

VENEZUELA FLOODS, LANDSLIDES: ECHO CLEARS €3.6 million. In an immediate response to Venezuela's appeal for aid in the wake of a disaster in which thousands are feared dead, ECHO approved funding to enable Spanish and German Red Cross teams to carry out emergency relief.

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Chechnya, November 1999

EchoNews

Photo: Izvestia/Sipa Press

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East Timor: the next test

The damage I saw in East Timor on my mission in early December was frightening. The country has been systematically emptied of everything useful. Homes have been razed to the ground, hospitals totally destroyed — even the tiles were smashed. But amid the destruction, I saw returnees determined to start afresh.

One picture that stayed in my mind was that of a family whose house had been burnt out. They were living in a makeshift shelter, and amid the ashes, they had already planted maize that was sprouting in straight green lines. But many who fled are still in West Timor, living in very bad conditions in camps there, and facing harassment to prevent them returning, even if Indonesia is playing its part in trying to reduce it. I was impressed at the way in which humanitarian organisations are cooperating in a very difficult environment, back-stopping for each other in a bid to deliver assistance. The next challenge for the international community will be to hand over the country to the East Timorese so that they can run it themselves once they have the capacity. We must avoid patronising donor behaviour. It will be a good test of our imagination and sensitivity.

See inside story

Poul Nielson



Photo: Paul Bhaskar/Sipa Press



Photo: Izvestia/Sipa Press



Photo: Anastasia Vrachnos/Sipa Press

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Aid to Orissa after cyclone hits India

Thousands died in the wake of a violent cyclone that devastated this poverty-stricken Eastern Indian state on October 29. Millions of people were stranded, villages were flooded and dire shortages of food and drinking water were overshadowed by the threat of water-borne epidemics. Thousands of families are still in desperate need of shelter, blankets, food and medicines, as well as clean drinking water.

Harsh winter for Chechen civilians

Russia's renewed military campaign against Chechnya has left civilians caught between Islamic militants and Russian troops. Russia has allowed some aid agencies in to provide relief to the estimated 300,000 people who are internally displaced. Thousands are queuing at the borders while others are living and waiting in open fields, tents, cars, buses and railway wagons. As we went to press, some were heading home anyway.

Starting afresh in East Timor

Hope is finally on the horizon for the people of East Timor following the campaign of violence and terror waged against them by pro-Jakarta militias after their vote for independence last September. Stability is returning with the presence of the UN Transitional Administration and a multinational peacekeeping force. The violence has devastated the population and shattered communities.



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INTERVIEW

Call for lateral thinking



CATHERINE BERTINI
The Executive Director of the World Food Programme wants experts in HQs to be more creative in their responses to new demands for aid

The aid community is facing new demands – and needs to be more flexible in responding to them. That is the view of Catherine Bertini, World Food Programme Executive Director after the setting up of operations in Kosovo and East Timor. Identifying the type of crisis is not a word game – it influences outcomes, she says. ‘Is it an emergency? Is it development? Is it something in between, or a whole new different thing? In a lot of cases, it’s difficult to describe what the situation is once the fighting is over and there’s a state of relative peace,’ she told EchoNews in an interview.

In both Kosovo and East Timor, the UN is having to create a complete infrastructure from scratch. ‘This is a whole new kind of programme for the UN to be involved in,’ Bertini said. She welcomed the new structure at the European Commission, which puts both humanitarian aid and development under one commissioner, Poul Nielson. ‘Frankly, sometimes it’s hard for us to know whether we’re

‘In both Kosovo and East Timor, the UN is creating a complete infrastructure from scratch’

supposed to talk to ECHO or to Development, so now it’ll be better for programming from the Commission perspective, and it’ll facilitate better communication with people like us who are funded by the Commission,’ she added.

She welcomed Commission President Romano Prodi’s decision to appoint Nielson, a former Danish minister for Development Cooperation. ‘He has such a good understanding of development needs and emergency needs from his job in Denmark, he has a good understanding of the Commission because of his involvement with it, and he also understands the UN system well.’

Bertini had to postpone a mission to Brussels in November to meet the Commissioner because of a plane crash acci-

dent involving a WFP-chartered aircraft flying to Kosovo. Its 24 passengers, most of them humanitarian aid workers, all died. ‘It hurts all of us to have lost them,’ she said, adding that WFP would not be deterred from continuing its mission and had made arrangements to go on operating flights to transport aid workers. It runs similar flights from Darwin to East Timor, and from Bujumbura to Nairobi.

At time of writing, WFP had just resumed operations in Burundi after mourning the loss of logistics officer Saskia Von Meijenfeldt, killed in an ambush along with UNICEF representative Luis Zuniga. They were on an assessment mission. Despite being accompanied by the local governor, policemen and UN security staff, they were shot point blank in the head. ‘We must have

‘We must have a higher level of concern about the places we ask aid workers to go’

a much higher level of concern about the places that we ask humanitarian aid workers to go – this really highlights the fact that they are asked to go places where governments won’t send their soldiers.’ She appealed to the international community to summon the political will to solve simmering crises such as those in Sudan, Angola and Russia, instead of substituting humanitarian aid for solutions, and sending aid workers into such danger.

We spoke on the eve of World Humanitarian Day, November 23, on which the UN launched its consolidated inter-agency appeals in Geneva. The focus was on forgotten crises. Bertini said she would be reminding delegates about the forgotten people – women. ‘We forget them when we develop programmes, because we forget to include them in the process. We forget them when we make distribution plans, because we forget they’re the ones who are going to be preparing the food – we need to get everyone thinking about the people we’re trying to help.’ All too often, experts at HQ made assumptions about, say, 200,000 people in a refugee camp without checking their needs. Bertini appealed to them to be more analytical. ‘Who are these people? How many women are there? How many children? We need to talk to them, to get them involved in making decisions about what they need for their own community.’

Catherine Bertini was talking to Eva Kaluzynska of ECHO Information.

End of a long

There is hope on the horizon for the people of East Timor, despite the devastation of the conflict. Hundreds of thousands who fled violence from pro-Jakarta militias came back, and stability is slowly returning amid the presence of a UN Transitional Administration and peacekeeping force

As we went to press, independence leader Jose Ramos Horta came back from exile to join fellow leader Xanana Gusmao in their homeland, and reconciliation is the message they are bringing to their people. Visits by foreign politicians are coinciding with plans for full-scale aid projects. But more than 150,000 refugees remain in border camps, with many still hiding in the mountains.

Poul Nielson, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, headed a mission to the region November 28 to December 3. In West Timor, Mr Nielson met Governor Piet Tallo. In East Timor, he met independence leader Xanana Gusmao, the Bishop of East Timor, Nobel Peace prize-winner Dom Ximenes Belo, Sergio Vieira de Mello, head of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) office, and General Peter Cosgrove of the International Forces in East Timor (INTERFET).

After a referendum on independence in August which yielded a massive vote in favour, the East Timorese endured a bloodbath instead of enjoying a celebration of democracy. Pro-Jakarta militias terrorised the population until the arrival mid-September of a UN peacekeeping force. Refugees



A worldwide campaign aims to make child soldiers, such as this Lebanese boy, a phenomenon of the past

nightmare in East Timor



East Timor, November 1999

who fled to West Timor faced terror too. The violence cost thousands of lives and shattered communities. The United Nations has appealed for \$200m (€200m) to restart a destroyed economy.

The violence cost thousands of lives and shattered communities'

The European Commission approved €10 million in humanitarian aid at the end of November to enable ECHO's partners in the field and UN agencies to provide food aid, shelter, basic medical aid and safe water/sanitation facilities. At the time of writing, the Commission was planning separate funding for those still in refugee camps.

The November decision brings ECHO funding for this crisis to a total of €15 million so far this year. DG Development has committed €8.5 million and DG Relex €10 million. Total Commission funding thus amounts to €33.5 million. Portugal has contributed around €56 million since May 1999, and has earmarked up to €96.98 million per year for the next three years to support East Timor.

A turbulent history of violence and oppression

1642 – Portugal invades Timor and sets up a trading post.

1859 – A treaty gives the eastern part of the island to Portugal, the west to the Dutch.

1975 – The Portuguese administration withdraws from Dili. Indonesian troops invade. Jakarta ignores UN calls to withdraw.

1976 – Indonesia annexes East Timor as its 27th province. About 200,000 die during the military crackdown and famine.

1978 – Australia first to recognise Indonesian rule in East Timor.

1998 – Indonesian President Suharto is forced out of office.

January 1999 – President B.J. Habibie announces East Timor will be granted independence if it rejects autonomy within Indonesia.

March 1999 – Portugal and Indonesia agree on a direct ballot. The agreement is signed in May.

May 1999-August 30 ballot – Pro-Jakarta militias, backed by the Indonesian military, terrorise the East Timorese people.

September 4, 1999 – The UN announces the Timorese voted for independence with 78.5% of more than 450,000 voters rejecting Indonesia's proposal for wide-ranging autonomy.

September 20, 1999 – Australian-led peacekeepers enter.

Boost for campaign on child soldiers

A worldwide campaign to stop the use of child soldiers gathered momentum in Berlin with a conference in October uniting delegates around this theme. Hosted by the German government, the conference on October 18-20 was an opportunity to put pressure on governments that still recruit children under the age of 18 into active service. The conference, organised by World Vision Deutschland, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and ECHO, also explored the plight of children abducted or forcibly recruited into armies by non-state actors.

Poul Nielson, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, described ECHO's

programmes in Sierra Leone and Guinea, where the aim is to take care of children that are ex-combatants, or who were otherwise involved in conflict. But he said it was important not to lose sight of the context in which children were mobilised to fight, and that he, as Commissioner for Development, would be looking at ways to intervene before they were drawn into combat.

'Many of the measures we may be able to facilitate are matters of common sense at local level. For instance, we should be making sure children have safe access to humanitarian aid, as well as safe schools, safe hospitals and safe play space and community activities in vulnerable regions,' he said.

ECHO's Global Reach

Central America: aid for victims of Hurricane Mitch. **€16m** to support programmes for victims of the October 1998 hurricane that caused the death or disappearance of almost 13,000 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Through its partners, ECHO will provide medical aid, and support for water, public health and housing facilities.

Algeria: aid for Sahraoui refugees. **€5.65m** to support refugees living in camps in Tindouf. Pending a referendum on self-determination, they live in precarious conditions. With ECHO's partners, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), this aid will cover the food, medical, and health sectors, as well as emergency rehabilitation.

China: aid for victims of torrential rainfalls. Some 800 people died and a further 24,000 were injured last summer. ECHO provided **€1.1m** in response to an appeal from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). This will cover the delivery of drinking water, supplementary feeding and medical assistance.

Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam: flood relief. Torrential rains also hit South East Asia in July and August, resulting in floods and landslides. **€2m** will enable Médecins Sans Frontières/Belgium, the Spanish Red Cross, IFRC, the Dutch Relief and Rehabilitation Agency and Oxfam UK to provide food, drinking water, medical supplies, blankets and shelters.

Ukraine and Belarus: aid for high-risk groups suffering the effects of Russia's economic crisis. **€1.225m** for pregnant women, mothers, children, the sick, rural dwellers and deportees in Donetsk (Crimea) and Minsk. ECHO's partners, Médecins du Monde/Greece, UNHCR and IFRC will supply medical equipment, renovate a hospital and a shelter, and train medical staff.

Upcoming events

• **January-March:** Exhibition on child soldiers, showing in the capitals of the following European countries: Belgium, France, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and European Parliament in Brussels. Admission free. Organised by NGO coalition VOICE, supported by ECHO. For further details, contact VOICE on 00 32 2 743 8775.

Winter misery in Chechnya

As EchoNews went to press, Russia was pressing on with its military offensive, amid growing Western objections that human rights are being violated

Fleeing Chechen civilians are caught between Islamic militants and Russian troops, both of whom resent their efforts to leave the war-torn state. An estimated 300,000 internally displaced people have fled bombing and artillery fire to neighbouring Dagestan and Ingushetia.

Russia has allowed some international relief agencies into the areas. But thousands of people are queuing at borders that are periodically closed by Russian soldiers. Many are living – and waiting – in freezing temperatures in the open, in tents, cars, buses and railway wagons, while up to 150,000 have found shelter with host families in Ingushetia.



Photo: Inevista/Sipa Press

Flight from Chechnya, November 1999

The West has said Russia is inflicting unnecessary casualties and suffering on Chechen civilians. Moscow counters that it has a right to defend its territory against what it calls “terrorist” activities operating out of the predominantly Moslem region.

Russia’s renewed military campaign follows the 1994-96 war in which Chechnya won *de facto* independence, and an estimated 80,000 people, mainly civilians, were killed.

The European Commission has approved €1.2m for victims of the conflict over Chechnya, to be channelled primarily to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Programmes to be carried out, mainly in Ingushetia, will cover purchase and distribution of food, blankets, mattresses, personal hygiene items and winter clothing. A further €1million in funding was in the pipeline as we went to press.

India reeling under shock of worst-ever cyclone in Orissa



Photo: Paul Bhaskar/Sipa Press

Family wading through flood-waters in the wake of Orissa’s worst-ever cyclone

Relief teams were in mid-November still struggling to reach many of the victims of the violent cyclone that hit Eastern India on October 29. The storm affected five million of Orissa’s 35 million people. The aftermath brought flooded villages, dire shortages of food and drinking water, and the threat of water-borne epidemics.

A week after the cyclone hit, a third of the state’s people were still without electricity and other utilities; many roads were blocked and rail lines severed. As the scope of the disaster became apparent, about 150 tonnes of relief supplies were dropped in one day alone by Indian air force planes and helicopters. More than 5,000 army personnel cleared roads and distributed emergency supplies. The navy cleared sunken boats and set up medical camps at the devastated port of Paradip.

There is still no reliable estimate of the number killed by the worst cyclone to hit the poverty-stricken state in three decades. The death toll is estimated to run into the thousands, while thousands of families are in desperate need of shelter, blankets, food and medicines, and clean drinking water.

With millions stranded in the worst-affected areas, there could be an estimated 6,000 births a week over the next three months. In mid-November, the United Nations Population Fund shipped emergency reproductive health supplies, including equipment for the safe delivery of new-born infants.

The European Commission approved an

‘The death toll is estimated to run into the thousands, and surviving families are in desperate need of shelter, blankets, food and medicines’

initial €2 million, to be channelled through ECHO to Care International (UK), Danchurchaid (Denmark) and German Agro Action. Emergency relief efforts will provide water and sanitation, temporary shelter, food aid and medical treatment. As EchoNews went to press, a second funding decision was being prepared.

The US offered \$2.1 million in emergency food and shelter supplies while the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies immediately launched a preliminary appeal for \$2.83 million.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/en/index_en.html

Funding for training and information projects: ECHO has funding available for training and for information, communication and awareness-raising projects in the field of humanitarian aid. For full details of the types of activities eligible and how to apply, visit the following page on our website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/en/finances/finan_en.html. (Scroll to the bottom of the page.) Please note that the scheme is only open to humanitarian organisations. Individuals may not apply.

