

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 8, 2006

Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Iraq call on ECHO to provide adequate funding for emergencies and humanitarian aid

A call signed by the **NCCI** (NGOs Coordination Committee in Iraq - comprises 50 NGOs) and European NGOs from 12 member states and Norway.

GIVEN THE IRAQI SITUATION EUROPEAN NGOS CALL ON ECHO TO RECONSIDER ITS CURRENT WITHDRAWAL OF HUMANITARIAN AID TO IRAQ IN COMPLIANCE WITH ITS MANDATE

BELGIUM

Handicap International

CZECH

People In Need

DENMARK

Danish Refugee Council

FRANCE

Enfants du Monde Droits de l'Homme

Handicap International

Première Urgence

Solidarités et liberté

Médecins du Monde

Jen

GERMANY

Architects for People in Need

Handicap International

Step

GREECE

Médecins du Monde

IRELAND

Trocaire

ITALY

Cooperazione Internazionale

Intersos

Terre Des Hommes

Un Ponte Per

LUXEMBOURG

Handicap International

NORWAY

Norwegian People Aid

SPAIN

Médecins du Monde

SLOVENIA

Together

UK

Mercy corps

Mine Action Group

Islamic relief

Handicap International

Oxfam

War Child

Christian Aid

In "ECHO 2006 Strategy" it is stated that:

"The implementation of European humanitarian aid is based on the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, in accordance with international law and more specifically with international humanitarian law and refugee law. In practical application of these fundamental principles, decisions to grant humanitarian aid are based solely on an assessment of the beneficiary populations' needs and not on reasons of political expediency."

According to Echo's mandate and considering the needs described below, it is thus essential that ECHO:

- recognizes and responds to the critical emergency needs in Iraq and make available immediate "neutral" funds accessible to European NGOs
- extends to the Iraqi humanitarian response the remote management flexibility. These facilities have already been tested and long implemented in the Northern Caucasus.

❖ **NGOs are alarmed by the deterioration of the humanitarian situation of the Iraqi people**

European NGOs still involved in Iraq have observed that the political and security situation in the country is still very difficult and at the moment it is impossible to say how things are likely to evolve. While attacks by insurgents and counter-insurgency operations continue and sectarian violence deepens and spreads, Iraqi civilians remain the first victims.

Even though epidemiologic data collection is difficult to obtain and rarely updated, some reliable figures indicate that daily living conditions are worsening despite all the efforts made in the reconstruction field.

54% of the Iraqi population are living below the poverty line (less than USD 1 a day); amongst them 15% are living in extreme poverty (less than USD 0.5 a day).

The unemployment rate has risen to around 60%.

Only 32 % of Iraqis have access to drinking water, whilst a mere 19 % have access to good sewerage system.

Malnutrition is increasing: the public food distribution system is not fully operational and yet more than 40% of the population depends on it.

The health system is deteriorating: health structures are lacking critical drugs and equipments. They are being attacked and occupied by military forces. There are fewer and fewer medical personnel as many medical staffs are fleeing the system and even the country.

Mental health is becoming a crucial concern: continuous stress and anxiety generate psychological vulnerability. A recent study found that 92% of Iraqi children have learning difficulties.

At least 425 000 newly internally displaced persons have been registered since the 22nd February 2006 bombing of the shrines in Samara with a huge increase in emergency aid needs in addition to the 1,5 Million displaced in the country.

❖ **The humanitarian needs are more acute than ever, but the increasing scarcity of funding is making it harder for NGOs to support the Iraqi People**

The combination of military operations, sectarian and political violence, and criminality and lawlessness, has devastating humanitarian consequences for Iraqi civilians. They are suffering from death, injury, illness, malnutrition, and displacement, denial of fundamental human rights and destruction of homes, vital facilities and infrastructure.

Humanitarian, impartial, neutral and independent funding is required because there is an increasing need for NGOs to demonstrate their independence and impartiality. Neutral funding from parties or sources not directly involved in the conflict will not

damage NGO perception and will not increase the insecurity of aid workers.

Due to the lack of such funding support, many NGOs have had to close down or reduce their activities since 2005, increasing the population's vulnerability even more.

ECHO's withdrawal of Iraqi humanitarian aid has contributed to decreasing NGO's capacity to respond to increasing needs.

❖ **Growing insecurity - a constant challenge for Iraqi humanitarian actors: remote management as a solution**

The continuous political instability since March 2003 has meant Iraqi society has lost confidence in the various governments. There has been no significant progress in rebuilding Iraq and keeping peace and security.

NGOs are facing major threats such as chaos, criminality, kidnapping, assassinations, arbitrary detention, collateral damages.

The governments cannot make headway on the security situation. A huge proportion of "aid budgets" are going to security, reducing the amount available for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

As a consequence of this security situation, the majority of international staff has withdrawn from Iraq, reducing the scope of humanitarian organisations to act.

Two simultaneous processes have become apparent since 2004:

- Most international NGOs have decided to locate their management teams to neighbouring countries and to continue managing their relief activities from a distance;
- Numerous local NGOs have been created by Iraqi people in the two past years, some of them made up of former NGO national staff involved in relief activities

International NGOs still supporting Iraqi people have changed their operational approach towards remote management and close partnership with Iraqi NGOs.

❖ **Remote management: a *modus operandi* already tried and tested by European NGOs and accepted by ECHO in other highly insecure countries**

In the current highly insecure Iraqi context, NGOs are using various forms of "remote support" to deliver the best possible humanitarian assistance in the circumstances.

Such ways of working have already been tried by NGOs with ECHO support in similar contexts such as the camps of Northern Uganda, Somalia and Northern Caucasus, including Chechnya.

They are relevant and accepted by funding bodies when humanitarian needs can't be met using more direct operational programming. They should be made possible in Iraq.

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*For further information on the Humanitarian Emergency, please refer to
the attached document*