pots and water containers) as well as food, and basic medical care. This practical support is crucial for children and single mothers, who have no means of supporting themselves.



Girls playing a ball game in a transit centre for former child soldiers in Liberia.
© Simon Woods/Save the Children UK

widespread food insecurity. Tens of thousands of people faced water shortages and nutritional problems. ECHO funding helped meet the water, health and nutrition needs of drought victims.

Ethiopia

Funding - €2 million

The onset of severe drought led to the allocation of €4 million at the end of 2002 (reported in last year's Annual Review). These funds were deployed throughout 2003. More than 500,000 drought victims in the Afar, Amhara, Somali, and Oromiya regions were assisted. The main focus was on marginalised pastoralist communities who depend heavily on their livestock.

The drought exacerbated inter-ethnic conflict because of increased competition for scarce resources. To address the resulting humanitarian needs and ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions, ECHO provided €2 million to the ICRC for protection and healthcare activities.

Fiji

Funding - €0.42 million

In January, Tropical Cyclone Ami caused widespread damage in Fiji. More than 130,000 people were affected. ECHO supported emergency relief operations, providing food, shelter, access to drinking water and assistance for the repair of damaged infrastructures.

Global reach

Georgia

Funding - €2.2 million

Georgia, in the southern Caucasus, faced considerable and forgotten humanitarian problems, a legacy of the 1992 conflict in the autonomous republic of Abkhazia that led to the displacement of more than 250,000 people. Declining international support for the victims of this crisis meant that the essential needs of many people were not being met. ECHO funding was targeted at the basic food requirements of 58,000 of the most vulnerable people.

Haiti

Funding - €0.08 million

Torrential rains in August led to severe flooding in Haiti. ECHO provided urgent aid to an estimated 60,000 people affected by the disaster. Funds were used to purchase emergency relief items and medicines, construct water supply systems and restore health services.

India

Funding - €1.95 million

Since 1989, tens of thousands of people have been killed or reported missing as a result of the conflict in Kashmir, and more than 350,000 people have been displaced. The lack of security and widespread violence hinders humanitarian work and leaves much of the local population feeling isolated and vulnerable. The focus of ECHO's assistance was on providing drinking water, psychosocial support and non-formal education for both IDPs and the resident population.

Indonesia

Funding - €3.5 million

While overall security in Indonesia improved somewhat, difficult climatic conditions and epidemic diseases exacerbated the humanitarian situation in a number of areas. At the start of 2003, there were an estimated 590,000 IDPs still unable to return home. ECHO continued to offer protection to these highly vulnerable populations and to seek durable solutions for their resettlement.

In Aceh, continuing conflict provoked new population movements, limiting access by civilians to basic services. ECHO provided support for teacher training and health structures in war-affected areas. Since the declaration of martial law in May, humanitarian organisations have been denied access to victims of the conflict.

In West Timor, a two-year drought and reduced crop yields led to significant food shortages. ECHO responded with nutritional assistance, agricultural tools and seeds for the affected population. ECHO also helped improve living conditions and widen access to essential services for 50,000 former refugees (a legacy of the conflict in East Timor) and 7,000 local people.

Iran

Funding - €2.3 million

On 26 December, a 6.6 magnitude earthquake struck south-eastern Iran. In human cost terms, this was the world's worst earthquake for many years, with more than 26,000 people killed, a further 30,000 injured and 45,000 made homeless. In the city of Bam, 85% of the buildings were destroyed.

ECHO, through a primary emergency decision for €2.3 million, provided prompt assistance in the form of water purification equipment, food parcels, shelter, basic household items, support for local health services and the emergency rehabilitation of medical structures. ECHO was able to draw on funds from its 2004 budget to finance part of this decision.

During 2003, ECHO also continued to provide support for Afghan refugees living in Iran (see section on Afghanistan).

Iraq

Funding - €97.14 million

The Iraq war, and continuing insecurity following the end of formal hostilities, generated significant new needs in a country already facing severe humanitarian problems. War-related damage and widespread looting led to the collapse of many basic services.

ECHO supported the emergency assistance and protection programme of the ICRC, one of the few humanitarian organisations that remained operational during the war. ECHO also provided resources for emergency repairs, essential drugs and medical equipment, and contributed to the WFP's public food distribution system for the purchase and distribution of dry milk, not available under the UN Oil for Food Programme.

The provision of clean water and electricity were also severely disrupted by the war. Contaminated water supplies led to a sharp increase in the incidence of diarrhoea, cholera and other infectious diseases. Some areas suffered severe water shortages. ECHO intervened to support vital repairs to infrastructures including the rehabilitation of water and sewerage systems. It also funded water tankering operations and hygiene education. During the year, ECHO-funded projects restored and improved access to safe water for 1.5 million people.

€5.8 million was allocated for projects to dispose of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and related awareness-raising activities. Iraq reportedly has the world's highest rate of UXO accidents involving landmines (many of which are a legacy of past conflicts), bombs, shells and weapons stockpiles. Most of the victims are civilians and children are particularly at risk.

Since April, humanitarian operations in Iraq have been affected by the lack of security throughout the country. Many of ECHO's partners have nonetheless been able to continue delivering vital aid with the support of local staff.

Laos

Funding - €1.7 million

The resettlement of ethnic minorities and of people living in mountain regions has had major humanitarian consequences for already vulnerable rural populations in Laos. Natural disasters and imposed agricultural reform have added to widespread food insecurity. The situation is compounded by the continuing danger from unexploded ordnance (UXO).

More than 17,000 vulnerable people benefited from ECHO-financed operations in 2003. Funding was provided for water/sanitation projects and basic health training as well as UXO risk education and awareness activities in resettlement areas.

Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea

Funding - €24 million

In recent years, Liberia and Sierra Leone have suffered a series of conflicts, the effects of which have often spilled over into neighbouring Guinea.

In 2003, Liberia was the main focus of the latest bout of instability. In June, rebel groups launched major offensives on the capital, Monrovia, and other key cities. Up to 700 civilians were killed, some 71,000 people sought refuge in neighbouring countries and an estimated 450,000 were internally displaced. Basic services collapsed and food shortages were widespread.

While the signature, in August, of a peace agreement

Global reach

between the government and two rebel movements brought hope to the suffering population, significant needs remained in the aftermath of the fighting.

ECHO funded the provision of basic services and key commodities. Areas supported included healthcare, nutrition, water/sanitation, shelter, logistics, protection and the distribution of non-food items.

In Sierra Leone, where the overall situation continued to stabilise, ECHO assisted some 60,000 Liberian refugees together with local populations in the areas affected by the latest refugee flows. Support was also provided for the re-integration of an estimated 220,000 people returning to their home areas, having been displaced during Sierra Leone's civil war. In Guinea, which has hosted large numbers of people fleeing strife in the region in recent years, ECHO continued to provide integrated assistance for refugees, supporting their return home wherever possible.

Mali

Funding - €0.5 million

ECHO funded emergency medical treatment for an estimated 4,000 victims of a cholera outbreak. A further 500,000 people, considered to be at high risk, benefited from awareness-raising educational activities.

Middle East

Funding - €38 million

As a result of the conflict and the deadlock in the peace process, the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian Territories deepened during the year. Unemployment rates reached an estimated 50% and the number of people living in poverty rose to almost two million. Malnutrition among under fives was widespread.

Closures, house demolitions and other collective punishments by the Israeli authorities made life increasingly intolerable for ordinary Palestinians. Construction of a 'separation barrier' in the West Bank left many communities cut off from their farmland, wells, and medical and social services. Aid agencies faced complex problems in gaining access to those most in need and the cost of delivering humanitarian aid increased as a consequence of measures imposed by Israel.

In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, ECHO funds were directed at providing food, healthcare, water/sanitation, psycho-social support and protection to vulnerable people, as well as boosting job opportunities and household income.

To prevent malnutrition, ECHO financed nutritional programmes for more than 600,000 people. Jobs were provided to 10,000 workers, indirectly benefiting around 50,000. More than 250 health professionals were given training and equipment to assist pregnant women living in areas affected by movement restrictions. ECHO also supported activities by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) aimed at raising international awareness about the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian Territories.

ECHO also continued to support Palestinian refugees living in precarious conditions in neighbouring countries, whose needs are often forgotten. In Lebanon in particular, refugees are housed in overcrowded, unsanitary camps. Excluded from state support and most of the job market, they rely entirely on international assistance. ECHO-funded actions included employment creation, special healthcare for mothers, children and the disabled, and water/sanitation improvements.

Mongolia

Funding- €1 million

Mongolia has been hit by an unprecedented three-year sequence of severe winters followed by exceptional summer droughts. It is estimated that 2.5 million livestock have died as a result, with 665,000 people directly affected. ECHO funding reinforced the economic security of herder or ex-herder households, providing vital assets and tools. Measures to improve the food security of the most vulnerable sections of the population (particularly the urban poor) were also supported.

Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand

Funding - €11.56 million

The internal situation in Myanmar has led to an acute humanitarian crisis that particularly affects ethnic minorities, displaced populations, detainees and other vulnerable groups. The effects of the crisis are also felt in Thailand, where vulnerable minorities from Burma have taken refuge.

In 2003, ECHO provided €6.24 million to assist around 80,000 refugees living in ten temporary camps in Thailand, close to the Myanmar border. In addition to providing basic food aid, ECHO funded improvements to health, water and sanitation infrastructures and supported the relocation of a camp of 17,000 refugees.

In Myanmar itself, funds were provided to help vulnerable people, particularly in northern Rakhine state where malnutrition is widespread and health services are limited. ECHO funded medical assistance and protection for approximately 700,000 people. Treatment was also provided for 14,000 victims of acute malnutrition.

Elsewhere in Myanmar, ECHO helped to combat malaria through the supply of medicines and improvements to water and sanitation systems. More than 300,000 people are estimated to have benefited directly from these actions.



250 Palestinian refugees were provided with professional kits to start or expand their own economic activities.

© Première Urgence

Helping refugees to help themselves

Almost two thirds of the four million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East are hosted by countries bordering Israel. Many live in vulnerable conditions and their needs are often forgotten. In Lebanon, most of the 430,000 refugees are housed in overcrowded,

unhygienic settlements. Excluded from state support, they are also banned from working in more than 70 professions.

With ECHO support, the French NGO Première Urgence helped 250 refugees of the Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi camps in northern Lebanon, to start or expand income-generating activities, by providing them with 'professional kits' containing tools, machines and other equipment. Beneficiaries paid 15% of the kit value in return, once they had generated enough revenue.

Some opened small food-processing operations, restaurants or electrical and construction workshops. Others set up hairdressing salons or bakeries.

Once a casual worker, 20-year-old Ali Fatih el-Najar, is now a craftsman processing aluminium. He hired three employees and, four months later, had multiplied his income by six.

In total, the project secured jobs for 320 individuals - all breadwinners for their families - thus enhancing the self-reliance of more than 2,300 refugees.

Global reach

Nepal

Funding - €4 million

The plight of more than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan, who have lived in camps in south-east Nepal for the last 12 years, attracts little international attention. The refugees are caught in a legal vacuum, as neither Nepal nor Bhutan recognises them as citizens, and they rely entirely on external aid.

Over the last two years, the WFP has experienced increasing difficulties in providing food to the camp residents. Recognising that the interruption of supplies would have disastrous humanitarian consequences, the Commission allocated €2 million through ECHO for the purchase of food on local markets.

A further €2 million was provided to support victims of the conflict between Maoist insurgency groups and the Nepalese government. ECHO-funded interventions included protection activities for the civilian population, water and sanitation improvements and primary health care. Aid was focused on the mid-west region which has been particularly affected by the insurgency.

North Korea

Funding - €17 million

Since the early 1990s, humanitarian needs in North Korea have steadily increased. Frequent food shortages have resulted in widespread malnutrition and increased susceptibility to disease, particularly among children. The health system faces acute shortages.

In its €12 million global plan, ECHO maintained substantial support for the health sector, providing essential drugs, medical supplies and equipment to more than 1,400 health institutions as well as boosting blood transfusion services. Funds were also allocated to water and sanitation projects benefiting an estimated 300,000 people.

In December, ECHO provided an additional €5 million to meet the urgent nutritional needs of highly vulnerable groups. Funds were channelled through WFP to provide vital food supplements for 297,000 pregnant and breast-feeding women, and through UNICEF for therapeutic feeding programme targeting up to 70,000 severely malnourished infants in nine provinces.

Northern Caucasus

Funding - €26 million

The conflict in Chechnya has resulted in widespread physical damage and enormous human suffering. An estimated 80,000 Chechens are still exiled in neighbouring republics while a further 140,000 are displaced inside Chechnya.

ECHO provided substantial funding to help to meet the needs of more than 370,000 people affected by the crisis, both inside Chechnya and in neighbouring Ingushetia and Dagestan. This funding included construction of shelters for IDPs in Ingushetia as well as the provision of non-food items and protection activities for IDPs in all three republics. Primary health care for displaced people is provided free with a particular emphasis on children.

Other ECHO-funded actions included continued mine-awareness training in Ingushetia and Chechnya, improvements to sanitary conditions through the construction of latrines, water points and showers in IDP camps in Ingushetia, and access to potable water for residents of Grozny with a special focus on schools and health facilities.

Pakistan

Funding - €1 million

Severe flooding in July and August brought devastation to parts of southern Pakistan. ECHO responded with

emergency aid to help meet the essential needs of an estimated 40,000 vulnerable people. It also supported income-generating projects in the flood-affected area. During 2003, ECHO continued to provide support for Afghan refugees living in Pakistan (see section on Afghanistan).

Philippines

Funding - €1 million

Conflict between rebel factions and government forces again led to significant population displacements, notably on Mindanao. ECHO funded the provision of essential relief items for 31,000 displaced people living in camps on the island.

Sahrawi refugees

Funding - €5.14 million

ECHO continued to support the Sahrawi refugees who have been living in the desert in the Tindouf region of Algeria since 1975. Funding was targeted at basic needs including food, medicines, medical equipment, training and tents.

Serbia and Montenegro

Funding - €7.6 million

With continuing progress towards stabilisation and economic reform, ECHO's operations in the Western Balkans have been progressively scaled down. In 2003, it intervened only in Serbia, providing food and supporting durable solutions for refugees and IDPs.

This was ECHO's last humanitarian aid decision in the region in the context of the crisis resulting from the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. Accordingly, ECHO closed its office in Belgrade towards the end of the year.

Somalia

Funding - €9 million

The long-running crisis in Somalia continued due to armed conflict compounded by severe weather events. Needs are most acute in the areas of health and nutrition, the country's social services having long since collapsed. In 2003, it was estimated that 30% of Somalis had no access to healthcare and where facilities and personnel were available, they were often starved of resources. ECHO focused on improving access to effective health-care, drinking water and proper sanitation as well as reducing malnutrition.

Droughts, floods and fighting have also seriously disrupted livestock production, leading to food insecurity in many areas. ECHO supported projects to minimise the impact of climatic hazards on livestock, and to boost crop production through seed distribution and irrigation schemes.

In drought-affected regions, less than 20% of the population had access to safe drinking water. ECHO therefore focused on increasing access to clean water in remote rural districts and on improving sanitation facilities, especially in cholera-prone areas.

Southern Africa (excluding Angola and Zimbabwe)

Funding - €4.28 million

Southern Africa faced a complex crisis combining drought, economic and agricultural problems. The situation was compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic that has affected communities across the region.

In addition to major humanitarian operations in Angola and Zimbabwe (see pages 13 and 20) the Commission

Global reach

directed almost €4 million for targeted programmes in Zambia (€1.63 million), Malawi (€1.19 million), Swaziland (€0.91 million) and Lesotho (€0.25 million).

In Malawi, funds were provided for capacity building in 45 units providing treatment for severe acute malnutrition and for the expansion of community therapeutic care using locally produced 'ready-to-use' therapeutic food.

In Zambia, Lesotho and Swaziland, support was focused on nutrition, water/sanitation and health actions in favour of vulnerable groups affected in particular by drought and HIV/AIDS. The resources were drawn from a €25 million regional decision for Southern Africa adopted in August. ECHO also allocated €0.2 million from this decision on top of €0.1 million provided under an earlier emergency decision for urgent and follow-up relief to an estimated 12,000 vulnerable people affected by flooding in the Caprivi region of Namibia.

Victims of a forgotten crisis

In 2003, around 150,000 refugees from Myanmar (Burma) were still living in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, unable to support themselves and with no immediate prospect of returning home. Their situation rarely attracted international publicity but outside assistance has nonetheless been crucial to their survival.

ECHO supported the distribution of basic food items and cooking fuel in two refugee camps in Tak province, benefiting about 64,500 refugees. ECHO's partner, the Dutch NGO ICCO, worked in close cooperation with the local Burmese Border Consortium (BBC) in the implementation of this project.

Three key food items – rice, mung beans and soybean cooking oil – were supplied as part of the basic food basket for refugees in Mae La and Umpiem camps.

Since 1996, ECHO has provided more than €28 million in humanitarian assistance for Burmese refugees in Thailand. The bulk of the funding has been channelled into healthcare, water/sanitation facilities and food distribution.



Scene from a refugee camp on the Thailand/Myanmar border.
© Odile Minichetti, ECHO

Sri Lanka

Funding - €8.8 million

After 19 years of fighting, the ceasefire signed in February 2002 between the government and Tamil separatists brought new hope for peace. It was also the catalyst for large-scale population movements. 340,000 IDPs have now returned to their home areas but hundreds of thousands of others are still displaced. In addition, 62,000 Tamil refugees remain exiled in Tamil Nadu (India).

In 2003, ECHO assisted both refugees and IDPs as well as some 50,000 people who have returned home, focusing on nutrition and healthcare.

Up to a million unexploded mines are scattered across the former conflict zone. ECHO-funded mine disposal and awareness-raising operations have contributed to a reduction in the number of landmine injuries from 15-20 a month immediately after the ceasefire to between four and seven a month by the end of the year.

ECHO's support included €800,000 in emergency aid for victims of the flooding and landslides that struck southern Sri Lanka in May 2003.

Sudan

Funding - €22 million

At the end of 2003, hopes for peace in Sudan were higher than at any time since the civil war began in 1983. However, the conflict has resulted in the collapse of many basic services, leaving huge numbers of people dependent on international aid. Improved security also revealed the enormity of the humanitarian challenge in previously inaccessible areas.

Priority areas for ECHO funding were health and nutrition, water/sanitation, emergency preparedness and food security. ECHO also supported humanitarian logistics (transport and security), protection activities and family tracing.

A €2 million emergency decision was taken to assist victims of the escalating conflict in Greater Darfur. The funds helped meet basic shelter, health, nutrition, water and sanitation needs and supported measures to protect displaced people from security threats. About a million people were affected by the conflict but the majority could not be reached by aid workers due to insecurity and denial of access.

Tajikistan

Funding - €10 million

Tajikistan continued to face serious humanitarian problems during 2003, including a food crisis that left nearly 1.5 million people requiring emergency nutritional support. In addition, the incidence of disease, notably malaria, reached epidemic levels.

ECHO provided food aid for around 80,000 highly vulnerable people, financed water and sanitation projects benefiting more than 250,000 people and funded the supply of life-saving drugs to health facilities nationwide.

Tanzania

Funding - €24 million

For the past three years, the registered refugee population in Tanzania – coming mainly from Burundi and the DRC – has totalled approximately half a million. An estimated 500,000 others are unregistered, living outside the refugee camps.

ECHO provided continuing support for refugees living in 13 camps in the west of the country, who rely on UNHCR protection and depend on international aid. ECHO helped to maintain health services, with a focus on reducing the main causes of child mortality: malaria, pneumonia and neonatal problems. It also funded the provision of food, water/sanitation, shelter, infrastructure, education, protection and essential non-food items.

Uganda

Funding - €8 million

A complex humanitarian crisis developed further in Uganda. This was due mainly to internal conflict in the northern, eastern and central regions. The situation is complicated by the presence of refugees who have fled fighting in Sudan and DRC. An estimated 1.3 million IDPs now live in camps, dependent on aid from the international community. Insecurity limits access by humanitarian agencies to many vulnerable people. The crisis has, however, been attracting increasing international attention and ECHO now has more potential partners to help tackle growing needs.

ECHO funds were targeted at the most acute needs with an emphasis on health, nutrition, food security, water/sanitation and the supply of essential non-food items. Measures to help reintegrate former child soldiers into society were also supported.

Global reach

Yemen

Funding – €2 million

Yemen still faces significant humanitarian needs, notably in the health and water sectors. Malnutrition is widespread while malaria affects 1.5 million people, killing around 15,000 every year. 30% of the population has no access to safe drinking water. ECHO focused on improving mother and child healthcare in the most vulnerable rural areas. An estimated 180,000 people will benefit from projects to improve obstetric services and rehabilitate medical centres. ECHO also financed water supply improvements.

Zimbabwe

Funding €25.74 million

ECHO channelled substantial assistance to victims of the growing crisis in Zimbabwe. Supplementary, therapeutic and school feeding was provided to more than 600,000 children and almost 300,000 farming households received practical support including seeds, tools and fertilisers. Other actions included rehabilitation of water and sanitation systems in rural communities, HIV/AIDS awareness-raising projects and support for orphans and households headed by young people.

The above figure includes €13 million allocated in a specific humanitarian aid decision for Zimbabwe and €12.74 million from a €25 million regional decision for Southern Africa (see page 18)

Thematic funding

UNHCR

Funding - €11 million

ECHO recognises the importance of strengthening mechanisms to protect both vulnerable people affected by crises and the aid workers who are trying to help them. It therefore provided further 'thematic' support for UNHCR programmes aimed at boosting the protection of refugees and IDPs, improving registration and population data systems, and reinforcing operating security standards.

Refugee and displaced populations in crisis zones in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Northern Caucasus and Latin America, together with staff of the UNHCR and other partner organisations working in these regions, have all benefited from this support.

ICRC

Funding - €10 million

ECHO provided thematic funding for the programmes of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Support will go to ICRC projects for the protection of civilians, prisoners and detainees, separated families and victims of armed conflict around the world.

This funding was in addition to resources channelled by ECHO to ICRC aid programmes in its country and region-based humanitarian decisions described earlier in this section. ECHO's total contribution to ICRC activities in 2003 was €47.6 million.

OCHA

Funding - €1.2 million

ECHO supported the efforts of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to improve coordination between, and the quality of information available to, international humanitarian actors.

Funds were used to strengthen UNOCHA's regional support office for Central and East Africa, and to enable the Office to expand its Integrated Regional Information Network System (IRIN). This provides information about humanitarian crises, and conditions on the ground, to agencies working in 60 countries in Africa, central Asia and the Middle East.

UNICEF

Funding - €0.996 million

In recent years, unprecedented numbers of children have been drawn into active participation in conflict as child soldiers, while many more are victims in other ways. There is, however, a lack of reliable data on the numbers of children affected by armed conflict. This has created difficulties for agencies designing projects to address the specific humanitarian needs of children.

ECHO helped to fund research by UNICEF aimed at improving the quality of data in this area. Studies into the impact of displacement and participation in armed conflict will be carried out in Angola, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sri Lanka. ECHO will also support projects to improve methodologies and tools for data collection and to reinforce local research capacity.

Other funding

Disaster preparedness (DIPECHO)

Funding €12 million

The DIPECHO programme helps populations in areas at risk to prepare for natural catastrophes. Funds are allocated for training, capacity-building, awareness-raising and early-warning projects as well the organisation of relief services. During 2003, the Commission took four decisions under this programme totalling €12 million.

€4 million was allocated for projects to strengthen local response capacities in the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru).

€3 million was provided for disaster preparedness and mitigation in central Asia (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) where more than 5.5 million people have been affected by natural disasters in the last decade.

In South Asia, €2.5 million was allocated to train local authority staff, first aid teams and teachers, and to promote better communication between different specialised institutions. The funds were targeted at vulnerable communities and groups in Nepal, Bangladesh and northern regions of India.

In the Caribbean, ECHO provided €2.5 million to strengthen the capacity of communities to deal with various types of disaster. Activities were focused on Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

ECHO Flight

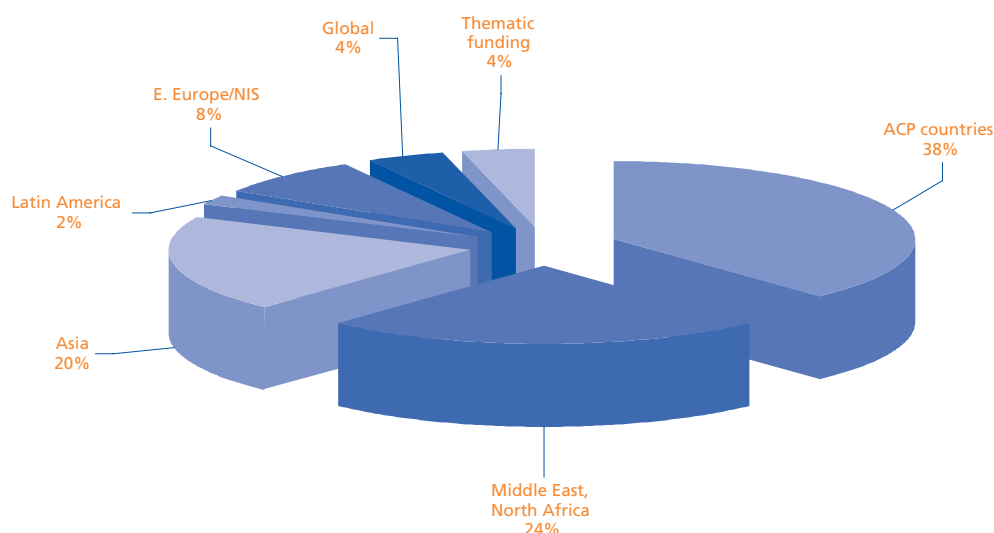
Funding - €8.4 million

ECHO Flight continued to provide free air transport for aid agencies operating relief and development programmes in Central Africa. Personnel and cargo were flown aboard scheduled services using a fleet of five light aircraft. In 2003, ECHO Flight carried almost 17,000 passengers, 339 tonnes of humanitarian cargo and more than 5,000 mail parcels to five destinations in Kenya, 18 in Somalia and nine in DRC.

Facts and figures

Financial decisions for humanitarian aid by region in 2003

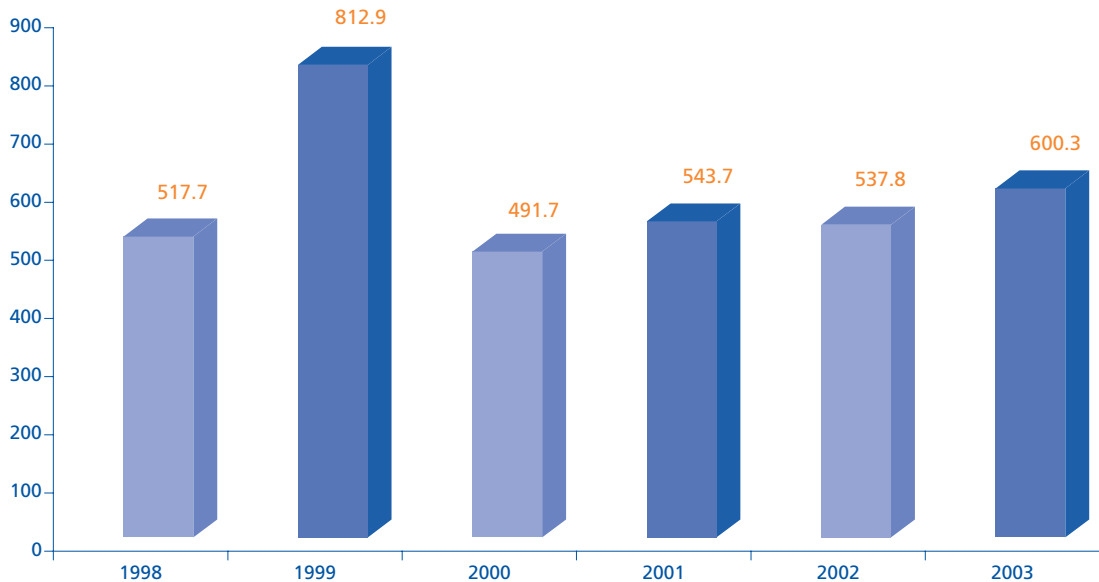
Country/sub-region	Decisions in € m	Country/sub-region	Decisions in € m
AFRICA, CARIBBEAN, PACIFIC	225.285	ASIA	116.949
Angola	21.980	Afghanistan/Pakistan/Iran	55.839
Burkina Faso	0.600	Cambodia	4.000
Burundi	15.000	China/Tibet	4.800
Central African Republic	1.000	East Timor	2.000
Chad	2.000	India	2.650
Congo (Democratic Republic)	44.000	Indonesia	3.500
Congo (Republic)	4.000	Laos	1.700
Côte d'Ivoire	5.740	Myanmar/Burma	5.320
Dominican Republic	0.900	Nepal/Bhutan	4.000
ECHO Flight	8.400	North Korea	17.000
Eritrea	1.300	Philippines	1.000
Ethiopia	2.000	Sri Lanka	8.100
Fiji	0.420	Thailand	6.240
Haiti	0.080	Regional (SARS)	0.800
Lesotho	0.250	LATIN AMERICA	10.111
Malawi	1.190	Central America	0.520
Mali	0.500	Colombia	8.000
Namibia	0.300	South America	1.591
Niger	0.345	DIPECHO	12.000
Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia	24.000	Andean Community	4.000
Somalia	9.000	Caribbean	2.500
Sudan	22.000	Central Asia	3.000
Swaziland	0.910	South Asia	2.500
Tanzania	24.000	THEMATIC FUNDING	23.196
Uganda	8.000	ICRC	10.000
Zambia	1.630	UNHCR	11.000
Zimbabwe	25.740	UNICEF	0.996
EASTERN EUROPE/NIS	46.860	OCHA	1.200
Mongolia	1.000	FIELD SUPPORT	16.917
Northern Caucasus (Chechnya crisis)	26.000	ECHO field experts	12.037
Serbia-Montenegro	7.660	ECHO field offices	4.880
Southern Caucasus	2.200	OTHER FUNDING	4.749
Tajikistan	10.000	Audits	1.310
MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA	144.282	Evaluation	1.234
Algeria	2.000	Information	0.624
Iraq	97.139	Training and studies	0.614
Middle East (Palestinian Territories)	38.000	Other	0.967
Western Saharan refugees	5.143		
Yemen	2.000		
		TOTAL	600.349



Facts and figures

ECHO financing decisions 1998-2003

(figures in € millions)



Organisations with an ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement

AUSTRIA: CARE ÖSTERREICH, CARITAS AUSTRIA, HILF-SWERK AUSTRIA-AUSTRIAN ASSOCIATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION, ÖSTERREICHISCHES ROTES KREUZ (RED CROSS), SOS-KINDERDORF INTERNATIONAL

BELGIUM: CARITAS SECOURS INTERNATIONAL, CROIX ROUGE DE BELGIQUE (RED CROSS), FONDS MEDICAL TROPICAL (FOMETRO), HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL, MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES-ARTSEN ZONDER GRENZEN-B, MEMISA BELGIUM, DIERENARTSEN ZONDER GRENZEN-VETERINAIRES SANS FRONTIERES-B.

CZECH REPUBLIC: CARITAS* (SDRUZENI CESKA KATHOLICKA CHARITA), PEOPLE IN NEED*

DENMARK: ADVENTIST DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF AGENCY (ADRA), ASF DANSK FOLKEHJÆLP, CARITAS DENMARK, DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL-DANSK FLYGTNINGEHJÆLP, DANSK RODE KORS (RED CROSS), FOLKEKIRKENS NODHJÆLP-DANCHURCHAD, MISSION OST

FRANCE: ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM (ACF), AGENCE D'AIDE A LA COOPERATION TECHNIQUE ET AU DEVELOPPEMENT (ACTED), AIDE MEDICALE INTERNATIONALE (AMI), ATLAS LOGISTIQUE, CARE-FRANCE, COMITE D'AIDE MEDICALE ET DE PARRAINAGE SANS FRONTIERES (CAM), CROIX-ROUGE FRANCAISE (RED CROSS), DIA, ENFANTS DU MONDE/DROITS DE L'HOMME (EMDH), ENFANTS REFUGIES DU MONDE, HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL/ACTION NORD SUD FRANCE, INTERAIDE, MEDECINS DU MONDE (MDM), MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES, MISSION D'AIDE AU DEVELOPPEMENT DES ECONOMIES RURALES (MADERA), PHARMACIENS SANS FRONTIERES COMITE INTERNATIONAL (PSFCI), PREMIERE URGENCE, CARITAS FRANCE-SECOURS CATHOLIQUE, SEC-

OURS POPULAIRE FRANÇAIS, SOLIDARITES, TELECOMS SANS FRONTIERES (TSF), TRIANGLE

FINLAND: FINNCHURCHAD, SUOMEN PUNAINEN RISTI (RED CROSS)

GERMANY: ADRA, ARBEITER-SAMARITER-BUND, CARE DEUTSCHLAND, DEUTSCHE WELTHUNGERHILFE/GERMAN AGRO ACTION, DEUTSCHER CARITASVERBAND, DEUTSCHES ROTES KREUZ (RED CROSS), DIAKONIE DER EVANGELISCHEN KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND, HAMMER FORUM EV, HELP - HILFE ZUR SELBSTHILFE EV, JOHANNITER-UNFALLHILFE EV, MALTESER HILFSDIENST, MEDICO INTERNATIONAL, WORLD VISION DEUTSCHLAND

GREECE: EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE, GREEK COMMITTEE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY, HELLENIC RED CROSS, INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES, KESSA DIMITRA, MEDECINS DU MONDE-GR

HUNGARY: HUNGARIAN INTERCHURCH AID*

INTERNATIONAL: INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES (IFRC), INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC), INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM)

IRELAND: CONCERN WORLDWIDE, GOAL, IRISH RED CROSS SOCIETY, TROCAIRE, WORLD VISION IRELAND

ITALY: ALISEI, ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA AMICI DI RAOUL FOLLEREAU (AIFO), ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA PER LA SOLIDARIETA TRA I POPOLI (AISPO), ASSOCIAZIONE PER LA SOLIDARIETA INTERNAZIONALE IN ASIA (ASIA), ASSOCIAZIONE VOLONTARI PER IL SERVIZIO INTERNAZIONALE (AVSI), CARITAS ITALIA, CENTRO REGIONALE D'INTERVENTO PER LA COOPERAZIONE (CRIC), COOPERAZIONE E SVILUPPO

Facts and figures

Organisations with an ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement

(CESVI), CISV, COMITATO COLLABORAZIONE MEDICA (CCM), COMITATO DI COORDINAMENTO DELLE ORGANIZZAZIONI PER IL SERVIZIO VOLONTARIO (COSV), COMITATO EUROPEO PER LA FORMAZIONE E L'AGRICOLTURA (CEFA), COMITATO INTERNAZIONALE PER LO SVILUPPO DEI POPOLI (CISP), COOPERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE (COOPI), COOPERAZIONE ITALIANA NORD SUD (CINS), COOPERAZIONE PER LO SVILUPPO DEI PAESI EMERGENTI (COSPE), CROCE ROSSA ITALIANA (RED CROSS), CUAMM, GRUPPO DI VOLONTARIATO CIVILE (GVC), ISTITUTO PER LA COOPERAZIONE UNIVERSITARIA (ICU), ISTITUTO SINDACALE PER LA COOPERAZIONE ALLO SVILUPPO (ISCOS), ASSOCIAZIONE UMANITARIA PER L'EMERGENZA (INTERSOS), ASSOCIAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE VOLONTARI LAICI (LVIA), MOVIMONDO, UN PONTE PER..., TERRE DES HOMMES ITALIA, VOLONTARI ITALIANI SOLIDARIETA PAESI EMERGENTI (VISPE)

LUXEMBOURG: CARITAS, CROIX ROUGE LUXEMBOURG (RED CROSS), MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES-L

NETHERLANDS: CORDAID, CARE NEDERLAND, HEALTH NET INTERNATIONAL, HET NEDERLANDSE RODE KRUIS (RED CROSS), INTERCHURCH ORGANIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (ICCO), MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES/ARTSEN ZONDER GRENZEN-NL, NETHERLANDS ORGANIZATION FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (NOVIB), SAVE THE CHILDREN-NL, ZOA REFUGEE CARE

NORWAY: NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID-KIRKENS NODHJELP, NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID-NORSK FOLKEHJELP, NORWEGIAN RED CROSS, NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

PORTUGAL: ASSISTENCIA MEDICA INTERNATIONAL (AMI), CRUZ VERMELHA PORTUGUESA (RED CROSS)

POLAND: POLISH HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION*

SPAIN: ASOCIACION PARA LA COOPERACION CON EL SUR LAS SEGOVIAS (ACSUR), ACCION CONTRA EL HAMBRE (ACH), ASAMBLEA DE COOPERACION POR LA PAZ (ACP), ASOCIACION NAVARRA NUEVO FUTURO (ANNF), CRUZ ROJA ESPAÑOLA (RED CROSS), CARITAS ESPAÑOLA, INTERMON, MEDICOS DEL MUNDO-E, MEDICOS SIN FRONTERAS-E, MEDICUS MUNDI ESPAÑA, MOVIMIENTO POR LA PAZ, EL DESARME Y LA LIBERTAD (MPDL), NOUS CAMINS, PAZ Y TERCER MUNDO (PTM), SOLIDARIDAD INTERNACIONAL (SI)

SWEDEN: CHURCH OF SWEDEN AID-LUTHERHJÄLPEN, ERIKSHJÄLPEN, PMU-INTERLIFE, SVENSKA RODA KORSET (RED CROSS), SWEDISH COMMITTEE FOR AFGHANISTAN

SWITZERLAND: MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES-CH

UNITED KINGDOM: ACTION AGAINST HUNGER, ACTION-AID, AGA KHAN FOUNDATION, BRITISH RED CROSS, CARE INTERNATIONAL UK, CATHOLIC AGENCY FOR OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT (CAFOD), CHRISTIAN AID, CONCERN UNIVERSAL, CHRISTIAN OUTREACH RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT (CORD), FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY-UK, THE HALO TRUST, HEALTH UNLIMITED, HELPAGE INTERNATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE, ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLDWIDE, MARIE STOPES INTERNATIONAL, MEDAIR UK, MERCY CORPS SCOTLAND, MEDICAL EMERGENCY RELIEF INTERNATIONAL (MERLIN), MINES ADVISORY GROUP (MAG), OCKENDEN INTERNATIONAL (OI), OXFAM UK, PLAN INTERNATIONAL UK, PROJECT HOPE, SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND UK, TEARFUND, WORLD VISION UK

* Eligible from 1 May 2004

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PEOPLE

Iraq

The curse of unexploded bombs and mines

Ali Mansour Mehdi's 2.2-hectare plot of land used to be a wealthy farm. The production of dates, chickens and cattle provided a living for 24 families. But since the war, work has been at a standstill and the 35 workers have been laid off. Located just a few kilometres south of Baghdad airport, the farm was blanketed with cluster bombs dropped by US warplanes.

"The explosions instantly killed our 10,000 chickens, and about 50 cows died later after stepping on unexploded bombs," recalls Ali Mansour. He stayed at the farm with the eldest of his four sons throughout the war. Everyone else was evacuated, returning after the hostilities had ended. They were soon to discover the terrible legacy of the air raid that missed its target. "One person died when he hit a bomblet while cutting the grass, and five others have been injured in similar incidents."

"Fifty per cent of the bomblets dropped on the farm did not detonate when they landed", explains Lance Malin. Lance is the Mine Action Programme Manager of Handicap International (HI), the non-governmental organisation that, with ECHO support,

is helping to clear Ali Mansour's farm. He continues: "The type of cluster bomb used here contains 644 bomblets, each the size of a small hand grenade and capable of killing two or three people."

Unexploded ordnance (UXO) – the general term that covers mines, bombs, shells and stockpiles of explosive devices – is one of the most critical humanitarian problems in Iraq. For years, landmines have contaminated much of northern Iraq and its borders with Iran, Turkey and Kuwait. The recent conflict has added significantly to the backlog of unexploded ordnance awaiting disposal, including new mines and cluster munitions. They not only constrain the ability of farmers to cultivate their fields but also pose a serious hazard to local communities.



Six hours a day, two five-member demining teams from Handicap International search painstakingly for unexploded cluster bombs on Ali Mansour's farm.

© Sébastien Carliez, ECHO



Mine risk education staff put up a billboard in Kirkuk. Hundreds of boards have been erected in northern Iraq to alert people to the dangers

© Mines Advisory Group

Since the beginning of the Iraq war, the number of casualties resulting from mines and UXO-related incidents has risen sharply, according to a recent UN study. Children are particularly at risk. The Mines Advisory Group (MAG), another ECHO operational partner in Iraq, has reported that more than three quarters of children’s injuries in the north of the country occur because they have been playing or tampering with unexploded devices.

Ali Mansour’s farm is one of the 200 sites identified as UXO-contaminated in and around Baghdad. Six hours a day, two Handicap International demining teams of five technicians search for cluster bombs in the fields. “Look up and watch out!” warns Emin Durakovic, one of the team leaders. Some bomblets are still stuck in date trees, and may well explode if they fall to the ground. Others are hidden behind fallen branches or buried 20 centimetres deep in the mud.

A 39-year-old Bosnian professional, Emin has neutralised hundreds of explosive devices over the last six years in UXO hotspots such as Kosovo and Macedonia. Donning his body protection suit and helmet, he tells us that sang froid and self-confidence are the keys to successful demining. Painstaking attention to detail is also vital. “Every morning, we test our magnetic detectors on deactivated bombs to make sure the machines don’t miss any live ones.”

Once bomblets are located and marked, their fuses are encapsulated with glue. They are then pulled with ropes into a disposal pit hole surrounded by

sandbags, to be destroyed later using electrical exploders. “It is a risky business at the best of times”, explains Lance Malin, “but it is even more dangerous in the summer as explosive munitions become extremely unstable in high temperatures.”

Two Iraqi liaison officers maintain permanent contact with the local community to ensure that they stay within secured areas. “Although families would like a quicker clearance of their fields, they have been very cooperative,” says Handicap International’s Jaafar Nazher.

After 11 days of operations at the farm, 185 unexploded bomblets have been found. “We need another four weeks to clear everything and hand the land back to the farmers so that they can start to cultivate again,” says Lance Malin.

In June, the European Commission adopted a €10m decision aimed at protecting people at risk from UXOs and mines in Iraq. Activities include collecting and disseminating information on locations where there are high concentrations of unexploded ordnance, developing local capacity through training, and mine risk education.

The decision also covered landmine safety training for other humanitarian agencies and support to identify, mark and clear hazards that prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid. Besides Handicap International and the Mines Advisory Group, ECHO’s partners for this operation were UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service), the Danish Demining Groups, Dan Church Aid, INTERSOS and Norwegian People’s Aid.

PEOPLE

Palestinian Territories

Food for impoverished families

Father of seven, 33-year-old Fawze Awad can no longer earn his living. A year ago, he was struck by bullets fired by Israeli soldiers and was left crippled. "I used to be a casual worker, striving hard to sustain my family," he says. "Now I can't even buy food. How can I afford new clothes for my kids to go to school?"

Like an increasing number of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Awad depends on international food aid. The son of a 1948 refugee and still considered a refugee himself, he is one of the 16,000 people living in Tulkarem camp, the second biggest in the West Bank.

Outside the United Nations offices in a busy street in downtown Tulkarem, Awad's wife and dozens of other women wait in line for a lorry full of food sacks to be unloaded.

Humanitarian needs in the Palestinian Territories have risen sharply since the end of 2000 and the start of the second Intifada. "About 80% of Tulkarem's refugees have been receiving emergency food rations," explains Mohammad Haykal, the camp services officer of UNRWA, the UN agency assisting Palestinian refugees. With ECHO

support, UNRWA distributes quarterly rations of wheat flour, oil, sugar, rice, chick peas and milk powder to most of Tulkarem's families. "It's their lifeline," says Haykal.

Refugees in the Palestinian Territories are not the only ones to have been affected by the crisis. Resident populations have suffered as well. Because of curfews and closures, many people cannot get to work and farmers' access to fields is hampered. According to the latest estimates, the unemployment rate in the Territories is somewhere between 53% and 67%.

The Abed Rabbo family belongs to this new class of Palestinian recently plunged into deep poverty. They live in Yatta, south of Hebron, one of the places worst affected by movement restrictions in the West Bank. The town is surrounded by Israeli



At a food distribution centre in the Palestinian Territories. With ECHO support, UNRWA distributes quarterly rations of wheat flour, oil, sugar, rice, chick peas and milk powder
© ICRC

settlements and their newly-built roads, and is sometimes completely sealed off by military-imposed closures. When it can be reached, it is best to do it on foot or on a donkey, wending one's way between the road blocks and tanks.

Until two years ago, the breadwinner in the household worked for a company on the other side of the "green line" that separates the West Bank from Israel. Now, he tries to support the family by selling recycled rubbish in and around Yatta. Eleven of the 17 family members living in the three-roomed house are children and the shortage of food has hit the young ones hard. Nisma, 5, and 2-year-old Manal are malnourished. The World Food Programme (WFP) has identified the Abed Rabbo household, and 1,000 other families with malnourished children in Yatta, as vulnerable. They

receive ECHO-funded food aid every month in the form of flour, olive oil, sugar, rice and lentils.

But fresh food and meat remain scarce. "We eat chicken only for special occasions," says Rasmiya, the mother of Manal and Nisma. "Many Palestinian families have had to change their eating habits, consuming cheaper and less protein-rich foods," explains Marc Regnault de la Mothe, WFP's programme officer for the Palestinian Territories.

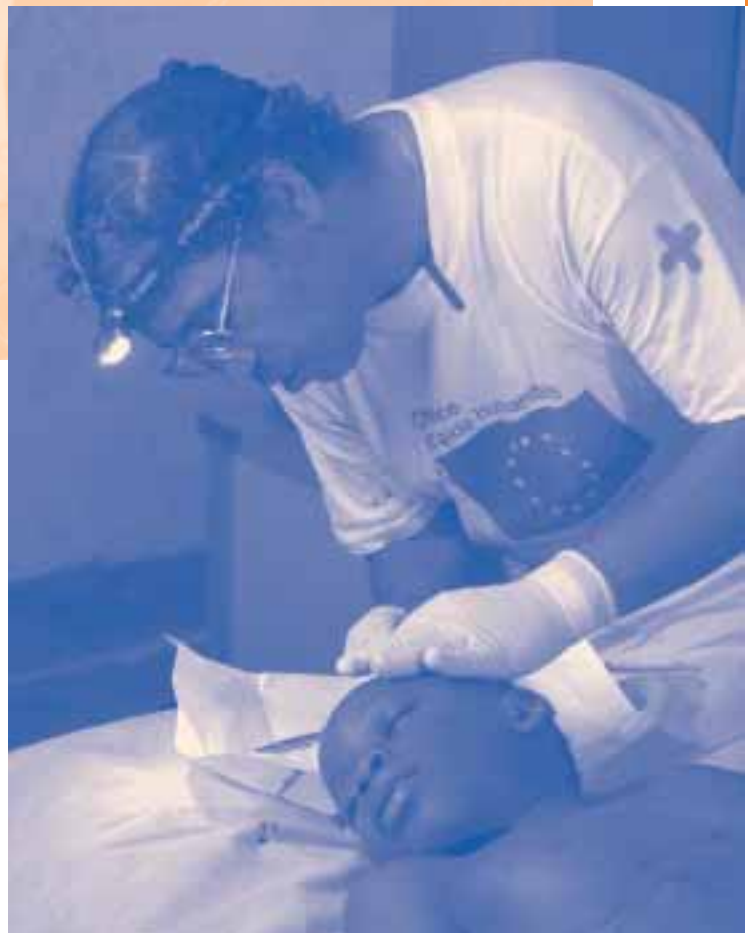
Malnutrition rates have increased throughout the Palestinian Territories. In Gaza, where the problem is particularly acute, ECHO has funded a similar WFP supplementary feeding programme for 5,500 malnourished children and their families.

PEOPLE

Democratic Republic of Congo

A haven for the wounded in Bunia

Bunia - the principal town of Ituri district in North-Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - hit international headlines in April when fierce fighting broke out between rival groups after the withdrawal of Ugandan forces. Here, Dr Victor Kibonge describes the humanitarian situation he found at the scene, and how he and fellow ECHO expert François Goemans helped to set up a clinic for the war wounded.



MONUC compound Bunia, 13 May 2003: Dr Victor Kibonge operates on young boy injured by shrapnel. © François Goemans, ECHO

By mid-May a large proportion of the town's population had fled and aid workers were forced to evacuate because of the worsening security situation. Civilians remaining in Bunia - estimated at no more than 15,000 - sought refuge in and around the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) barracks. Some became direct victims of the violence - killed or wounded by cross-fire or deliberate attacks.

When I arrived in Bunia, the humanitarian situation was critical. The hygiene conditions at the camp outside the MONUC barracks were deplorable, and there was a serious risk of epidemics. I was taken to the MONUC garden where about 20 wounded people were lying on a plastic sheet. I was asked to start operating immediately, but there was no medicine, surgical equipment or anaesthetic available. I called Kinshasa and Goma to order the necessary equipment - including blood for transfusion. It was brought in the next day on ECHO Flight.

Meanwhile, François Goemans went in search of a place to house and treat the wounded. He found a large abandoned administrative building in central Bunia measuring about 600 square metres. It was in a filthy state, and there was no water available

for cleaning. Despite these conditions, about 20 women from the refugee camp agreed to help us turn the place into a makeshift clinic. We broke down the door, emptied it of unwanted objects and cleaned it from top to toe.

After ten hours of non-stop work, the building was transformed into a clinic ready to receive its first patients - victims of stray bullets, ricochets and deliberate knife or machete attacks. I classed the most serious cases by type of wound, and other cases by types of medical problem.

François made telephone contact with ECHO's NGO partners and asked them to send in doctors. He also managed to find a local doctor in Bunia. The man was in shock because he could not find his wife and children, and his house had been looted. But when the doctor was brought to the clinic and saw the needs of the patients, he gradually mustered the strength to begin work.

During this time the fighting was intermittent and we were working under very dangerous conditions. Every time the clinic door opened I could see five or six young militiamen sitting across the square. We painted a large red cross on the building to show it was a hospital.

PEOPLE

Uganda

Betty's Story

Betty was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group when she was 16 years old. She was living with her mother in Anaka (northern Uganda) at the time. Betty's parents had divorced when she was still a baby. Betty was taken along with other children to an LRA base in south Sudan and given a 'husband' - an LRA fighter - on arrival.

The LRA regularly abduct children for use as fighters, porters and 'wives' in their combat against the Ugandan government. Under international law, girls who are used as 'wives' or sex slaves in combat situations are considered as child soldiers, even if they are not directly involved in combat. ECHO is funding the Italian aid agency AVSI to help re-integrate former child soldiers in northern Uganda into family and society. Betty is now one of about 1,400

children benefiting from this project.

"I really hated this man at first", Betty recalls, "but there was no way I could escape from him. In time, I started developing some affection for him because he was always with me. He was kind so I accepted him into my life. I even decided not to return home if I ever got the chance. I conceived and gave birth to a baby girl. We loved her dearly and did our best to bring her up in the harsh bush



Former child soldiers dancing at a rehabilitation centre in Kitgum, Northern Uganda

© AVSI, Uganda

environment. Then one day, the Ugandan Army (UPDF) invaded our camps forcing us to flee. I was separated from my husband. It was so hard fending for my child alone in Sudan that I decided to escape across the border back into Uganda.

I ran to Palabek in Kitgum District where my father lived. I managed to find his home, and fortunately he was happy to receive me. But after a couple of months my stepmother decided to send me to live with my mother. My mother lived many miles away and I was afraid of returning to the place where I had been abducted. I had nowhere to go.

Some kind people in the community told me that my paternal grandmother lived in Kitgum town. I went in search of her even though I had never met her. When I found her, she sent me to look after my aunt who is ill with AIDS. My aunt is not easy to live with. I do all the domestic chores and distil Waragi (local alcohol) for her business. After cooking for her I go and collect sand to sell in order to support my child and myself. But when I manage to sell the sand, my aunt usually takes the money from me to

buy her medicine.

Some neighbours told a community volunteer counsellor (CVC) about my situation. The volunteer came to talk to me and recommended that I should join the AVSI psychosocial support program. The training I have received in business skills has opened my eyes and broadened my thinking. Now I know that there are many good things I can still do with my life. I have met some friends at the workshop who have been through experiences similar to mine. Seeing them has encouraged me to work hard and overcome the daily challenges. I'm determined to generate some money to start up a small business on the market. When my business succeeds, I shall start living on my own but continue supporting my aunt."

Crisis Zones

Sudan

The twenty year-long conflict in Sudan between the Government and southern opposition groups has resulted in over two million deaths. About four million people have been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere in the country. Many others have also been compelled to flee across the border into neighbouring countries. A chronic lack of basic services has left large numbers of Sudanese dependent on emergency relief aid. Meanwhile, a series of natural disasters such as floods and drought have exacerbated what was already a serious humanitarian crisis.

Despite the positive development of the cease-fire signed in October 2002, and the ongoing peace

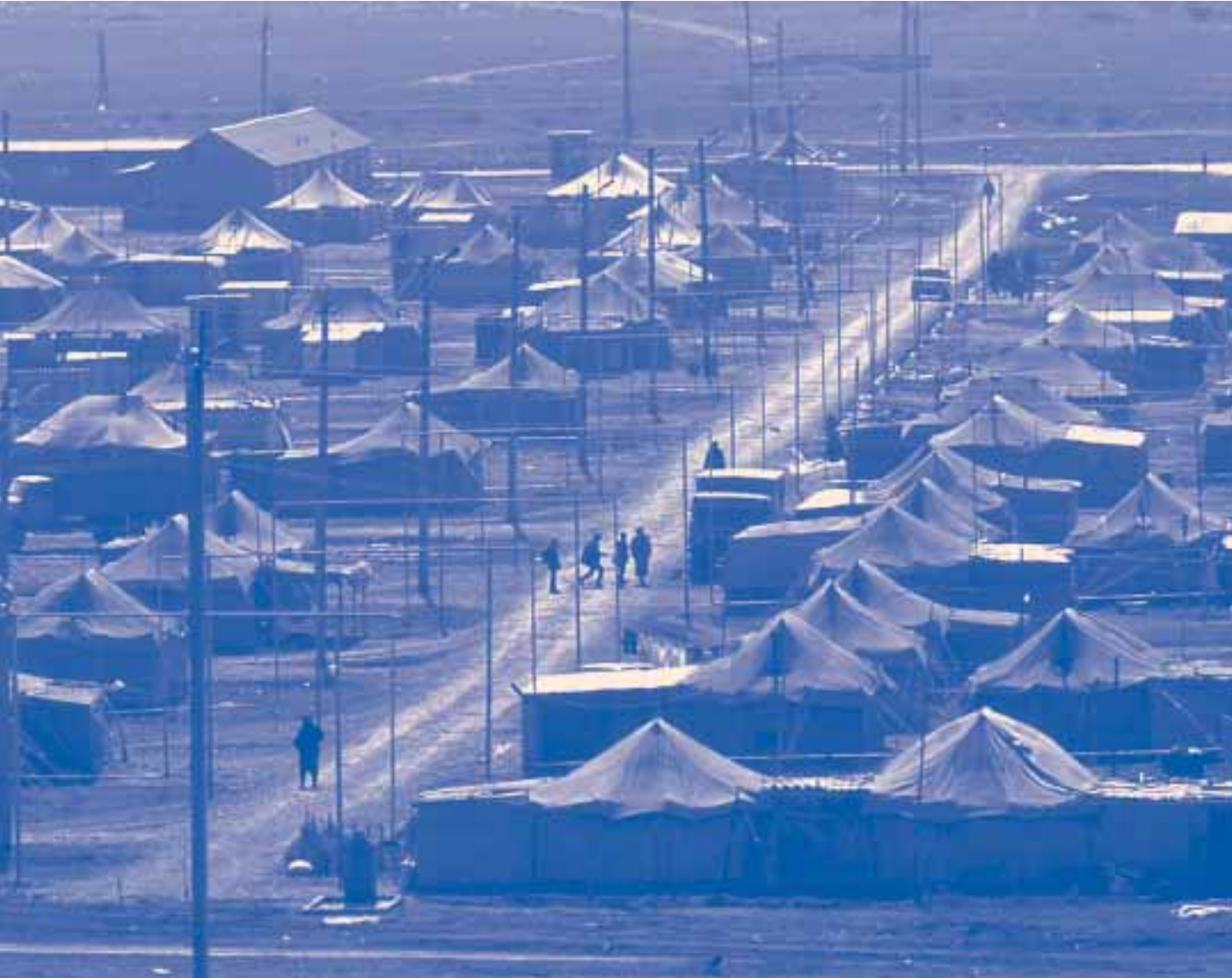
negotiations, the humanitarian situation in large parts of Sudan remains precarious in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The situation in the Eastern region of Darfur deteriorated dramatically in 2003. About a million people were affected by the conflict, but insecurity and the denial of access to aid workers meant that most could not be helped.

In 2003, ECHO-funded aid was delivered to vulnerable groups across the whole territory – North and South – in accordance with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. An estimated five million people benefited.



A doctor treats a sick baby in an ECHO-funded clinic in Yei, Southern Sudan. This marshy area has the highest incidence in the world of a number of diseases (River Blindness, Sleeping Sickness, Kala Azar, Poliomyelitis and Guinea Worm).

© Sven Torfinn, 2003



Alina Camp in Ingushetia, set up by UNHCR in 2000 for people displaced by the conflict in Chechnya

© UNHCR/T. Mazkeeva

Crisis Zones

Northern Caucasus (Chechnya conflict)

In autumn 1999, tent camps were set up on the territory of Ingushetia to host people who had fled the Chechnya conflict. Four years later, there were still around 70,000 people displaced in Ingushetia living in precarious conditions (a further 10,000 were in Daghestan). Chechnya itself continued to be plagued by insecurity and intermittent conflict, resulting in ongoing and widespread human misery. To assist people most affected by the conflict in Chechnya, and those displaced in Ingushetia and Daghestan, ECHO financed a substantial humani-

tarian programme in 2003. This covered a wide range of activities including the provision of basic foodstuffs to more than 500,000 people, free healthcare for the most vulnerable (especially mothers and children), water and sanitation activities, the provision of education for primary school-children and psychosocial assistance. In Chechnya, the implementation of programmes has proved to be particularly difficult due to the continuing insecurity and access restrictions for humanitarian staff.

Crisis Zones

North Korea

North Korea continued to face significant humanitarian needs during 2003 with no end in sight to the country's structural economic crisis. The health system is in a particularly poor state, with crumbling infrastructures and chronic shortages of basic equipment and medical supplies.

In these situations, children are always among the most vulnerable. While accurate statistics are difficult to obtain, the WFP estimates that around one in five children in North Korea are underweight. Insufficient medical provision, a lack of access to clean drinking water, poor sanitation, and reduced resistance caused by inadequate nutrition all

undermine the health status of the population in general and its youngest members in particular. The suffering reaches a peak during the country's harsh winters, when electricity is only available for a few hours every day, fuel is scarce and warm winter clothing is in short supply.

In humanitarian actions supported by ECHO, the emphasis has been on meeting the basic health and nutritional needs of highly vulnerable children, breast-feeding mothers and pregnant women. Overall, more than seven million people benefited from ECHO-funded programmes in 2003.

Children in North Korea are particularly prone to illnesses during the harsh winters.

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About ECHO

Humanitarian action worldwide

ECHO is the European Union's Humanitarian Aid Office, a service of the European Commission under the direct responsibility of Commissioner Poul Nielson.

Since 1992, **ECHO** has funded relief to millions of victims of both natural disasters and man-made crises outside the EU. Aid is channelled impartially, straight to victims, regardless of their race, religion and political beliefs. **ECHO** works with around 160 operational partners, mainly organisations that have signed a framework partnership agreement with the Commission. Its partners include specialist United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

ECHO is one of the biggest sources of humanitarian aid in the world, providing more than € 600 million in 2003. **ECHO's** funding, taken together with the aid allocated by EU Member States separately, makes the European Union the largest donor of humanitarian aid in the world. Since it was set up, **ECHO** has supported projects in more than 100 countries. The funds are spent on goods and services such as food, clothing, shelter, medical provisions, water supply systems, sanitation, emergency repairs and mine clearing. **ECHO** also funds disaster preparedness and mitigation projects in regions prone to natural catastrophes.

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ACRONYMS

CAPS	United Nations Consolidated Appeals for Humanitarian Crises
DIPECHO	ECHO's disaster preparedness and prevention programme
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid Office
EU	European Union
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement (between ECHO and its operational partners)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network (UNOCHA)
LRRD	Linking relief, rehabilitation and development
MCDA	Military and Civil Defence Assets
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
NOHA	Network on Humanitarian Assistance
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

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