



VOICE ASBL

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CONTENTS

Introduction

1– Influencing practices and policies of EU Humanitarian Aid

1. VOICE advocacy on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid
2. EU crisis management
3. Revision of the Framework Partnership Agreement
4. Partnership between VOICE and DG ECHO

2 – Strengthen VOICE authority vis-à-vis the EU and in the humanitarian community

1. VOICE and EU Institutions
2. VOICE relations with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
3. VOICE relations with NGO networks
4. Other international bodies
5. VOICE and the Global Humanitarian Reform Process
6. VOICE relations with UN-OCHA

3 - Increasing relevance for the members

1. Working groups
2. Promoting quality
3. Events
4. VOICE Communication

4 – Organisational developments of the network

1. VOICE General Assembly (Forum)
2. Procedures for working groups & statements
3. VOICE Assessment 2005-2007
4. VOICE network members
5. VOICE President
6. VOICE Board
7. VOICE Secretariat
8. ECHO Grant Facility project
9. Finances

5 – Statistics

VOICE member organisations in 2007

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
CAN	Climate Action Network
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CONCORD	European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development
DG	Directorate General (European Commission Department)
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Commission Department for Humanitarian Aid
ENNA	European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
GA	General Assembly (VOICE Annual General Assembly)
GHDI	Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative
GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee (inter agency coordination for humanitarian assistance)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Organisations
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
LRRD	Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NOHA	Network on Humanitarian Action
OECD/ DAC	Organisation for Economic and Cooperation Development in Europe/ Development Assistance Committee
PoP	Principles of Partnership
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RELEX	European Commission Department for External Relations
SCHA	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Aid (VOICE Board)
SCHR	Standing Committee on Humanitarian Response
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
VOICE	Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies

Introduction

Looking back to 2007. The year has seen a strong focus on the effects of climate change and its possible consequences, especially for developing countries. At the same time there is recognition in the humanitarian community that the vulnerability of populations in the South is increasing. An increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters is therefore most likely to lead to an increase in overall humanitarian needs. Rather than the development community, it is the humanitarian community who has taken up the challenge to advocate for the mainstreaming of Disaster Risk Reduction into all relevant international and national policies.

The spiralling price of basic food costs is of significant concern, and increases in the cost of food will result in less food being available for crisis-affected populations. These factors may also lead to increasing population movements, with the possibility of the number of refugees and internally displaced persons, and overall vulnerability increasing in the coming decades.

The trend of an increasing number of new actors getting involved in humanitarian assistance continues. This includes both the military, civil protection bodies, and private enterprises, particularly in the field of security services. While many traditional humanitarian actors question the motivation, ethics, standards and professionalism of some of these actors, an increased interest and support can be noted among governments and politicians both at EU and international level. These trends may in the future have a strong impact on the distribution of funds, the role of humanitarian NGOs and the overall security situation in the field.

NGOs have continued to be actively involved in the implementation of the Global Humanitarian reform process. The approval of the Principles of Partnership in the Global Humanitarian Platform laid down the foundation for more equal collaboration, better coordination and complementarity between the UN, the Red Cross family and the humanitarian NGOs. The challenge will now be to make them known so that they become a useful tool in the field among the different actors involved.

While humanitarian NGOs remain committed to constantly improving the quality, effectiveness and impact of their work, the informal debate around accountability both to the taxpayer and to the crises affected populations is gaining momentum. Donors are repeatedly bringing up the issue of NGO accreditation, with a view to regulating the sector.

In 2007, VOICE gave priority to the development of the European Consensus on

Humanitarian Aid. Its members engaged actively with their ministries at national level. The discussion process which took place at all levels of the EU, both in institutions and among member states, resulted in an increased awareness of the specificity of humanitarian aid. The final text recognizes the comparative advantage of NGOs. Disaster Risk Reduction has an important place. Governmental bodies, such as the military and civil protection sections have to respect the humanitarian principles and mainly intervene in natural disasters in the framework of the Oslo Guidelines. It is clear, that the main challenge lies in the interpretation and implementation of the text, but the positions and concerns of the VOICE network have been taken into account throughout the document.

The EU has also continued to strengthen its crises management capabilities. The planned EU mission to Chad, the role of the so-called Stability Instrument and the EC Communication on Fragile States, have all brought up issues concerning how to best preserve the specificity of humanitarian aid in an increasingly complex security and foreign policy context.

Looking towards 2008. It is therefore of utmost importance that humanitarian actors in the EU closely monitor the ongoing policy developments, promote the humanitarian principles and insist on the importance of implementing the letter and spirit of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. VOICE members will need to follow up the advocacy achievements from last year with the relevant ministries at national level over the months to come. An EU policy dialogue with relevant stakeholders on future EU budgets would be one of the issues to be addressed by VOICE given the foreseeable increase in global humanitarian needs.

At the EU level, the Lisbon Treaty for the first time establishes a legal base for EU humanitarian aid through including a separate chapter on EU Humanitarian Aid. With a chapter in the Treaty and the signing of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the EU has finally a strong framework establishing the principles and direction for its future humanitarian aid policies. Anyhow, the Treaty includes elements which might put the specificity of humanitarian aid at risk, such as the creation of a High representative for foreign and security policy and the External Action Service.



Paul Grossrieder
VOICE President



Kathrin Schick
VOICE Director

1 – INFLUENCING PRACTICES AND POLICIES OF EU HUMANITARIAN AID

1. VOICE advocacy on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid

VOICE was instrumental in ensuring the inclusion of European humanitarian NGOs' perspective in the process of developing the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Given the importance of this policy declaration for humanitarian NGOs, who deliver the majority of aid worldwide, policy influencing on this Consensus was made a priority for 2007.

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid was officially signed by the Presidents of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union on behalf of the 27 EU Member States on 18 December 2007 following a one year long policy making process. The Consensus establishes a concrete framework and common ground for values, guiding principles and policy scope of humanitarian aid for EU institutions and Member States – the world's largest humanitarian aid donor.

VOICE achieved important results through its advocacy towards the European institutions as well as towards the EU Member State Governments. The Consensus recognises the fundamental importance of the humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law for humanitarian aid, and acknowledges the added value of a diversity of civilian professional humanitarian actors in delivering aid. The Consensus also emphasises that EU humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool, and commits to the use of civil protection and military assets in emergency relief only in line with international guidelines, in compliance with humanitarian principles and always on the bases of identified needs.

Since the initiation of the Consensus policy formulation process in December 2006, VOICE facilitated and coordinated NGOs' participation to the process. VOICE consolidated a reply to the DG ECHO consultation process based on the solid input of 44 of its members to the stakeholder questionnaire. The need for the EU to commit to the humanitarian principles, the importance of a diversity of actors, and principled humanitarian aid were among the main messages to emerge from this. More than 90 VOICE members and other DG ECHO

Partners supported the final document. Commissioner Michel and DG ECHO acknowledged the VOICE effort and commented the high quality of answers, and the active participation to the consultation roundtables, results of which contributed towards the drafting of the European Commission Communication "Towards a European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid".

VOICE was also invited to make a statement in the Informal Humanitarian Aid Committee (HAC) meeting on 29 March in Berlin, where DG ECHO presented the result of the stakeholder consultation to the EU Member States' ministries' relevant administrators.

VOICE also facilitated the reflection and NGOs' joint advocacy efforts by bringing NGOs' together for roundtable discussions on the EU Humanitarian Aid in Copenhagen, Denmark in June and Lisbon, Portugal in October.

Following the adoption of the EC Communication in June, VOICE issued comments and recommendations to stress the three established main messages, but also included further recommendations to be considered in the Consensus. They included recommendations on adequate funding for humanitarian aid; an inclusive global humanitarian reform; Disaster Risk Reduction; Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development; protection; quality and accountability; and capacity-building.

In preparation for the European Parliament own-initiative report, VOICE was invited, as the main interlocutor of humanitarian NGOs, to give its opinion and to provide a contribution to this report. VOICE input was appreciated and accommodated in the report. The main messages were further being reinforced by UN agencies and the Red Cross / Crescent Movement throughout a very constructive dialogue and consultation process. During the drafting process of the EP Report substantial collated input by several VOICE members was provided directly to the EP's Permanent Rapporteur on Humanitarian Aid. In addition, individual VOICE member organisations wrote letters and met with MEPs; activities which further strengthened the NGO position.

VOICE met with the Portuguese EU presidency to present its position concerning the Consensus, the EU Humanitarian Aid policy statement, under preparation. This work gained support through a statement by the

Portuguese NGO platform addressing similar concerns than VOICE to the Presidency, which was drafting the joint statement for the adoption by the EU Institutions and Member States. VOICE analysed the first draft of the Consensus text. With the support of this analysis and a common message in form of a letter to the ministers, an intense lobbying of ministries by VOICE members initiated a fruitful exchange in several EU member states. Given that the issues addressed in the Consensus fall under the competence of several different ministries in the Member States, this enabled VOICE to create new contacts and dialogue outside the usual contacts responsible for humanitarian aid.

2. EU crisis management

The Portuguese EU Presidency focused on the EU's approach and response to fragile states. In July, a round table discussion and presentation of the results of a study "An adequate EU response strategy to address situations of fragility and difficult environments" was organised in Brussels. The VOICE contribution concerning matters relating to humanitarian aid is acknowledged in the study.

In line with strengthening its crises capabilities the EU has focused on activities to promote "the EU as a global player" among relevant stakeholders from civil society such as NGOs and EU think tanks. Over the last years, VOICE has been monitoring developments in the area of EU crises management in relation to its possible impact on EU humanitarian aid. VOICE members stressed the need to preserve humanitarian space and the importance of the humanitarian principles during a consultation workshop and a major conference in the framework of the EC's Stability Instrument. These events also gave the possibility for a constructive exchange with members from the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) which has played a very active role in relation to the Peace Building Partnership which forms part of the Stability Instrument. EPLO members also participated in the seminar on civil-military relations VOICE organised in December.

3. Revision of the Framework Partnership Agreement

One of the main developments of 2007 has been the adoption and the signature of a new

Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). DG ECHO considered the revision of the FPA an opportunity to introduce certain simplifications and address weaknesses of the 2004 FPA. The most important changes to the 2008 FPA are the introduction of a new "control-system" (A-control and P-control) and the recognition of internal procedures for P-control Partners. The recognition of NGOs' procurement procedures has been one of the major requests of the FPA Watch Group since 2005. Moreover, additional simplifications, which have been requested by NGOs over the past four years, have finally been introduced with the new FPA, such as the abolition of the rules of origin and nationality, and the ex-post publication of awarded contracts.

The consultation with the FPA Watch Group officially started in July, although its Task Force had already started to work with DG ECHO's Finance Management, Legal and procedural affairs Unit on the revision in April. Facilitated by VOICE, five ad hoc meetings between DG ECHO and the NGOs were dedicated to this intense and important process, in addition to the preparatory meetings and work carried out by the Watch Group and its Task Force.

While the process was characterised by transparency and constructive communication between DG ECHO and the NGOs, a quite ambitious revision and an extremely short timeframe put strong pressure on NGOs, who however managed to react timely and efficiently.

4. Partnership between VOICE and the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO)

Dialogue with DG ECHO

Throughout the year, VOICE maintained a close dialogue with DG ECHO in relation to the preparations of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. This included correspondence with the EC Commissioner in charge of Development and Humanitarian Aid, Mr. Louis Michel.

In February, DG ECHO Director General Mr. Antonio Cavaco and VOICE President Mr. Paul Grossrieder met to discuss the development of the next Strategic Dialogue Meeting and the ECHO Annual Partner Meeting. VOICE also drew the attention of DG ECHO to the situation of smaller and recent ECHO NGO partners

which have difficulties in obtaining ECHO contracts.

The annual Strategic Dialogue Meeting between DG ECHO and VOICE took place in July. DG ECHO conducts annually a meeting with each of its Partner groups. Dialogue addressed a wide variety of ongoing and upcoming topics: Information on the latest developments on the humanitarian aid consensus process after the adoption of the EC Communication, and the mid-term review of DG ECHO 2007 Strategy. VOICE raised particular issues of funding for Iraq, plans for the Central African Republic, and thematic issues, such as education in emergencies, food security, implementation of the food aid budget line, and capacity building.

As initiated by Belgian NGO Partners, DG ECHO discussed and carried out an analysis of its audit procedures. During this dialogue, VOICE explicitly requested DG ECHO to improve information flow and communication on audits, which concretely resulted in making available useful audit related information on the DG ECHO website.

DG ECHO Annual Partner Conference

The DG ECHO Partner Conference 2007 in December was the scene of the official signing of the revised Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA), which formalised DG ECHO/ NGO cooperation for coming years. The FPA Watch Group, facilitated by VOICE, had worked extensively with DG ECHO during the past months providing comments and recommendations in order for the new FPA to be as suitable as possible for NGO interventions in the field.

VOICE President Mr. Paul Grossrieder addressed the conference, touching on the main policy issues for humanitarian NGOs of the past year. He expressed satisfaction with a year's fruitful collaboration and partnership between VOICE and DG ECHO, especially on the Framework Partnership Agreement revision, and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Mr. Grossrieder also addressed some challenges ahead, including the implementation of the Consensus, and the respect of humanitarian principles. Other priorities for VOICE would be disaster risk reduction, civil-military relations, as much as monitoring the implementation of the FPA.

Throughout the two-day conference VOICE member organisations used the opportunity to

challenge conference speakers on current issues such as the new FPA and DG ECHO Strategy for 2008. VOICE members also gave presentations on accountability, protection and capacity building.

Participation in ECHO reviews

Collaboration with DG ECHO and VOICE with regard to the reviews and evaluations DG ECHO carries out regularly was further solidified in 2007. As a follow-up to the Strategic Dialogue Meeting, VOICE met with the DG ECHO evaluation sector to discuss how to better involve VOICE in DG ECHO thematic reviews, evaluations and studies. In addition to ensuring NGO Partners' input with longer consultation periods, possibilities of involving VOICE could also include commenting of draft final reports, organising public debriefing sessions, and exchange on the themes that DG ECHO should consider a review on. In the first instance it was confirmed that VOICE will be interviewed by the consultants for thematic reviews in order to reinforce the possibility for an NGO input and to ensure involvement of a wider range of NGOs. .

The results of this collaboration were evidenced by approximately 60 responses from NGOs to the DG ECHO review on communication, information and visibility activities in humanitarian aid. Also, VOICE was interviewed and gave its expertise to reviews/evaluations on the methodology for the evaluation of humanitarian aid; the methodology for the monitoring of humanitarian aid; and on DG ECHO financed activities in the health sector.

2 – STRENGTHEN VOICE AUTHORITY VIS-A-VIS THE EU AND IN THE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

1. VOICE and EU Institutions

European Commission

In addition of VOICE being the main interlocutor of humanitarian NGOs with DG ECHO, VOICE follows the work of other European Commission services. In relation to EU crisis management capabilities, VOICE has created working relations with Directorate-General for External Relations (RELEX). With the policy focus on disaster risk reduction through VOICE working group, the policy developing processes of Directorate-General for Development have grown in importance. The contacts are particularly developed with the unit responsible of sustainable management of natural resources. In relation to civil protection, VOICE monitors the policy developments as lead by Directorate-General for Environment.

European Parliament

The VOICE collaboration with the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur for Humanitarian Aid, as well as other Development Committee members, grew significantly during the drafting of the EP Report on Humanitarian Aid and the tri-institutional negotiations for the Consensus. In addition to the Consensus process, VOICE monitored the work of Development Committee. Also, due to the strengthened relations VOICE advice and facilitation was sought to identify NGO speakers for hearings on Evaluation of the post-tsunami EU response, Humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka, and Humanitarian Aid after the Consensus.

Council of European Union / EU Presidencies

VOICE followed very closely the German EU Presidency's (January – June 2007) preparations for the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. In this framework, VOICE was invited to address the Informal Humanitarian Aid Committee in Berlin. In the second half of 2007, VOICE met with the Portuguese EU presidency, which took over as from July and started drafting the Consensus text. VOICE member organizations in different European Countries got together to advocate national level ministries, in order to influence

the Member States' position in the Council working group.

2. VOICE relations with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

VOICE relations with both the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were strengthened through the three parties' involvement in the EU policy discussions over the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The exchange with both the IFRC EU Office and ICRC EU Delegation saw regular information-sharing on issues of common interest, such as military and civil protection assets in emergency response, respect of humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law, and protection of humanitarian space. To follow from the successful roundtable discussion organised together with ICRC in December 2006, possibilities for another joint event were discussed, and decided for 2008.

3. VOICE relations with NGO networks

In May, VOICE President Mr. Paul Grossrieder and CONCORD President Mr. Justin Kilcullen met to exchange on issues of common interest. A possibility to organise a meeting between the Boards of the two networks was explored as well as a common working group on Disaster Risk Reduction.

The VOICE working group on Disaster Risk Reduction worked in close contact with both CONCORD and *Climate Action Network (CAN)* while preparing a side event at the European Development Days in Lisbon in October. The VOICE working group's side event complemented that of CONCORD and CAN by illustrating the link between disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and development cooperation.

VOICE strengthened the exchange and collaboration with other humanitarian networks leading to the very successful seminar last December on NGOs and civil-military relations where both *ICVA* and *InterAction* actively participated.

The December seminar also gave the opportunity to continue the exchange with the *European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA)* and the national NGO Platform (*ACBAR*), an NGO network bringing together

international and national NGOs working in Afghanistan. Earlier in the year, VOICE had also met with the coordinator of *NGOs Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI)* in order to get a first hand update on the challenges NGOs face while working in Iraq.

At EU level, VOICE has strengthened its links with several of the national NGO platforms. During the advocacy and consultations concerning the European Consensus, close coordination took place with several humanitarian segments of national NGO platforms, especially with the humanitarian working group of the German platform *VENRO*. The SCHA also met with *Portuguese humanitarian NGOs* during the Portuguese Presidency, gave a speech and participated actively during a conference the NGO Platform organised with the support of ECHO, the outcome being that their policy statement reflected several VOICE positions. Exchange has also taken place with French *Coordination Sud* and the *Italian* and *Danish NGO Platforms*.

4. Other international bodies

OECD/DAC. In order to get an external perspective on which issues should be highlighted in the OECD/DAC Peer Review on DG ECHO review, VOICE, as the main EU interlocutor of humanitarian NGOs, was consulted. The issues discussed included the following issues: implications of civil protection/crisis management on EU humanitarian aid; DG ECHO policy & strategy; VOICE thoughts in relation to the DG ECHO evaluation in 2006; FPA and management/contracting issues; and LRRD.

The main findings and recommendations and the review clearly took up several VOICE arguments. Among other things they acknowledged the strong partnership between DG ECHO and NGOs and the strength it brings to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the need for more funding, and the continuing need to streamline and simplify DG ECHO administrative requirements.

Council of Europe. Irish Senator Pascal Mooney, the rapporteur for the Council of Europe study on 'Europe's Response to Humanitarian Disasters', requested to receive comments from VOICE concerning EU civil protection activities and the risk of lack of coordination between different EU mechanisms. VOICE was also invited to the

Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU, to a high level working dinner with the EC, DG ECHO, the Council Secretariat, and UN-OCHA. The focus of discussion included the challenges involved in coordinating and rapidly responding to humanitarian disasters. On both occasions, VOICE reiterated its recommendations outlined in the briefing paper on EU Crisis capabilities, and the need to preserve the independence of humanitarian NGOs.

NOHA. During autumn VOICE collaborated with NOHA (Network on Humanitarian Assistance) Universities Master's Programme on several occasions. At the Introductory Seminar for 150 new students at Bochum University, VOICE member Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, the VOICE Director and a representative of the German NGO Platform gave their perspectives on NGO policy influencing at NGO, national and EU level. The case study was the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

In October, the VOICE Director gave a speech addressing a NOHA seminar in Portugal focusing on the different actors in the humanitarian community. In addition, the VOICE Director together with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and others were invited to evaluate and validate the content of the current NOHA Master's programme in an exercise called tuning, where the coordinators of the different universities seek input from external stakeholders.

Humanitarian Futures Programme. VOICE also met representatives of the Humanitarian Futures Programme, hosted by King's College in London, which aims to improve the ability of agencies to anticipate and adapt in the face of new and emerging crises.

5. VOICE and the Global Humanitarian Reform Process

Throughout the year VOICE has been monitoring and engaging in the different initiatives of the global humanitarian reform process.

The issue of UN humanitarian reforms was discussed with German NGOs in Berlin in March. VOICE organised, in cooperation with VENRO, a Round Table on *Global Humanitarian Reforms: What impact on European NGOs?*. Some 40 participants –

including representatives of 17 German NGOs – attended this half-day event. VOICE and the NGOs repeated the need for a diversity of independent and professional humanitarian non-state actors to the attention of the representative of the German EU Presidency.

Global Humanitarian Platform. VOICE has been involved in the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) since the beginning in 2006. This initiative seeks to improve humanitarian response by strengthening partnerships at the global and field level while it brings together NGOs, UN agencies and the Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement on an equal footing. In July representatives of 40 NGOs (mostly VOICE members), the Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement, UN agencies and other intergovernmental organizations came together in Geneva. The meeting approved the 'Principles of Partnership' (PoP) which aim to improve collaboration in order to achieve better humanitarian response. VOICE has been promoting the PoP among its members, stressing its importance and the need to apply them within the organisations in order to advance towards achieving the objectives of the GHP.

Future of Global Humanitarian Financing. VOICE, together with the humanitarian NGO networks of ICVA and SCHR, participated actively in a meeting on the Future of Global Humanitarian Financing in July in Geneva. VOICE member Médecins du Monde France (MDM) gave a speech. This meeting was the first of its kind to bring together the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (GHDI), Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and Non-UN actors. The objective of the meeting was to look into ways of improving present international humanitarian financing in order to better support the delivery and effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

In advance of the meeting, VOICE and ICVA met with Geneva-based donors which gave the opportunity to stress that contributions to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) should be additional to current humanitarian funding, and that the CERF should be more easily accessible for NGOs. VOICE members' experiences with CERF funding were also presented at a VOICE and DanChurchAid organised Round

Table in Copenhagen in June. Throughout the year the VOICE position concerning the CERF (2006) was brought forward in a range of different fora.

Informal EU Humanitarian Aid Committee. During the Portuguese EU Presidency, VOICE was invited to speak at the Informal EU Humanitarian Aid Committee (HAC) meeting in Lisbon in October. VOICE President, Mr. Paul Grossrieder, addressed EU member states' representatives and spoke about the opportunities and challenges of the humanitarian reform to NGOs. Other speakers included UN/OCHA and UNHCR. Also, VOICE recommendations for the European consensus on humanitarian aid and on disaster risk reduction were included in the official background documents for participants.

In its recommendations to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, VOICE stressed the need for inclusiveness concerning the UN reforms, the need for NGO access to the CERF and the importance of the GHP.

6. VOICE relations with UN-OCHA

In March, VOICE met with the Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) in Geneva, Mr. Kasidis Rochanakorn. The issue of the 'last resort' clause of the Oslo Guidelines was addressed during the meeting, which had been initiated by UN-OCHA.

Sir John Holmes, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, while visiting Brussels on in August for a series of high level meetings requested to exchange with VOICE. VOICE brought up the following issues: NGO position and advocacy on the EU humanitarian aid consensus process, importance of inclusiveness in the global humanitarian reform, challenges that the UN cluster approach put to NGOs, the Global Humanitarian Platform, and the VOICE position on the CERF.

In mid-October the newly appointed Liaison Officer of UN-OCHA to Brussels, Ms. Guadalupe de Sousa Reis, met with VOICE to exchange views and discuss future collaboration.

3 – INCREASING RELEVANCE FOR THE MEMBERS

1. Working Groups

FPA Watch Group

Throughout 2007 VOICE continued to play an important role as facilitator for DG ECHO Partner NGOs in relation to Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) by supporting the FPA Watch Group and its Task Force in the consultation process with DG ECHO. As a result, recommendations and proposals have been made to DG ECHO and the perspectives and concerns of NGOs have been heard..

In the first half of the year, the main focus was placed on the development of the Fact Sheets. These documents aim to ensure consistency and coherence in interpretation among DG ECHO field offices and Headquarter staff; an issue of concern which was repeatedly raised over the last year by the FPA Watch Group. The group provided regular inputs and several proposals for changes in order to make these documents more NGO friendly.

In the second half of 2007, DG ECHO focused on the revision of the FPA. The Watch Group and its Task Force were very active on this matter, closely monitoring DG ECHO documents and providing feedback and suggestions, which were openly discussed with DG ECHO.

Beside the regular exchange with DG ECHO's financial and legal unit, the WG met with the World Food Programme to discuss the Humanitarian Response Depots (UNHRD) and with two Humanitarian Procurement Centres (HPCs): MSF Supply and EuronAid. Two FPA Watch Group meetings and nine Task Force working meetings were organised and facilitated by VOICE in 2007.

The work done by the Watch Group and VOICE has become one of the cornerstones of the partnership with DG ECHO and it is widely recognised. The close dialogue and the constructive spirit of the consultation between DG ECHO, the Watch Group and VOICE represent a recognition of the work done by the group during the last years and has benefited both DG ECHO and its Partners.

VOICE Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction

Following strong interest among VOICE members to influence the EU policies and practice around disaster risk reduction (DRR) a VOICE Working Group on DRR was created in March 2007. The interest among VOICE members to participate in the group grew throughout the year: from 12 organizations initially participating to 20 working group members by the end of 2007. The working group chose EU-CORD as a lead agency, who facilitates and coordinates the group together with VOICE secretariat. The working group met four times in 2007.

The overarching goal of the VOICE working group on DRR is to contribute to and improve EU policy and practice on Disaster Risk Reduction mainstreaming within the context of the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Its main objectives are to increase EC institutions (European Council, European Parliament, and EC services) and EU member states' understanding of the need to mainstream DRR in relief and development programming. It also aims to increase NGO influence with the EC on DRR mainstreaming, as well as increasing the number of EC Service and EU Member states monitoring the progress on DRR mainstreaming.

The DRR Working Group formulated policy recommendations on DRR in EU humanitarian and development aid policies. These messages were widely used throughout the development of the Consensus on humanitarian aid, addressing both the EU Institutions and Member States. As a result, the Consensus refers to the Hyogo Framework for Action, it states the EU's support to community-based preparedness activities, and it seeks to mainstream DRR in EU development policy.

The working group was also active at the European Development Days in Lisbon where it held a side event linking DRR, climate change adaptation and development cooperation. The preparations were coordinated together with Climate Action Network (CAN) and CONCORD, whose side event preceded that of the working group.

In 2007, the working group met with DRR policy administrators from DG ECHO and DG Development. These exchanges enabled the working group to hear about the relevant upcoming EC initiatives (such as EC

Communication on DRR and ECHO review on DRR mainstreaming planned for 2008), and establish solid working relations in order to make contributions.

The working group also shares information on global, European and national level DRR initiatives and policy developments including publications, research, events, and campaigns.

2. Promoting quality

FPA and Sphere trainings

The VOICE network is committed to contributing to increasing the professionalism and quality of its members and is actively supporting the drive towards increased professionalism that exists within the humanitarian NGO sector. The FPA and Sphere workshops organised by VOICE are designed to meet the day-to-day needs of NGO staff responsible for developing and implementing humanitarian interventions, both in the field and headquarters.

In 2007, in the framework of the DG ECHO co-financed 2006 Grant Facility project, VOICE, in collaboration with the Association punto.sud, organised seven training sessions on the Framework Partnership Agreement. These trainings aimed to facilitate cooperation between DG ECHO and NGO partners, through the improved comprehension of the FPA as well as the application of quality practices and standard procedures. 109 NGO staff benefited from these sessions.

Throughout 2007, in the framework of the 2006 Grant Facility project, VOICE also organised two workshops on the Sphere project. The main objectives of this type of training were to enable participants to situate Sphere within the general Quality and Accountability dynamics of the humanitarian aid sector and to enable participants to use Sphere standards, indicators and other tools as a reference in programme management. These trainings – hosted by DG ECHO – were attended by 43 humanitarian workers, including NGOs and DG ECHO officials.

VOICE workshops have proven to be very relevant to humanitarian NGOs. Feedback on the sessions has been very positive. In 2007, a total of 68 different humanitarian organisations attended VOICE trainings. VOICE is grateful to the Association punto.sud and the Development Bioforce Institute for their notable support in these activities.

VOICE also maintained its links with other quality initiatives. VOICE continues to be a member of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), and the Director of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP-International) gave a presentation on accreditation at the VOICE General Assembly.

3. Events

VOICE Roundtables in EU Member States

In 2007, VOICE organised three roundtables in Germany, Denmark and Portugal. These events were organised under the framework of the 2006 Grant Facility project, co-financed by ECHO. The objective was to engage the VOICE Board, VOICE member organisations and other relevant humanitarian actors in a dialogue on relevant policy issues related to EU humanitarian aid, with a special emphasis on the national NGO environment. These events represented an excellent opportunity to learn about different national realities to increase the understanding of the importance and relevance of VOICE work at EU level.

Berlin, 12 March 2007:

In cooperation with VENRO, the Association of German development non-governmental organisations, VOICE organised a roundtable on “Global Humanitarian Reforms: What impact on European NGOs”. Officials from DG ECHO, UN-OCHA, the German Foreign Office and various German NGOs participated in this event. VOICE and the NGOs stressed the need for a diversity of independent and professional humanitarian non state actors to the attention of the German EU Presidency.

Copenhagen, 26 June 2007:

Realised in cooperation with VOICE member DanChurchAid, this event focused on trends in EU humanitarian policy, funding, and on civil-military relations. DG ECHO, the Danish Humanitarian Office (DANIDA), and several NGOs from Nordic countries contributed to the roundtable.

Lisbon, 11 October 2007:

In collaboration with the Portuguese NGO platform, VOICE organised a roundtable discussion on humanitarian advocacy to Portuguese NGOs, focusing on the process of developing the European Humanitarian Aid Consensus.

The roundtables have proven very valuable for discussing EU policy issues related to humanitarian aid with relevant actors at EU Member States level. They have been an opportunity for exchange between NGOs from all over the EU and officials from the European Commission and national ministries.

VOICE event on field security and perceptions

In cooperation with GRIP (Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité) and with the financial support of DG ECHO, VOICE organised a public event on "Field Security and Perceptions: Experiences from crisis situations" on 21 May 2007. The event aimed at contributing to the debate on security, stressing that it is not solely a technical matter, but that there are other aspects to consider. How the crises-affected populations perceive international aid agencies is of crucial importance.

Seminar on Civil-Military relations

This very successful seminar was organised on 3-4 December with the financial support of DG ECHO. The concepts and content of the seminar were developed under the coordination of VOICE and in cooperation with member organisations CARE, World Vision and the Norwegian Refugee Council. This event also saw the inter-network collaboration of the Geneva based NGO network ICVA and the American, Washington based NGO network InterAction.

The seminar aimed to explore two main themes: NGO policy and advocacy work on CivMil, and NGO operational strategies on CivMil at field level. Experts from the field and headquarters and speakers shared lessons learned and reflected on knowledge or gaps relating to policy and practice. Participants of this 2-day event represented a wide variety of the NGO community, including VOICE members and NGO networks such as ICVA, InterAction, Canadian Council for International Cooperation, European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA), Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), and European Peace-building Liaison Office (EPLO). Speakers came from several NGOs as well as DG ECHO, ICRC and UN-OCHA. The 60 seminar participants recommended the creation of a VOICE working group on EU civil-military issues.

4. VOICE Communication

VOICE website

Visits to the VOICE website www.ngovoice.org have increased notably since its redesign in late 2006. With a more user-friendly layout, information is more easily accessible. Areas of information are clearly divided, with information on VOICE activities, VOICE publications, the VOICE organizational structure, and on member organisations. The website also provides news and updates on VOICE activities and EU humanitarian aid policy developments. Based on the web statistics, the visibility of VOICE and its member organizations, and therefore the awareness of humanitarian issues has steadily increased.

VOICE Out Loud

VOICE Out Loud is the external newsletter of the network, compiled of contributions by the VOICE members and published by the secretariat. It is intended to contribute to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs through the accounts and opinions of members' experiences, either operationally, or through policy work. It is targeted at stakeholders in the humanitarian community and decision makers at EU level. In 2007, there were two issues of the newsletter; in May and in December.

Issue Five, May 2007 focused on *Vulnerability in Humanitarian Crisis*, and included articles on Internally Displaced Persons in emergencies, gender based violence, mental and physical disability, and indigenous peoples. View on the EU concerned EU Crisis Capabilities, and the Field Focus gave a perspective on vulnerability in Afghanistan. VOICE President, Paul Grossrieder wrote about the importance of NGO coherence in lobbying and advocacy. Issue Five was launched at the 2007 General Assembly and there were some 650 copies published in addition to wide electronic distribution.

The launch of VOICE Out Loud 6 coincided with the annual ECHO Partners' conference in December 2007. It focused on *Advocacy in the Humanitarian Field* and there were some 500 paper copies published. Articles in issue 6 addressed issues such as reproductive health, Disaster Risk Reduction, poverty reduction, Civil-Military relations, Private Security Companies, and protection. The President's editorial focused on the Global Humanitarian Reforms. View on the EU dealt with the reformed EU Lisbon Treaty from a humanitarian perspective, and there was a Field Focus on the role of Information and

Communication Technology in emergency relief and prevention through programmes in Nicaragua and Niger.

VOICE Extranet

The development of the VOICE extranet site began in 2007 and it will be launched during the first half of 2008. This website will be accessible exclusively to VOICE members and intends to improve communication and information-sharing within the network. VOICE extranet will provide easily accessible information to VOICE members on events, humanitarian policies and related VOICE activities, and VOICE organizational information to enhance transparency within the network and encourage further member participation to network's activities.

VOICE Flash

The VOICE Flash is the internal e-bulletin of the network, which keeps VOICE members informed of the latest EU humanitarian aid issues, on the activities of the secretariat, and on other relevant initiatives from the humanitarian community. The Flash also includes announcements on vacancies, events and publications from members and other relevant actors. In 2007, seven issues of the Flash were sent. The distribution is mainly through VOICE contact persons in member organizations, but increasingly interested colleagues subscribe to receive directly the VOICE Flash.

Advocacy Updates

2007 was a very active year for VOICE in terms of advocacy, and the volume of information on advocacy activities around the EU humanitarian aid policy alone warranted separate information updates. There was an all round increase in communication and coordination on advocacy and lobby within the network during the drafting of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. This was greatly facilitated by these extra information bulletins - EU Humanitarian Aid Policy - Advocacy updates. Five of these were issued throughout 2007, which led to a consolidated approach to humanitarian NGO advocacy in the process of developing the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

4 – ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE NETWORK

1. VOICE General Assembly (Forum)

VOICE annual Forum was organised on 21st and 22nd May 2007, consisting of a roundtable on *field security and perception* and the General Assembly (GA). Through individual membership and family representation, a total of 68 VOICE member organisations were represented at the GA; which corresponds to 77% of the total VOICE membership. Three new member organisations were welcomed to the network. Members also elected four new members to the Board (SCHA) and reconfirmed one member.

In 2007, three new organisations joined the VOICE network: International Medical Corps (UK), Islamic Relief Worldwide (UK) and Marie Stopes International UK.

The GA voted to elect four new SCHA members: Andréa Brezovsek (Handicap International France), Thomas Gonnet (Action Contre la Faim), Louise McLean (ActionAid International UK), Evert Van Bodegom (Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation); and reconfirmed Jean Saslawsky (Médecins du Monde France) for a second mandate.

Through its General Policy Resolution, the General Assembly reinforced the main messages of a recent VOICE Statement to influence the development of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The Statement calls for respect of the humanitarian principles (impartiality, independence and neutrality) as essential to access populations in need; diversity of civilian humanitarian actors – particularly the NGOs – in the delivery of EU humanitarian aid; and for the principled delivery of EU humanitarian aid – which implies the use of civil protection and/or military assets only as a last resort.

Given the importance of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the GA decided to give priority to advocacy activities in the annual work programme.

Mr. António Cavaco, Director-General of DG Humanitarian Aid, addressed the VOICE GA. He confirmed the plans to renew and revise the Framework Partnership Agreement reassuring that it would be done in open dialogue with Partners. Also, he clarified that

the new-to-DG ECHO Food Aid budget line is also allocated based on humanitarian needs; and that institutional Partners are not privileged over NGO Partners. Mr. Cavaco also emphasised the importance of the forthcoming Communication on the EU Humanitarian Aid, and recognised VOICE active involvement and concerns raised by NGOs.

2. Procedures for working groups & statements

Given the strong interest from VOICE members for working groups and the need for common positions in the network, the SCHA decided in early spring to develop procedures for working groups and common statements for the network. The SCHA meeting in May approved these two network procedures, which aim at strengthening governance and transparency within VOICE.

3. VOICE Assessment 2005-2007

In 2007, the SCHA launched an external evaluation of the achievements of the VOICE network against the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2005 – 2007. The assessment – carried out in the framework of the 2006 Grant Facility project – was undertaken by the UK consultancy JMJ International. Through a questionnaire and interviews all VOICE members were invited to give their opinions on the past and future work of the network. The assessment was finalized in January 2008. Being a management tool for the SCHA, it has sought to integrate all relevant recommendations into the draft Strategic Plan 2008 – 2010.

The overall outcome confirms that members appreciate and recognize the work done. VOICE has strengthened its authority with the relevant EU institutions, and to a certain degree diversified its financial resources and built its efficiency as approved in the main objectives of the Strategic Plan 2005 – 2007. On the other hand, members wish for more visible and measurable outcomes in relation to activities clearly linked to their needs and concerns. In order to achieve this, there is a need for further financial and human resources. In conclusion, the current level of VOICE authority on EU humanitarian policy needs to be further transformed in order to lead to policy changes and to have a stronger impact on relevant EU institutions and member states.

4. VOICE network members

VOICE is the only network focusing on the EU humanitarian aid, and therefore the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness. The network is composed of eighty eight operational European humanitarian NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide, and the secretariat based in Brussels. Members come from seventeen European countries. VOICE, unlike its members, is not operational in emergencies.

VOICE members are dedicated to saving lives, preventing suffering, and bringing swift humanitarian relief to the most vulnerable groups. They base their work – as enshrined in International Humanitarian Law – on humanitarian principles, such as humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. They are committed to following Codes of Conduct and set high standards of professionalism and expertise. Where possible, their interventions include a participatory approach with their local partners and they seek to link relief, rehabilitation and development in order to ensure the sustainability of their interventions. Seventy four (84%) VOICE members are ECHO partners.

5. VOICE President

Mr. Paul Grossrieder has been the President of the network since 2005. Paul Grossrieder is the former Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and has long-standing field experience. He holds a degree in theology and a PhD in international politics and has written numerous articles on humanitarian affairs. Mr. Grossrieder is Swiss.

6. VOICE Board

The VOICE Board is called the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Aid (SCHA). Its role is to ensure that VOICE adheres to its purpose and statutes. It decides on strategic directions and policies, provides governance and accountability and ensures proper management of the network. The SCHA members contribute their professional experience, on a voluntary basis, and as such represent the broader membership of the VOICE network.

At the end of 2007, the VOICE SCHA comprised Paul Grossrieder (VOICE President); Jane Backhurst (World Vision);

Andréa Brezovsek (Handicap International France); Dominic Crowley (Concern Worldwide); Thomas Gonnet (Action Contre la Faim); Louise McLean (Action Aid International UK); Jean Saslawsky (Médecins du Monde France), and Evert Van Bodegom (ICCO).

In the autumn, Louise McLean (Action Aid International UK) went on a one year leave of absence. Anna Jefferys (Save the Children UK) left the SCHA in December before her mandate ended for a new assignment.

The 'Bureau' is the executive body of the SCHA for administrative tasks, and guarantees the financial and legal accountability of VOICE. The Bureau 2007 consisted of Paul Grossrieder (President), Jean Saslawsky (Treasurer), Dominic Crowley (Secretary) and the Director (without a vote). The Bureau met three times in 2007.

7. VOICE Secretariat

The VOICE Secretariat is responsible for facilitating the implementation of the activities as indicated in the VOICE Annual Work Programme – in line with the Strategic Objectives. It is also in charge of the financial management of the association, under the supervision and general control of the VOICE SCHA.

The core staff of the VOICE Secretariat comprises the Director (Kathrin Schick), the Advocacy and Communication Officer (Paula Hokkanen) and the Administration Officer (Teg Malla). The Project Coordinator (Sonia Giannone) has been implementing an ECHO co-financed project of capacity building actions for the benefit of ECHO Partners. During the year the team was supported by several very capable interns.

We would also like to thank Gilles Van Moortel and Kenan Hadzmusic, who in 2007 left the network for new challenges.

8. ECHO Grant Facility project

2007 saw the implementation of the project "Strengthening quality and synergy in humanitarian aid: networking, training and advocacy for humanitarian organisations", co-financed by DG ECHO under the 2006 Grant Facility. This project, implemented from November 2006 until December 2007, aimed at enhancing the knowledge and expertise of humanitarian agencies and professional staff.

VOICE provided its members and other DG ECHO partners with trainings, roundtables, seminars and publications and consolidated its networking, advocacy and policy work, and institutional capacity. In the framework of the Grant Facility project, the network also underwent an external assessment of its achievements against the Strategic Plan 2005-2007.

Through the Grant Facility project DG ECHO recognises the crucial role that VOICE plays, in relation to both policy and operational issues, as the main interlocutor and interface between DG ECHO NGO partners and the European Commission.

9. Finances

Financial independence has always been of importance to the network. The core structure of three staff is therefore foreseen to be mainly financed through the membership fees of its members. In 2007, the total budget of the core costs of the VOICE Secretariat was 275,058€. This amount was made up of 93% membership fees and of 7% from other sources. The ECHO co-financed project contributes to some of the core costs of the budget in addition to covering specific project activities.

5 – Statistics

In 2007 there were eighty eight (88) VOICE member NGOs. 84% of these organizations signed the new DG ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). 49% of ECHO NGO partners are VOICE members.

Main VOICE organised Activities in 2007

- FPA Trainings
- Sphere Trainings
- FPA Watch Group and Task Force
- VOICE Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction
- VOICE Out Loud newsletters
- VOICE General Assembly 2007
- Roundtable in Berlin, March 2007 “Global Humanitarian Reforms: What impact on European NGOs?”
- Roundtable in Brussels, May 2007 “Field Security and Perceptions: Experiences from crisis situations”
- Roundtable in Copenhagen, June 2007- focused on funding and civil-military relations
- Roundtable in Lisbon, October 2007- focused on the advocacy on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid
- Seminar in Brussels, December 2007 “NGO Civil Military Relations”

Member’s participation

- 70.5% of VOICE members have been involved in one or more activities
- 29.5% of VOICE members have not been involved in the activities listed

Most active members in VOICE activities in 2007:

ICCO (NL)	10 activities
Cordaid (NL)	9 activities
Johanniter Unfall Hilfe (DE)	
Action Contre la Faim (FR)	
Handicap International (FR)	
Save the Children (UK)	
Islamic Relief Worldwide (UK)	
Concern Worldwide (IE)	7 activities
DWHH-GermanAgroAction (DE)	
International Rescue Committee (UK)	
Médecins du Monde (FR)	
Mission East (DK)	
	6 activities

Members involvement in VOICE organised activities in 2007

68 NGOs were involved in VOICE General Assembly	77%
32 NGOs were involved in FPA trainings	36%
29 NGOs were involved in the General Assembly event	33%
27 NGOs were involved in the Roundtables	30%
25 NGOs were involved in the CivMil Seminar	28%
21 NGOs were involved in the FPA WG	25%
20 NGOs were involved in DRR Working Group	23%
17 NGOs were involved in Sphere trainings	19%
15 NGOs contributed to VOICE Out Loud Newsletters	17%
10 NGOs were involved in the Civil Military Working Group Feasibility Meeting	11%
8 NGOs were involved in the SCHA at the end of 2007	9%

VOICE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS in 2007

Austria

- CARE Österreich
- CARITAS Österreich
- Hilfswerk Austria
- SOS Kinderdorf International
- World Vision Österreich

Belgium

- CARITAS Secours International Belgium
- Handicap International Belgium
- OXFAM Solidarité – Solidariteit Belgium
- Médecins du Monde Belgium

Denmark

- ADRA Denmark
- ASF Dansk Folkehjælp
- Dansk CARITAS
- DanChurchAid – Folkekirkens Nødhjælp
- Danish Refugee Council – Dansk Flygtningehjælp
- Mission East – Mission Øst

Finland

- FIDA International
- FinnChurchAid
- World Vision Finland

France

- ACF – Action Contre la Faim
- ACTED – Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement
- CARE France
- CARITAS France (Secours Catholique)
- Handicap International France
- MDM – Médecins du Monde France
- Première Urgence
- Secours Populaire Français
- Solidarités
- Triangle "Génération Humanitaire"
- TSF – Télécoms sans Frontières

Germany

- ADRA – Adventist Development and Relief Agency Germany
- ASB – Arbeiter Samariter Bund Deutschland
- CARE Germany
- CARITAS Germany
- DWHH – GermanAgroAction
- Diakonie Emergency Aid – Diakonisches Werk der EKD
- Johanniter Unfall Hilfe Bundesgeschäftsstelle
- Malteser Hilfsdienst
- Medico International
- World Vision Germany

Greece

- Médecins du Monde - Greece

Ireland

- CONCERN Worldwide
- Trócaire
- World Vision Ireland

Italy

- CARITAS Italia
- CESVI – Cooperazione e Sviluppo
- CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli

Luxembourg

- CARITAS Luxembourg

The Netherlands

- Cordaid
- CARE Nederland
- HealthNet – TPO
- ICCO
- NOVIB – Oxfam Netherlands
- World Vision Nederland
- ZOA Refugee Care

Norway

- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Portugal

- Medicos do Mundo – Portugal

Spain

- Acción contra el Hambre
- CARITAS Spain
- Intermón-Oxfam
- Medicos del Mundo
- MPDL – Movimiento Por La Paz, El Desarme y la Libertad

Sweden

- CARITAS Sverige
- Church of Sweden Aid – Lutherhjälpen
- IAS–International Aid Services Sweden
- PMU Interlife Sverige
- Star of Hope International

Switzerland

- ACT– Action by Churches Together
- Lutheran World Federation
- MEDAIR

United Kingdom

- Action Against Hunger
- ActionAid UK
- ADRA UK
- CAFOD – Catholic Fund For Overseas Development
- CARE UK
- Christian Aid UK
- CORD
- Health Unlimited
- IRC UK – International Rescue Committee UK
- International Medical Corps
- Islamic Relief Worldwide UK
- Marie Stopes International UK
- Mercy Corps Scotland
- Merlin
- Oxfam GB
- Plan International UK
- Save The Children UK
- Tear Fund
- World Vision UK