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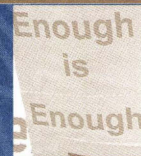
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Echo News n° 26

Autumn 2000



Echo News

European Commission Delegation
Library
2300 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037



Echo News is published by the Echo Information Service four times a year in English and French. For information and inquiries please contact :

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▶ The world's forgotten crises

When a humanitarian tragedy strikes, journalists perform a vital service in letting the world know about it. International public opinion is aroused and resources are mobilised to bring succour to the victims. But newsgathering is not a static activity. New stories break in other places and, sooner or later, the media has to move on.

This doesn't necessarily mean that the crisis is over. Indeed, it can signal the start of a new one - the crisis of being forgotten as public awareness gradually fades. The problem is exacerbated if the region affected is poor and does not have the economic potential to attract outside political and business interests.

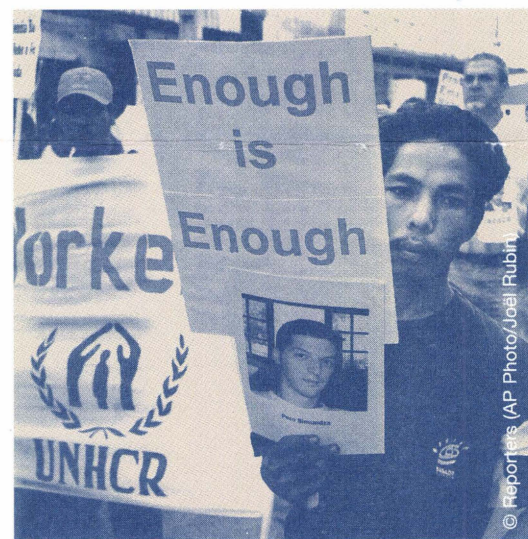
It is in this type of situation that international aid work most needs support from a reliable partner. ECHO, through its dedicated field coordinators and desk officers, keeps its ears firmly to the ground and maintains a strong focus on all the humanitarian crises that have slipped from the global headlines.

Take the examples of Sudan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Sudan's internal conflict has raged on and off for four decades. The causes of the war are complex, reflecting a struggle over governance and natural resources, as well as racial, cultural and religious identity.

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▶ West Timor Safety of aid workers in danger



"Atambua suddenly shut down when news spread that trucks and buses full of militias were coming from Betun... I'm glad that a couple of weeks ago we bought rolls and rolls of barbed wire... We sent most of the staff home, rushing to safety. I just heard someone on the radio saying that they are praying for us in the office... You should see this office. Plywood on the windows, staff peering out through openings in the curtains... We sit here like bait, unarmed, waiting for (the) wave to hit... I just hope I will be able to leave tomorrow... As I wait for the militias to do their business, I will draft the agenda for tomorrow's meeting..."

These chilling words, written by foreign aid worker Carlos Caseres, were the last he sent to his colleagues. Carlos, along with UNHCR co-workers Samson Aregahegn and Pero Simundza, was killed by Timorese militias on 6 September. Following the attack, 460 aid workers were evacuated from West Timor, where they were tending to refugees in camps close to the border with East Timor. The aid workers refuse to go back until the Indonesian government can guarantee their safety.

Fifteen UN staff have died on duty this year. Mensah Kpognon, was a fourth worker killed in September in Guinea. His colleague, Laurence Djeya, who was kidnapped in the same attack, was released in neighbouring Liberia 10 days later following pressure from international aid organisations.

Interview

ECHO director Costanza Adinolfi explains the reforms underway in the European Commission's humanitarian activities in an interview with Echo News editor Tony Snape.

Q. What are ECHO's priorities in terms of programme management ?

ECHO is in the process of implementing important, immediate and longer-term management changes to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivery on the ground. We have found it necessary to reform project cycle management, especially to take account of improved performance-tracking. Staff training is being enhanced, as are our relationships with our partners. The Commission's reform of financial controls is leading to better auditing procedures and evaluation of work. ECHO is also reconstructing its web site so that it is more informative and user-friendly.

Q. The dangers facing humanitarian aid workers are obviously of concern to you. What can ECHO do to help minimise them ?

We recognise that insecurity is a serious problem, that threatens the very basis of humanitarian aid, namely the access of those in need. Guaranteeing the security of humanitarian operations is far from easy and we are acutely aware of this. In 1998, the Commission issued a *Working Paper on Security of Relief Workers and Humanitarian Space*¹⁾, which has been debated before and since its presentation to the Council. This paper has been the subject of detailed consultations with all interested parties. Now there is a wide consensus on the scope for improvement in security arrangements, and ECHO is fully committed to working alongside its partners to achieve tangible results in this respect.

Q. Is the much-talked-about grey zone between relief and development bridgeable ?

The challenge is to link relief with rehabilitation and development (what is known as LRRD). This concept originated in the mid-1990s, when both academics and practitioners voiced concern about this "grey zone" that you refer to between humanitarian assistance and development. A recent evaluation of ECHO's performance²⁾ has confirmed that linkages between relief and development should be improved. ECHO can no longer be a convenient gap-filler and has to develop exit strategies aimed at the soonest possible pull-out. EC development instruments must, therefore, be ready to cover the immediate post-emergency phase, which will involve changes in implementing development policy. A Commission interservice working group is preparing a new Communication on LRRD that will be available before the end of the year. The document will focus on the need for the EC to enhance international donor co-ordination and reassess its own instruments and procedures.

Q. What do ECHO and the NGOs need to do to strengthen their partnership ?

Since its creation, ECHO has developed a specific form of partnership with a range of European NGOs specialised in humanitarian actions. This partnership has continued to develop over the years and has become an instrument allowing ECHO and its partners to react swiftly when a humanitarian catastrophe occurs. We have put in place a new training programme, which aims to reinforce our partners' technical capacity and contribute considerably to developing an efficient partnership. For their part, the NGOs represent an essential component on the ground. We are only too aware of how hard they struggle every day in order to provide aid to people in distress. To improve our partnership and optimise the use of European funds, the NGOs realise they need to continue to improve coordination between themselves and with ECHO and other donors. A better understanding of contractual engagements would help the planning process and ECHO's strategic approach.

Q. Do you see ECHO as the human face of the European Union ?

Yes. Through humanitarian aid, we try to get across the message of European solidarity to those who are suffering. We also inform our fellow citizens about the way taxpayers' funds are used, through a wide range of communication tools, both innovative and "traditional". Transmitting this message of solidarity highlights the human face of Europe.

¹ SEC (1998) 797 final

² COM (1999) 468



▶ Helping East Timor towards independence

Although aid workers have been forced to evacuate refugee camps in West Timor following the assassination of three colleagues, they are still heavily engaged in the eastern part of the island. ECHO is funding vital work in the areas of health and hygiene. Tony SNAPE reports.

The border between East and West Timor snakes through the jungle from coast to coast.

In the West are the camps of East Timorese refugees, who fled last year to escape the ravages of the militias.

In the East, aid workers are rehousing and providing shelter for displaced people, as the new East Timorese government adapts to its task of rebuilding society.

In between, the UN Peacekeeping Force is trying to control a border that is as eery by day as it is at night.

The border region is dangerous. The reports that ECHO receives point to a climate of fear, intimidation and disinformation, particularly in the refugee camps.

Following the killing of three UNHCR staff in West Timor in September, hundreds of aid workers were evacuated to the East. None are now working in the West. Until the Indonesian government can guarantee their safe return, East Timor is where they will stay.

But the news from Timor is not all bad. The progress made in East Timor is a tribute to the dedication of ECHO and the international and local aid workers it supports.

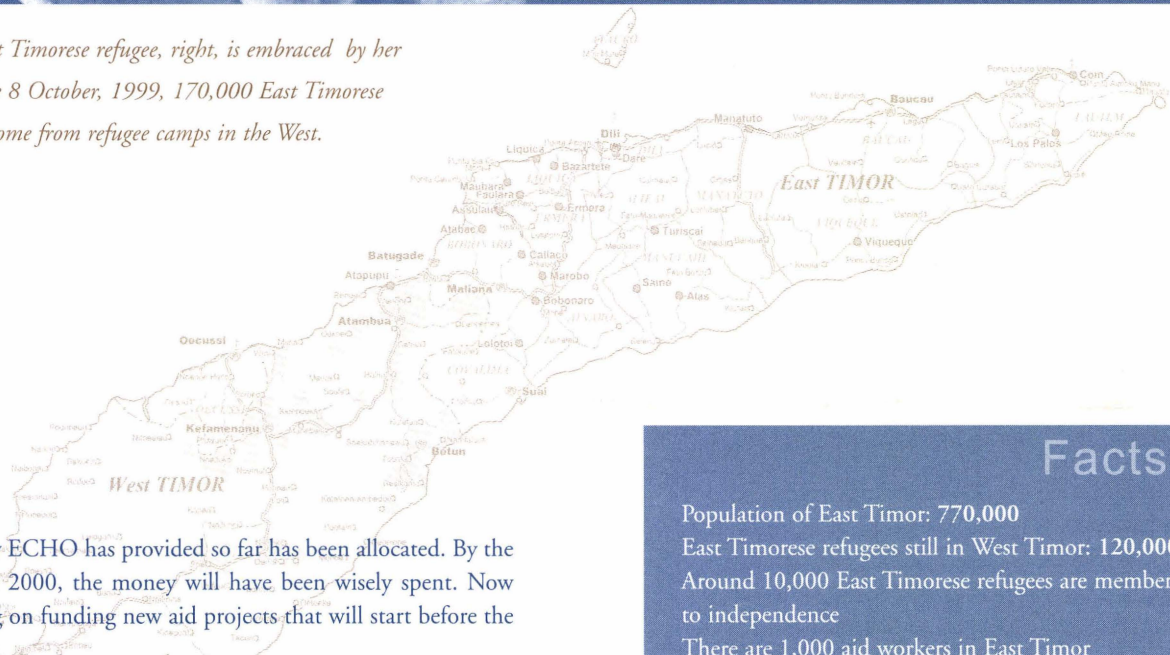
ECHO has given 17 million euros for specific humanitarian projects to UN agencies and international and local NGOs in Timor since the vote for independence in August 1999.

Displaced families in East Timor now have shelter and medical assistance, as ECHO funds the reinstatement of water and sanitation systems and finances NGOs that run the district hospitals.



© Reporters (AP Photo/Joel Rubin)

A returning East Timorese refugee, right, is embraced by her neighbour. Since 8 October, 1999, 170,000 East Timorese have returned home from refugee camps in the West.



And all the money ECHO has provided so far has been allocated. By the end of September 2000, the money will have been wisely spent. Now ECHO is working on funding new aid projects that will start before the end of this year.

ECHO envisages funding humanitarian agencies in East Timor until the end of 2001, when the local government should be fully operational.

The aim is to help refugees who want to return to East Timor, re-housing them in covered dwellings, restoring water and sanitation services and ensuring that emergency medical services are available. The operation to date, in humanitarian aid terms, has been a huge success, though there is much still to do.

ECHO is also considering a programme of psychosocial counselling. Mental health care is an urgent part of the medical care needed in East Timor, for, among others, victims of violence and rape.

Facts and figures

Population of East Timor: 770,000

East Timorese refugees still in West Timor: 120,000

Around 10,000 East Timorese refugees are members of militia opposed to independence

There are 1,000 aid workers in East Timor

ECHO:

- > is funding 15 international NGOs and 3 UN agencies in Timor;
- > has so far donated 17 million euros to agencies working in Timor for specific humanitarian projects;
- > has provided funds to help distribute shelter kits to 32,000 families;
- > has provided financing to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to assist in the repatriation of 170,000 out of 290,000 refugees who fled from East to West Timor.

Upcoming Events

- > **5-6 December, Brussels.** Meeting of bilateral and multilateral donors to East Timor, with the participation of international and local NGOs. European Commissioners Poul Nielson and Christopher Patten chair several sessions involving the World Bank and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). Main meeting preceded on the 5th by a gathering of World Bank Trust Fund contributors. For further information, contact Ruth Albuquerque on +32 2 295 34 20. Email: Ruth.Albuquerque@cec.eu.int
- > **15-16 December, Paris.** "Long-lasting crises: humanitarian stakes, European challenges". Organised under the French presidency of the European Union, by the French NGOs-EU Platform, *Médecins du Monde* and URD, a group dedicated to emergency, rehabilitation and development aid. With the support of ECHO and the French foreign affairs ministry. For further information, contact +33 1 44 72 92 61. Email: secretariat@pff-ong-europe.org

▶ The world's forgotten crises

IRAQ

A further €8.6million has been provided to Iraq to refurbish hospitals, health centres, a sewage treatment plant and specialist institutions for handicapped children and orphans. This brings to €259m the aid ECHO has allocated for Iraq since the Gulf War in 1991-92, making ECHO the biggest donor to the country.

UK NGO, Care, is working on improving water quality in the Qadissyah region, home to 370,000 people. It is overseeing the refurbishment of water preparation plants and installing a new water distribution network. Meanwhile, French NGO, Première Urgence, is restoring hospital infrastructures, getting drains, sanitation facilities and ventilation back in working order.

The growing number of street children is a major problem in Iraqi cities. ECHO's partner, Enfants du Monde, is providing support for over 5,000 handicapped children and orphans by refurbishing and equipping 13 specialist institutions and providing extra food.

BALKANS

ECHO is providing a further €2m to enable NGOs to carry out new projects in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). This will ensure continuing food supplies for 20,000 displaced people, while refugees will be offered psychosocial and educational support. Children are a priority for help.

The aid will also focus on vocational training and capacity-building projects, including the strengthening of social institutions such as community and local NGO centres.

The target groups include Serbs from Kosovo and members of the Roma community.

ECHO aid to victims of the Kosovo crisis now totals some €440m.

MOZAMBIQUE

Over €1m of new ECHO funds are making their way to Mozambique to help victims of the floods in February this year. The money will help around 19,000 families resettle and brings the total humanitarian aid offered by ECHO to Mozambique since the floods to almost €9.5m.

CENTRAL AMERICA

A further €1.8m has been earmarked for Nicaragua and €1.5m for Honduras, which, along with Guatemala and El Salvador, were hit by Hurricane Mitch in October 1998. Priority areas for assistance are disease prevention, medical aid, and water and sanitation. Since the hurricane, ECHO has donated more than €35m, helping 3.5m people in the four countries.



© Reporters (AP Photo/Amir Shah)

A widow begs with her child at a roadside, Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2000 in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Winter is arriving in Afghanistan, which is struggling to cope with its worst drought in three decades after winter rains failed for the second successive year. Tens of thousands of Afghans still live in refugee camps set up to cope with the fall-out from the continuing civil war. Some 1.6m people are receiving food aid and aid workers are fighting to prevent outbreaks of disease in refugee camps, as well as to improve sanitary conditions and provide shelter for those without a roof over their heads.

ECHO has supported ongoing aid work in Afghanistan, allocating €76 million since 1996. This winter, it will again be making an important contribution to relief work in this troubled country.

Afghanistan's neighbour, Tajikistan, has also been crippled by the drought that has ravaged central Asia this year, while striving to recover from its own gruelling five-year civil war. Cereal production in the country has fallen by half during the drought and imports will only be enough to supply 40% of the population. One million people face famine.

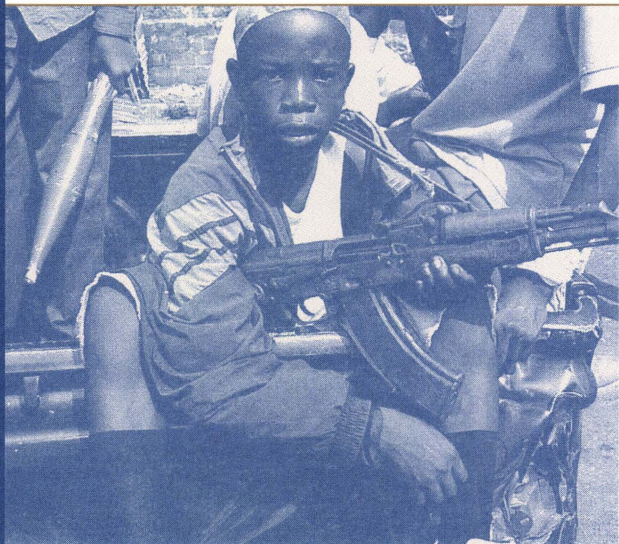
ECHO, which has provided some €112m to Tajikistan over the past six years and is the most important donor, has pledged a further €3m in emergency aid this winter.

These are just three examples of ECHO's continuing commitment to help in crises across the globe that no longer grab the headlines.

Two million Sudanese have already died due to the conflict and a further four million people, mainly from the south, have been displaced. Around two million live in miserable conditions in displaced camps around Khartoum and other northern cities. Successive generations of children – more than three million – have grown up without access to adequate primary education. More than 80 per cent of children today do not attend school.

ECHO focuses on assisting the most vulnerable victims of conflict and those displaced throughout the country, providing a package of medical aid, water and sanitation, food security and relief assistance. ECHO supported Sudanese aid work to the tune of €52m between 1996 and 1999 and is donating €11m this year.

▶ Challenges for demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers



Child soldiers keep guard in Sierra Leone

and Sierra Leone in order to identify best practices. As part of the study, 160 ECHO partners from all over the world have participated in a questionnaire recounting their experience of working with children associated with fighting forces.

"We will use the information to inform next steps in the development of best practice guidelines", commented Save The Children UK's Sarah Uppard, who is managing the project.

"These children can be very young, in some cases only six years old. They are frequently abducted or forced into joining militias and are subject to brutal treatment. They are just like other children. They need support, guidance and, most of all, the opportunity to lead a normal life. They have the right as much as anyone to a peaceful future unconnected with arms and war."

The study, which began in July, initially concentrated on a review of relevant and current literature in the field.

Now the researchers are collecting information in Colombia and Sierra Leone, before working in Congo and Mozambique later in the year.

It is estimated that more than two million children have died in combat around the globe since 1987. There are still around 300,000 child soldiers serving in armies in 30 countries.

In January this year, the United Nations adopted an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, banning the deployment of under-18s in conflict, and calling for the demobilisation of child soldiers and their immediate reintegration.

ECHO has commissioned a best practice analysis in the field of working with child soldiers.

Coordinated by Save The Children in the United Kingdom, the study will focus on practical ways of preventing recruitment of children by armed groups and how to protect their rights throughout the process of disarmament, demobilisation and social reintegration.

Successful reintegration requires support to society as a whole so that all children, including those associated with fighting forces, can benefit from educational and economic opportunities.

The researchers are compiling case studies in four countries: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique