

HUMANITARIAN WORKERS UNDER THREAT

ICRC/Yannick Muller

While rebel forces were progressing, the last remaining aid workers from international organisations have been evacuated from the Tingi Tingi camp in Eastern Zaire. As ECHOnews was going to press, no more humanitarian workers remained in this region, even though their assistance there is so desperately needed. The first casualties of this situation are the hundreds of thousands of refugees, cut off from assistance, forced to flee again to escape combats.

The situation is extremely insecure in the Great Lakes region. Eight aid workers have come under attack in Rwanda in recent weeks. Three Spanish volunteers working for the NGO Medicos del Mundo have been killed, as well as a Canadian missionary and four UN human rights observers. Last December, six ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) employees were cold-bloodedly murdered in Chechnya, inside the hospital where they were working. The humanitarian community has been dealt a bitter blow and is now left with a feeling of impotence and despair. It is hard to understand why anyone should want to attack

"IT IS NOT RIGHT TO GIVE IN TO BLACKMAIL"

Emma Bonino
Commissioner for humanitarian aid

"Humanitarian workers and human rights have now become targets in areas of conflict. In Chechnya and Rwanda, we have seen the forces of chaos at work, using assassins as weapons in their determination to hold civilian populations hostage, depriving them of any humanitarian assistance. I pay tribute to all those people who have lost their lives taking part in humanitarian missions. More courage than ever is needed to undertake these sorts of missions. It is not right to risk the lives of our employees but nor is it right to give in to blackmail. The international community is responsible for the safety of humanitarian workers and for ensuring the aid gets through to the people in need"

unarmed individuals whose sole aim is to relieve the suffering caused by strife.

An easy target

We have to face up to the facts: in the Great Lakes Region, in Chechnya, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and in Liberia, humanitarian workers have become the target of those seeking to spread terror to serve their own interests. This situation is a far cry from the time when governments worthy of the name did indeed engage in wars but still

agreed to hold their fire to let Red Cross volunteers through to attend to the wounded on both sides. The nature of conflicts has changed since the end of the Cold War. What we are seeing now is unstructured internal ethnic conflicts, involving five, six or even seven warring factions. They are no longer State armies but militias, armed gangs led by local warlords answerable to no-one. There is a proliferation of firearms which are falling into the hands of bandits and often even children like in Liberia, thus creating an extremely dangerous situation.



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Persona non grata

These different factions ignore or openly flout international humanitarian law and have no qualms about attacking humanitarian workers so as to be able to make off with food and medical supplies, vehicles and communication equipment and they are prepared to carry out a sustained campaign of intimidation in a bid to force the foreigners to pull out. Says Pilar Estebanez, Chairperson of Medicos del Mundo - Spain: "We have become embarrassing witnesses, *persona non grata*, for those wishing to conceal what is really going on in their countries". According to her, "the attacks against humanitarian workers are perpetrated according to pre-defined strategies designed to scare and intimidate the volunteers so as to keep them away from troubles spots. Those carrying out the attacks want to be able to attack with impunity, without control, without witnesses, without any proof of the crimes committed against the civilian populations". NGOs do not have, and will never have, the means to repulse this kind of armed aggression, so they are compelled to withdraw. The first casualties of a decision to pull out are the civilian populations so desperately in need of assistance. In places such as Somalia or the former Yugoslavia during the war, humanitarian workers had to rely on army convoys for protection in the midst of situations where anarchy reigns. As a result, they have lost their traditional neutral role and have had to contend with charges of being on the side of one or the other faction. The ICRC took the exceptional step of having its relief convoys placed under military protection in Somalia. It was not a



Noel Quiró

Aid under military protection ?

convincing exercise and the negative effects soon became apparent. The experience in Somalia certainly did not offer any clues to finding a solution to the problem of how to guarantee protection for aid workers. We are still left with the question of how humanitarian organisations are supposed to adjust to this new situation, one that can undermine all their efforts, notwithstanding the scale of the relief operation set in motion and the dedication of the workers. There is a very big questionmark indeed hanging over the ability of humanitarian organisations to continue being neutral in ever-more complex and increasingly politicised conflicts. Can we continue to play the game of those who make war by feeding Hutu militiamen in the refugee camps or handing part of the supplies to one of the belligerents to leave convoys through in Bosnia?

There cannot be many people left who are foolhardy enough to volunteer to expose themselves to high-risk situations on the ground. There is a pressing need to rethink the whys and wherefores of humanitarian aid. With armed gangs stepping in to the vacuum left by the disintegration of

central authority, and humanitarian ideals flouted by protagonists behaving like criminals, humanitarian initiatives can no longer be undertaken according to the old tried and tested methods. When violence becomes a political strategy and reaches such a pitch that whole populations are at risk, the solution can no longer be just granting humanitarian aid to satisfy one's conscience. The only way to deal with bloody massacres and acts of genocide is through political action, backed up by military muscle if need be. The international community has to act without delay, in line with its commitments under the UN Charter.



Photo Medicos del Mundo

The three Medicos del Mundo employees who were cold-bloodedly murdered in Rwanda: Luis Valtuena Gallego, Maria Flors Sirera Fortuny and Manuel Madrazo Osuna. Says Dr Manuel Diaz Olalla, a member of the MDM Executive Committee: "They were three exceptional professionals, committed to lending assistance to the Rwandan people, and motivated solely by a bond of solidarity with people who are suffering".

"IF WE TAKE REFUGE IN BUNKERS, WE WILL LOSE CONTACT WITH THE VICTIMS"

Cornelio Sommaruga - President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Interview by Isabelle Brusselmans

Last December 17, six ICRC employees, five of them women, were cold-bloodedly murdered inside the hospital where they were working in Novy Atagui in Chechnya. This crime stung the ICRC into suspending its activities on the ground. Three other ICRC employees lost their lives in Burundi last June.

Are ICRC workers faced with greater risks than ever before?

Between 1942 and 1990, fifteen ICRC employees lost their lives whilst on a mission. Over the last six years, since the end of the Cold War, 18 of our staff have been killed. ICRC humanitarian activities are of course fraught with risk, and volunteers know this only too well. The ICRC came into being in the midst of war and is called upon to carry out its missions amidst the background of war. Consequently, there is never a risk-free situation. However, the danger is exacerbated when common crime becomes entangled in the conflicts.

Do volunteers need a different type of training?

The training does not need to take a different form but it does have to be made more intense so volunteers are better able to recognise political contexts and integrate themselves more effectively into local cultures and traditions. Technically speaking, it would be impossible to do any more than we are

doing now. After the tragedy, we straightaway assembled all the heads of the delegations to make sure they were fully aware of their responsibilities: it is up to them to make an efficient assessment of the risk inherent in each operation. And if the risks are too high, officials are entitled to call off an operation.

Does the ICRC intend to review its basic approach given the new situation?

Our humanitarian action on the ground has to remain neutral. We do not want to have to depend on armed forces for our protection. If we take refuge in bunkers, we will lose contact with the victims. The only exception to the rule is the protection we accept for our warehouses, to prevent pillaging. We nonetheless plan to intensify the debate so to be able to meet the new challenges facing humanitarian action. I intend to ask all the members of the humanitarian community to take part in this debate.

What are the main ideas to be discussed?

We are planning to appeal to the governments of countries belonging to the Geneva Conventions to urge them to accept joint responsibility for enforcing the provisions contained therein. They have to be taken seriously. Work has to be continued on trying to set up a Permanent International Criminal Court. Criminal proceedings have to be instituted against people guilty of war crimes. This instrument has to act as a deterrent.

HUMANITARIAN LAW AND DOMESTIC CONFLICTS

International humanitarian law is reflected in the Geneva Conventions that have been ratified by States. In most of the present-day conflicts, government has broken down and a myriad of factions are locked in combat. The result is sheer anarchy and chaos, as was underscored by the events in Somalia between 1992 and 1993. As for the question of enforcing international humanitarian law in the context of a domestic conflict, the legal precedents are sorely lacking. It is of little importance to civilians whether a conflict is an international one or not. It is of no concern to them whether a bomb they have just stepped on was placed there by their compatriots or the army of another country, nor if they are under attack from "friendly" or enemy fire. They are, however, entitled to ask why the warring factions in their own country use combat methods and resources that are banned under international law (see "the role of the ICRC in the application of International Humanitarian law by Toni Pfanner, in "Law in humanitarian crises", published by ECHO).



ECHO's global reach

PALESTINE

ECHO lends support to health establishments

As a result of successive decisions by the Israeli authorities to seal off the Occupied Territories and the recent dramatic events that have succeeded in unsettling the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, living conditions for the Palestinian people have deteriorated in all respects. Now in charge of public health concerns, the new Palestinian Authority is finding it an uphill struggle trying to cope with its new responsibilities. To ensure the Palestinian people may continue having access to health care, ECHO is supplying medicines and equipment to a large number of hospitals, clinics and specialist centres. ECHO has also made a contribution to the setting up of a laboratory for assessing and checking locally manufactured medical products. The laboratory is needed to guarantee that the medicines distributed to the Palestinian people are of the right quality



Tordai/FSP/Gamma

Living conditions for the Palestinian people have deteriorated in all respects

and conform to the requirements. It will also allow the local pharmaceutical industry to get off the ground. ECHO is due to take a decision (involving ECU 7 million) on the continuation of the programmes under which it is planned to carry out a major campaign to vaccinate children. ECHO is also providing ECU 3 million in aid to help improve the extremely worrying health situation for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

ANGOLA

Regions finally opened up

As a result of the Lusaka agreements, humanitarian organisations have begun entering wide areas of Angola that were hitherto sealed off from the outside world and they now have a better idea of the extent of the damage inflicted on the country during 20 years of bitter fighting. Very many people are living in abject poverty, bereft of primary health care, drinking water, basic education and even essential goods, such as soap or salt. The destruction of lines of communication, mining facilities, the lack of public services and the rapid spread of infectious diseases have all conspired to create a humanitarian situation that continues to be a source of grave concern. The humanitarian aid the Commission has been channelling into Angola since 1992 has helped spare thousands of lives and even paved the way for development initiatives in areas such as Planalto, but succour continues to be urgently needed in very many areas of the country. ECHO and DG VIII have decided to work out their support strategies together in a bid to ensure more efficiency and consistency. ECHO has just adopted a comprehensive

programme of support for the Angolan population. Endowed with an ECU 14 million budget, the programme is mainly focused on health care and will seek to reopen rural hospitals, particularly in regions that have been beyond the reach of international aid for a very long time. One of the key aims of humanitarian operations in Angola is to help make some regions of the country more accessible.

TAJIKISTAN

A country brought to its knees

Against the background of an already dire economic situation, the civil war that started to become decidedly uglier last year has now succeeded in bringing the country to its knees. A large section of the population is only just managing to survive. Children and elderly, the most vulnerable citizens, are suffering from malnutrition. Medicines are unobtainable, apart from those supplied by humanitarian organisations. Power shortages amidst freezing temperatures have prompted schools and even a number of hospitals to close down. Add to this bleak picture: political instability, a very harsh climate, rough terrains and poor lines of communication, all of which put a heavy strain on the humanitarian effort. Food, health care, shelter and education needs are barely covered. ECHO has decided to focus its effort on medical and food aid. A comprehensive programme worth 10 million ECU is in the making in a bid to deal with the most urgent needs: support for hospitals and distribution of flour, sugar and oil to the most vulnerable people.

Report by an ECHO correspondent in Southern Bosnia

Bosnia-Herzegovina

STOLAC : THE RETURN THAT IS YET TO HAPPEN

Sophie Quintin, ECHO Mostar

Since being assigned to Mostar, I have been in charge of monitoring the ECHO/Danish Refugee Council contract designed to refurbish 100 houses in Stolac. And I am the witness of what has become a familiar story of the unlikely return of 100 Muslim families. Sponsored by the UNHCR as part of an international Dayton-related agreement, the project seemed to be sliding into the mire. Within the shade of its trees, mosques and Austro-Hungarian buildings, the tiny city was an oasis of peace in the bleakness of Herzegovina. When I first went there, Drazan, my assistant, showed me the spot where a 16th century mosque stood before hostilities broke out. This was my first contact with the stomach-churning reality of what was meant by "cultural cleansing". The pain of cultural cleansing was written in the faces of the men and women who, notwithstanding the misfortunes, wanted to keep on believing they would return home one day. They were a tiny portion of humanity whose faces are normally hidden behind the statistics for this Balkan crisis.

Nine families rejected

January 31, 1997 was supposed to be a happy day. But a hostile crowd was waiting in Stolac for the convoy to arrive. Stones were thrown, the expressions were hard and cold,

there where cries of hate: that was the "spontaneous" reaction of the displaced Croats from Central Bosnia. The families set off again for Mostar with what few goods they had. SFOR troops were there in force but their sizeable presence did nothing to change the course of events. A few figures: an ECU 900,000 budget to renovate 100 homes in Stolac, a pre-war population of 18,681, 43% of which were Muslims, a present-day population of 9,175, 100% Croats, and in canton 7-Neretva, the UNHCR put the number of displaced people at 72,371. On that Friday, as the bright sunshine poured down on the scene, the international community found itself impotent to help nine families return to their native city.

Time should take its course...

In the wake of the bloody events in Mostar on February 10, there is a feeling of deep pessimism about the chances of successfully implementing the civil strand of the Dayton accord. Without any return possible, one can be forgiven for thinking that the accord is null and void. Brute force and political manipula-

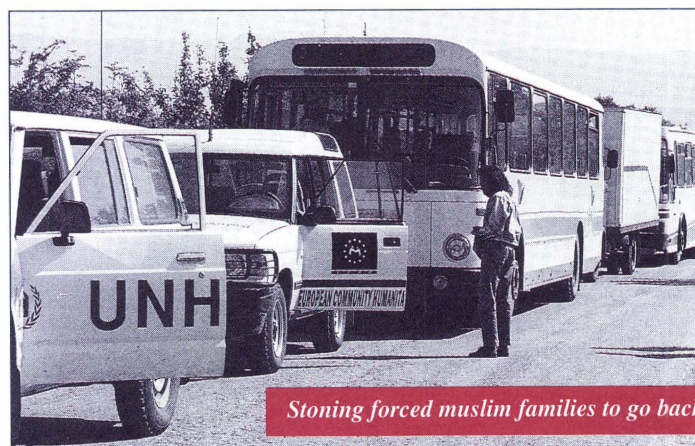
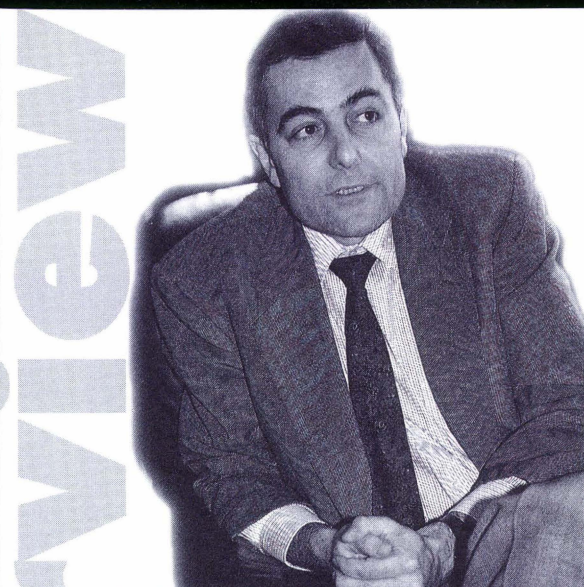


Photo by Sophie Quintin

Stoning forced muslim families to go back

tion continue to dominate the situation. Camouflaged vehicles travel constantly along the roads in Herzegovina, patrols continue to move through the streets of Mostar. I have very mixed feelings as I cross the no man's land where only yesterday stood the architectural expression of a multi-ethnic society. It is all very well on paper, but on the ground it is difficult to believe in the return they speak so much about. As I recall the weary faces of the displaced people from Stolac and the bitter hate on the faces of the displaced Croats, I have my doubts. Yet, after spending time with the ECHO mission in the African Great Lakes region and almost one year in Bosnia, I am convinced that time has to be allowed to take its course. It would have taken more than a "Dayton one", two or three for the French and Germans to find it in their hearts to trust each other again after the Second World War. To paraphrase Emma Bonino, I think it will take more than food parcels to restore peace...



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"THE MAJOR CHALLENGE : MANAGING OUR RESOURCES AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE"

Alberto Navarro
New ECHO Director since January 1, 1997

For the last 16 years, 41-year-old Alberto Navarro has had a high-powered diplomatic career in the service of Spain and Europe. He was Adviser to the Embassy in Honduras, in what used to be Czechoslovakia and to Spain's Permanent Representation to the European Community. Alberto Navarro is no stranger to Community institutions. He was involved in the Lomé IV negotiations and prior to his appointment as Director of ECHO, he was Principal Private Secretary at the Spanish Foreign Office.

Your appointment at the helm of ECHO coincides with an intense humanitarian crisis in the Great Lakes region...

Yes, indeed. And I was plunged into the heart of the matter straight-away, as one of my first duties was to accompany Commissioner Bonino on her visit to the Tingi Tingi refugee camp in the eastern part of Zaire. The terrible conditions we saw the refugees living in made a deep impression on me. After such an experience, one is duty-bound to become totally committed to an attempt to relieve their suffering. I am personally highly motivated by my new duties.

What does ECHO represent for you?

First and foremost, I would like to pay a tribute to my predecessor Santiago Gómez-Reino, for the incredible amount of work accomplished in such a short space of time. ECHO came into being in 1992 and only four years later turned out to be a key player in the humanitarian aid sector. The general public may not

fully realise it but ECHO has become the world's largest donor for humanitarian aid. If the Member State's bilateral contributions are taken into account, the European Union's resources account for more than half of all humanitarian aid worldwide. The general public needs to be made more aware of this human face of the European Union, an entity that is all too often regarded as an economic giant but a political pygmy.

What are your priority concerns?

There is a yawning gap between the amount of resources at our command and the level of human needs we have to cater for. Consequently, we need to manage the resources as effectively as possible. This poses a major challenge. In a drive to become even more efficient, we have to seek constantly to ensure a more effective form of coordination with the Member States and our partner organisations in the field. We also have to ensure the results of assessments are more effectively reflected in future policy-making and to develop a higher profile in international fora such as the United Nations. Towards this end, ECHO has just unveiled a set of general guidelines, featured in a strategy paper that has already been mooted with the Member States. The paper also has to do duty as a basis for stimulating a public debate with our partners. To echo Emma Bonino's words, the idea is to show that ECHO is not a humanitarian "bank" but a partner with its own profile, ideas and values reflecting those of Europe. Still on the subject of priorities, 1997 will be the year in which a general assessment of humanitarian aid initiatives is set in motion and the process for revamping and improving upon the framework partnership contract will be completed.

What aspects of humanitarian aid would you like to highlight?

What strikes me the most is the number of young people now working for ECHO and involved in humanitarian aid activities. They take a very professional attitude towards their responsibilities and are highly motivated. Humanitarian aid is extremely labour-intensive, which is an extremely important dimension in this field

of activity, as it is the commitment of people on the ground that very often determines the success of operations. I don't have any figures to give you an idea of the number of jobs created by ECHO, but it would be worthwhile trying to make a calculation...

The aspect of humanitarian aid I appreciate the most is the respect shown towards humanitarian principles and values, which although very often misunderstood, need to guide our actions at all times. Emma Bonino has long stressed this point and we should never tire of repeating it.

What are your feelings about the direct attacks that have been made on humanitarian workers in recent weeks?

The situation is deeply disturbing. I am fully aware of the risks run by volunteers working on the ground, but in all honesty we do not have the wherewithal to eradicate these risks.

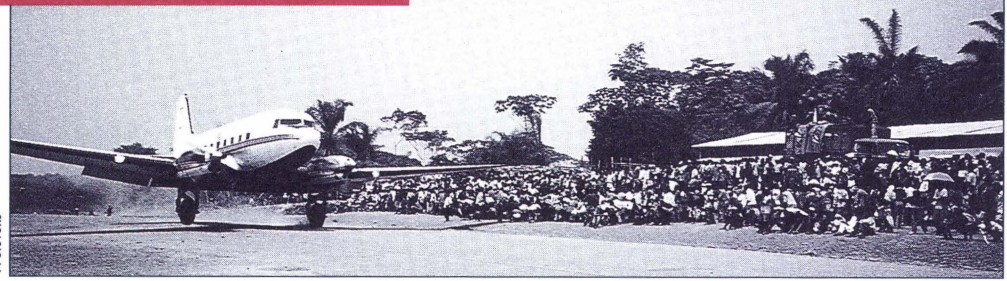
ECHO is planning to take action to improve this situation together with the entire humanitarian aid sector.

Interview by Isabelle Brusselmans

EASTERN ZAIRE

REFUGEES IN A DESPERATE PLIGHT

Emma Bonino landing in Tingi Tingi



P. Stevens

"I have just come back from hell" were the words Emma Bonino, the Humanitarian Aid Commissioner, used to describe the harrowing scenes she witnessed at a refugee camp in Zaire in early February. After talks with the Zairean authorities in Kinshasa and Kisangani she went on to Tingi Tingi where 200,000 Hutu refugees were huddled together in deplorable conditions, in a region where there is a desperate shortage of humanitarian aid. Their plight has been almost ignored by the international community. Said the Commissioner: "We find ourselves faced here with individuals who no longer exist, who could not be detected by the

world's most powerful armed forces with ultra-sophisticated satellite equipment at their command. We were told last December that there was no point in going there, as virtually all the Hutu refugees had returned home, to Rwanda. We were accused of having overheated imaginations, when we continued to insist that hundreds of thousand of refugees were missing...The international community has to admit it made a mistake". Emma Bonino's visit was followed up by one from Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. She put the figure for the number of refugees and displaced in Eastern Zaire at 500,000.

WINNERS OF THE ECHO TV AWARDS

BEST REPORTING OF HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

The first ceremony for presenting the ECHO awards for the best audiovisual reports on humanitarian issues was staged in December in the city of Dublin. Broadcast live on Irish television, the importance of the event was underscored by the presence of Commissioner Emma Bonino for Humanitarian Aid and President Mary Robinson of Ireland. The winners in the different categories are as follows:

Displaced people: *L'aube-dawn* (Cause Communes, Belgium)

Psychological impact on the population: *Enemy my friend?* (Eyedeas, UK)

Forgotten conflicts: *Liberia: the murder of a country* (Sverigs Television, Sweden)

Vulnerable groups: *The dead are alive* (Wild Heart Productions, Belgium)

Award for radio programmes: *The Plight of Turkish Writers* (Eurofile, Radio 4, BBC, UK)

Award for commitment: *The Hague Diaries - Coverage of the UN International Tribunal for War Crimes* (Internews, Europe)

ECHO and the Dutch Presidency

ECHO will once again use the platform of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union to launch an information campaign in the host country. During the Dutch Presidency of the EU, the message will underwrite ECHO's partnership with the Dutch NGOs and their combined role and activities in humanitarian affairs. To this end a number of joint activities are planned for the duration of the Presidency. They include:

- the publication of a brochure on ECHO and its Dutch partner NGOs;
- a special humanitarian supplement in one of the Netherlands' newspapers;
- an exhibition detailing the ECHO 'story', alongside the Dutch NGOs, in the Hague for one week in April;
- a television programme on one of the Dutch channels highlighting ECHO/Netherlands Red Cross projects in Palestine and Lebanon;
- an exhibition of paintings, donated by European artists, highlighting the theme of humanitarian values. These paintings will be exhibited and auctioned in Amsterdam in June. The proceeds will go towards a humanitarian cause.