



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing some 86 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. Seeking to involve its members in information, training, advocacy and lobbying, VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness and promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

VOICE General Assembly
Brussels, 16th March 2010

General Policy Resolution

To the European Union, its Presidency, the European Commission and the European Parliament

The VOICE network,

WELCOMING the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, as well as the legal basis it provides to EU humanitarian Aid, and the reminder it gives that EU humanitarian aid is committed to the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination;

WELCOMING the update in December 2009 of the EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which aim to address compliance with IHL by third States, and, as appropriate, non-State actors operating in third States;

PREOCCUPIED by the increasingly complex nature of crises, the decline of humanitarian access and the shrinking of humanitarian space due to insecurity and/or to host government restrictions;

CONCERNED about the lack of respect for International Humanitarian Law and core humanitarian principles in many recent conflicts, not only on the part of warring parties, but also on the part of governments and their militaries;

NOTING that the strengthening of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy provided by the Lisbon Treaty can present a challenge for the independence of EU humanitarian aid;

DRAWING ATTENTION to the increased need to ensure independence of EU humanitarian aid in the framework of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy, in order to avoid instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid for political and security purposes;

OBSERVING that the visibility of the EU in crisis response is an important preoccupation of the EU decision-makers, especially after the Haiti quake; but stressing that this should not undermine effectiveness and efficiency of European humanitarian aid delivery;

ACKNOWLEDGING that EU humanitarian aid will not be part of the European External Action Service;

UNDERLINING that the response to the Haiti earthquake moreover proved that effective overarching leadership and coordination in the field and among donors are crucial to deliver efficient aid to crises affected populations;

EMPHASISING, in light of the inclusion of civil protection under the mandate of DG ECHO and the newly created portfolio of Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, that there is a need to clarify of roles and to strengthen complementarity among the External Relations actors of the European Union;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Corps as provided in the Lisbon Treaty;

CALLS UPON THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (Council, European Parliament and European Commission) AND ITS 27 MEMBER STATES

1. To reconfirm, when reviewing the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid Action Plan, the commitments made to the principles of the Humanitarian Consensus, such as the respect of humanitarian principles, the diversity of civilian humanitarian actors, and the principled and needs-based delivery of aid. The EU institutions and Member States should focus on the practical implementation of these political pledges.
2. To provide that the implementation of civil protection as an integral part of ECHO's mandate complies with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid:
 - The use of civil protection assets must respect the principles governing the delivery of humanitarian aid. The crucial concept of "last resort" should be kept, and, the principle that deployment only takes place when requested by the host government should be maintained;
 - European civil protection has a clear mandate and role, concentrating on filling specific gaps in the provision of assistance, such as search and rescue in natural disasters, particularly in the first phase of the emergency;
 - When deployed in humanitarian crises, the use of civil protection assets has to be based on needs jointly identified in the field, and this in line with the principles contained in the Humanitarian Consensus;
 - Budget lines for humanitarian aid and civil protection need to be clearly distinguished.
3. To ensure that the objectives of the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC), that is provided to be created under the Lisbon Treaty, are based on European values such as solidarity with crisis affected populations and awareness-raising, rather than serving EU visibility purposes:
 - Professional humanitarian aid organisations active in responding to crisis should be consulted in the process of defining and setting up an EVHAC;
 - The EVHAC should answer documented and identified human resources needs expressed by humanitarian actors, rather than being a political, supply driven instrument;
 - It should not compromise the current trend towards a greater professionalism in the humanitarian sector;
 - Furthermore, the EVHAC concept should moreover respect the current trend of increased capacity building and engagement of local volunteers and partners;
 - Finally, the creation of an EVHAC should be complemented with additional funding.