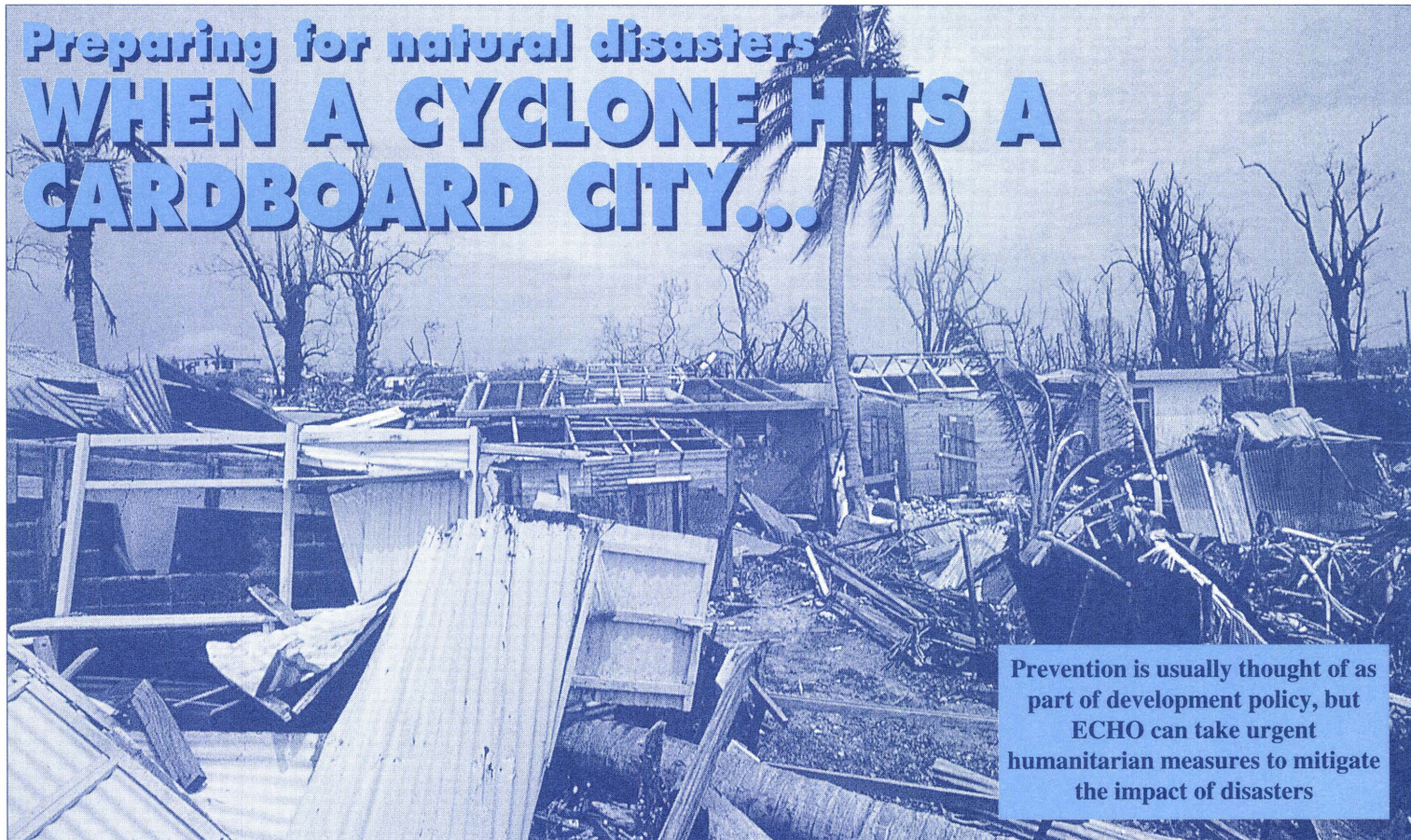


## Preparing for natural disasters **WHEN A CYCLONE HITS A CARDBOARD CITY...**



Prevention is usually thought of as part of development policy, but ECHO can take urgent humanitarian measures to mitigate the impact of disasters

*"Find somewhere to hide!" That's about the only advice it's practical to give people in Haiti when a cyclone is approaching. Every time a tropical storm strikes — and the Caribbean saw no fewer than 27 of them in 1995 — the loss of life and the damage are terrible. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in this part of the world, so the losses are all the more serious, because the government cannot afford an effective prevention and aid policy. In November 1994, Cyclone Gordon unleashed its full force on a "cardboard city" in Port-au-Prince. The damage it inflicted on this shanty town was appalling... yet sadly predictable.*

Because of a lack of means, prevention of natural disasters is not a priority in a less developed country such as Haiti. After all, it cannot even feed its own people. Large-scale disaster prevention, which may involve switching to better construction techniques, are usually seen as development issues. However, ECHO believes the consequences of natural disasters can be mitigated by adopting emergency humanitarian measures. In Haiti, for instance, as of next October, ECHO is funding actions to boost the capacity of the Haitian Red Cross's emergency and first aid services. The goal is to improve the effectiveness of this organisation when hurricanes and cyclones strike. Set up by France's Red Cross, the project initially aims to train Haitian instructors in Martinique. A training centre will later be created in Port-au-Prince.

### **Reducing the number of victims**

There is a clear link between projects like this and ECHO's humanitarian activities. Besides reducing the number of victims, prevention measures keep down the cost of first aid and reconstruction operations. This project is a good illustration of the disaster prevention

strategy ECHO has adopted — supporting organisations active in high-risk areas with a view to reinforcing their ability to cope when disaster strikes.

### **Training for professionals**

Since 1994, ECHO has supported many specific prevention projects in the following three areas :

- **Personnel training** : for instance, instructors working in Nicaragua have been trained to improve earthquake preparedness among schoolchildren
- **Strengthening institutions and organisations active in the field** : for instance, in Sahel countries, local radio stations have been equipped and their staff trained to include warning and prevention messages about droughts, cyclones, floods, locusts and other hazards in their broadcasts
- **Financing of pilot microprojects** : for instance, construction of a raised platform serving as a refuge during Bangladesh's seasonal floods, designed as a model for similar shelters. ECHO aims to help people to help themselves. Finding appropriate low-cost, low-tech solutions to recurring problems is the name of the game.

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To date, ECHO has supported projects in response to specific requests from NGOs, international organisations and agencies of the United Nations. It is now becoming more involved in the field of disaster prevention. This is a way of following up successful actions already undertaken, taking into account the fact that development policy is often not sensitive enough to the needs of prevention planning. A new programme, DIPECHO (Disaster Preparedness ECHO), was launched in July with the support of the European Union's Member States. As well as responding to ad hoc requests for funding, ECHO will now prepare regional action plans. ECHO will also choose appropriate organisations that can implement programmes which ECHO will manage.

To focus its efforts and improve effectiveness, ECHO has selected four regions for which action plans will be drawn up: the Caribbean, Central America, South-East Asia and Bangladesh.

## Why choose these ?

The Caribbean is especially vulnerable to cyclones, which sweep across the region every year. Though death tolls are sometimes higher elsewhere, this region was chosen because of the frequency of tropical storms which devastate small, less-developed islands regularly. The region still has special relations with at least four Member States, which will improve coordination of available resources. Central America is prone to four types of disaster: earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods and violent

winds. Here too, the impact of catastrophes is amplified because of the sheer scale of poverty (over 80% of the population), substandard constructions and the concentration of people living in high-risk areas.

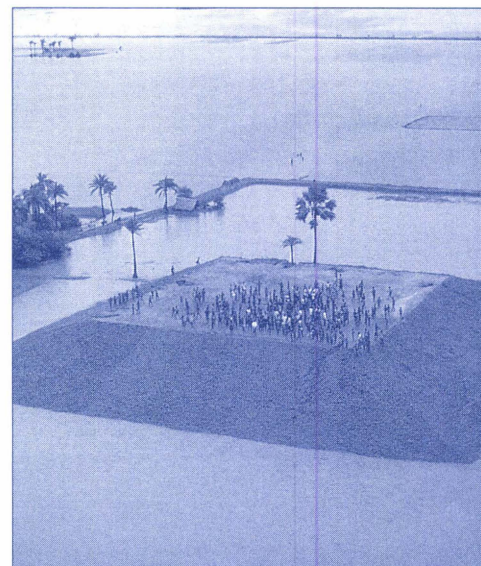
Of all the world's regions, South-East Asia (including Bangladesh) is undoubtedly the most vulnerable when it comes to natural disasters. It is here that the highest death tolls are recorded as a result of catastrophes, many of which are recurrent.

## The diagnosis

ECHO is to draw up action plans for these three regions. Before doing so, it will evaluate risks and current responses in each area. The objective is to spot any gaps and to make best use of existing resources. DIPECHO will be implemented in close collaboration with local organisations and external help from Member States. This should help to streamline the European Union's activities in this specialised work, making them more focussed and effective. Disaster prevention is a vital link in the chain between emergency humanitarian aid, rehabilitation and development. So ECHO's action plans will have to fit in with development plans for each region in question. It is no longer enough simply to cover short- or medium-term needs.

## Network of prevention experts

Besides action plans, ECHO intends to set up a network of experts. This will provide access to reliable structures when setting up projects. The network will be developed by the Centre



ECHO finances pilot microprojects : here, construction of a raised platform serving as a refuge during Bangladesh's seasonal floods, designed as a model for similar shelters

for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at the University of Leuven in Belgium and will bring together experts, institutions, techniques, non-governmental organisations and study groups working in the field of disaster prevention.

Elsewhere in the world, ECHO will continue to fund projects in response to specific requests from NGOs or international organisations. Ten new projects, worth a total of two million ECU, have just been selected. Most of these will cover regions not included in the action plans, notably Africa and South America. "As far as preventing, mitigating and preparing for catastrophes goes, the new pro-active approach reflects the importance ECHO attaches to this type of action. The DIPECHO programme meets the growing need to evaluate risks in order to reduce loss of life and damage to property," said ECHO desk officer Jean-Claude Heyraud.

# Women of Srebrenica : one year later, in Tuzla

## Coping after the massacre of their men

*On 11 July, 6,000 women from Srebrenica gathered in Tuzla to commemorate a terrible anniversary. One year ago to the day, around 1 pm, they got just five minutes to gather together their young children and board buses. They were not even allowed to say goodbye to their sons and husbands, whom they would never see again. At the same time, 8,000 men and boys disappeared from the so-called UN safe haven. Almost all of them were executed.*



The women of Srebrenica embroidered the names of their missing husbands and sons on a giant banner

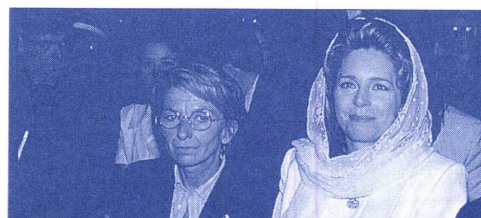
A group of women, all international figures, went to Tuzla this year on that anniversary. Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, and Queen Noor of Jordan were among those determined both to keep alive remembrance of this tragedy, and to support the women from Srebrenica. Speaking during the commemoration, Bonino said: "We can give food parcels to those who need them, but we cannot distribute the will to survive in the same way." ECHO has recognised this and has financed psychosocial support projects for people traumatised by the war in the former Yugoslavia since 1993. Commissioner Bonino announced further support amounting to two million ECU for projects run by five NGOs active in Tuzla. Most of the women of Srebrenica now live in Tuzla, following the fall of the enclave of Srebrenica.

## Serious traumas

A recent survey conducted among women of Srebrenica showed that they have experienced an average of eight highly traumatic events over the last few years. These include the death or disappearance of members of their family, detention in concentration camps, continual food shortages, witnessing executions, witnessing or experiencing rape or torture, prolonged isolation and moving from place to place. Since arriving in Tuzla, these women have had to live with constant anxiety about what happened to their husbands and sons. About 80% of them suffer from severe depression. A roof over their heads and regular food supplies are a start in



kindling a will to live, but they need more support than that. Many NGOs financed by ECHO offer psychological support and medical help. Some of the most successful activities are those involving group workshops, at which women get together to make handicrafts which can then be sold. Such activities help women to reintegrate within society at large, and also give them a means of contacting and exchanging experiences with other women who have been through similar traumas.



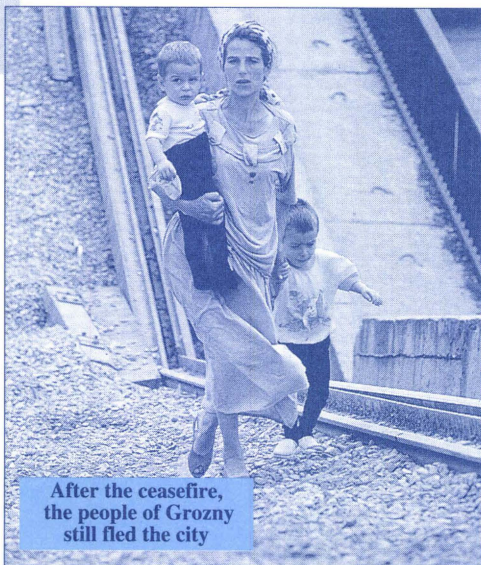
Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, with Queen Noor of Jordan



# ECHO's global reach

## RUSSIAN FEDERATION: CHECHNYA GROZNY : CALM AFTER THE STORM

Houses bombed, rocket fire, menacing Russian tanks and armoured cars, hand to hand combat right in the centre of the city : from August 6 until a few days ago, people in Grozny have been living in fear of their lives. On August 16, Alexander Lebed, Russia's national security chief, negotiated a tentative ceasefire. Civilians took advantage of the lull to flee the city, fearing more air raids. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 23,000 Chechens have taken refuge in the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan, bringing the number of displaced people living in these two republics to 100,000.



After the ceasefire, the people of Grozny still fled the city

On August 31, an accord to end the 20-month war was reached, a big step on the road to peace after the loss of over 40,000 lives. But there is still much to be done to put an end to this conflict for good. ECHO is following the situation on the ground very closely, both in Chechnya itself, and in neighbouring republics. It is putting together a major package of aid for civilian victims of this conflict.

## IRAQ

### KURDS CAUGHT IN FIGHTING

In Iraqi Kurdistan (North Iraq), the political situation remains very unstable due to tensions between the two main Kurdish factions (PUK and PDK), not to mention frequent armed incursions from neighbouring countries (Turkey and Iran). Civilians are the first victims. That is why ECHO continues to support organisations active in the field and working to meet needs in health, food aid, rehabilitation, resettlement of those displaced, mine clearance, refugees, drinking water and purification, and education. One specific example: ECHO has funded a central dispensary in Erbil, ensuring the region receives medicines and basic medical equipment despite the destruction of infrastructure.

ECHO also continues to finance mine clearance operations in the northern mountains, a region infested with millions of anti-personnel mines. Specialists estimate it will take between 40 and 50 years to rid the country of these terrifying devices, which will go on killing and maiming for years. ECHO has also been active in central and southern Iraq since 1992, providing substantial aid in sectors such as health, food for children, pregnant women and the old, as well as rehabilitation of drinking

water systems. A United Nations resolution to allow Iraq to sell oil for food and medicines has been suspended at time of writing. ECHO is following the implications for humanitarian aid. Meanwhile, the Commission in July approved a package of humanitarian aid worth nine million ECU for Iraq.

## UPDATE

As we went to press, the United States had launched a series of controversial missile attacks in response to Saddam Hussein's attacks on the Kurds in the north of Iraq. The towns of Erbil and Sulaimanya have been badly hit.

## HAITI

### THE BIG ISSUE : HEALTH

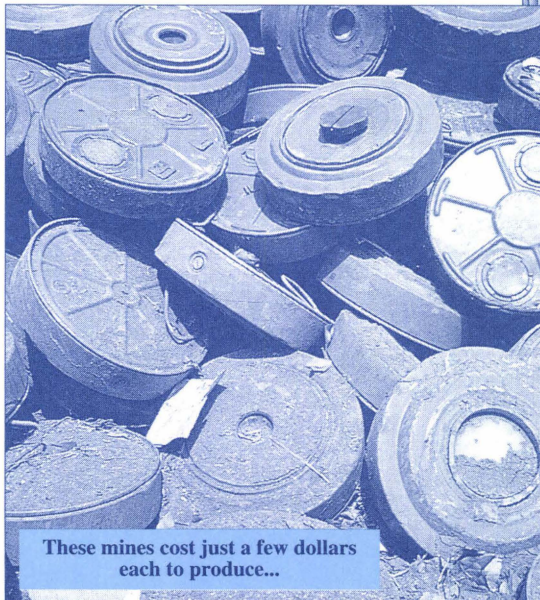
Humanitarian aid is still crucial to people in Haiti, many of whom are living in miserable conditions. They lack food, as local producers are not growing enough to meet demand. Infant mortality and death in childbirth statistics are alarming -- and the condition of the rest of the population is poor too. ECHO's prime objective here is to improve health. At the end of July, the Commission took a decision to earmark 10 million ECU in funding for Haiti with this in mind. The idea is to look after those with severe malnutrition, providing essential medicines and medical cover for some of the worst affected and most isolated areas. ECHO funds will also be spent on rehabilitating clinics and reorganising hospital services. ECHO works closely with Haiti's Ministry of Health, and is hoping to pave the way for development programmes dedicated to long-term strategies once the need for humanitarian aid diminishes. This new funding takes into account the particularly difficult situation in Haiti and covers a one-year period, unlike the usual type of shorter humanitarian projects.

## Diary of a mission to Asia — dateline Cambodia ■ LANDMINES : A POLITICAL MINEFIELD

Emma Bonino, Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, visited Thailand, Cambodia, Burma and India this summer. Here is an extract from her diary.

‘On Monday August 5, I go to Cambodia. The biggest problem in this country of 11 million people is mines — about eight million of them, everywhere. Each of these devices costs just a few dollars. It costs thousands to render them harmless. But it's not enough to cost the work of a de-mining specialist to do them justice. You have to see them at work, patiently defusing a weapon that could blow them to bits, to appreciate what they're doing. The Cambodia Mine Action Centre, which is working with experts from all over the world in Cambodia, shows me round. They say there's no alternative to the painstaking method they use to clear mines. Mechanical mineclearers never do the job completely. They can be used to clear the way for troops to go in, but they are not reliable enough to be used on land where civilians are going to live and work. There you have to be sure people are not going to step on a landmine. About 300 victims a month do in Cambodia. Children usually die. Adults lose limbs. Handicap International (Belgium) is providing artificial limbs and helping to rehabilitate people. In the past four years, ECHO has given over 10 million ECU for Cambodia, and a further eight million ECU have

come from other budget lines at the Commission. Here, as elsewhere, I come up against the limits of humanitarian action — we in the west spend huge amounts on clearing mines and rehabilitating victims, but we can't reach international consensus on abolishing their production, sale and use. Demining is a Labour of Sisyphus, and humanitarian aid is a figleaf covering the impotence of politicians....’



These mines cost just a few dollars each to produce...



...but the damage they do can ruin young lives for ever

# Network on Humanitarian Assistance Course THE PROFESSIONALS: NOHA STUDENTS LEARN CRISIS MANAGEMENT SKILLS



The need for practical experience is vital when it comes to managing a crisis in the field

"I thought it would be a good idea to combine theory with practice, to become more professional as a humanitarian aid worker," said Christopher Hepp, who has spent the past year studying. "For instance, I had no idea about international law relevant to this work. I'd qualified in medicine." Hepp, 34, from Germany, signed up for the one-year Network on Humanitarian Assistance (NOHA) postgraduate course after working in the refugee camps of Goma, Zaire, in 1994, right after the bloodbath in Rwanda, and in Tanzania during 1995.

Convinced that humanitarian operations can and should be better run, he divided his academic year between the Universities of Bochum in Germany and Bilbao in Spain.

The NOHA course, launched in 1993, is also taught in Britain, France and Belgium. Topics covered include law, management, geopolitics, geography, anthropology, medicine and anthropology. Hepp came to Brussels for an optional three-week module entitled SOS 96 —Sante dans les Operations de Secours (Health in Emergency Actions).

## SOS course

The SOS course, taught by Dr Pierre Perrin of the International Committee of the Red Cross, was an intensive week of practical training at the Centre for the Epidemiology of Disasters, Universite Catholique de Louvain. It was intended to give health professionals the tools to evaluate and manage emergency situations such as those that occurred in Ethiopia, or in the Philippines when Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991. Students are confronted with problems, and work out solutions together. "It's a very active way of learning," said Perrin, who was teaching his 23rd session, and has worked with universities in both Europe and the United States. "European universities tend to be too theoretical. Pure theory's not very useful in the field," he remarked.

Both Hepp and Dirk De Schrijver from Belgium, another NOHA student, responded very positively to the teaching methods. "He really knows what he's talking about, he's been everywhere," De Schrijver said. Trained as a teacher, De Schrijver has worked in development

projects for 22 years, in Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Kenya and Tanzania. Now 48, he decided to take a year off to review his experience and develop as a worker "somewhere between development and emergency action". The verdict on the year as a whole? Both students were solidly behind the principle of training professional all-rounders for fieldwork. CRED's director, Professor Debarati Guha-Sapir, has many examples of blunders that could have been avoided if workers had been better trained. For instance, in Bangladesh, hungry disaster victims were sent dried potato labelled in a language they did not understand. They thought it was detergent.

## Disaster tourists not wanted

Well-meaning amateurs that think emergency assistance is an exotic sort of charity work are not wanted in the field any more. Competition for jobs is tough. But Hepp felt the balance of the course erred too much on the side of theory. Those who graduated last year had a hard time getting a job unless they had prior field experience, he noted. He would like to see NOHA help the profession develop to the point where key non-governmental organisation staff work on contracts longer than the current six-month to one-year stints, allowing them to alternate between field work and HQ. "As it is, young people flow through, and their experience is lost as they move on to what they see as real life and a steady job."

Hepp starts a posting as ECHO Correspondent, Goma, in October 1996.

Further information on NOHA: a leaflet is available from ECHO Information.

Further information on SOS:  
International Committee of the Red Cross, Medical Division/SOS, 19 Avenue de la Paix, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland.  
The University of Bochum has a NOHA page on World Wide Web at <http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/www-public/fischhcy/6.htm>

## ECHO AWARDS FOR BEST TV AND RADIO REPORTING

ECHO has launched an open competition for all radio and television companies based in the European Union. Awards will be made for the best coverage of humanitarian affairs. They are intended to highlight the vital role broadcasters play in raising public awareness of humanitarian issues. Entries are invited in six categories reflecting the range of ECHO's activities.

The categories are :

- **PEOPLE ON THE MOVE** : the humanitarian consequences of sudden or forced population movements;
- **IN THE MINDS OF PEOPLE** : the psychological consequences of trauma on individuals and communities in crisis situations;
- **FORGOTTEN CONFLICTS** : long-running crises that are often overlooked by the media;
- **VULNERABLE GROUPS** : the hazards facing women, children and the elderly during and after conflicts and emergencies;
- **BROADCAST COMMITMENT** : award to a TV or radio station demonstrating its commitment to humanitarian causes, either by launching a programme series or by covering a particular crisis.
- **RADIO AWARD** : for incisive, analytical coverage of an emergency or humanitarian crisis.

Closing date for entries : 19 September 1996.

Winners will be announced at a reception in Dublin, on 9 December 1996, hosted by European Commissioner Emma Bonino and Irish President Mary Robinson.

For further information, please contact:

ECHO Radio and TV Awards secretariat  
MEDIA NATURA

26/34 Emerald Street, London WC1N 3QA.

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## OLYMPIC GOLD FOR CHILDREN IN WAR ZONES

For the first time ever, the Olympic ideals of peace and cooperation have inspired a fund-raising campaign known as "Atlanta Olympic Aid 1996", for children in 10 war-torn countries. ECHO responded to the call by donating five million dollars -- the largest contribution -- to a mass vaccination campaign involving 18 million children. UNICEF will implement the project.