



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing more than 80 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

2011

GENERAL POLICY RESOLUTION

THE VOICE NETWORK,

WELCOMING the Communication on *the mid-term review of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid Action Plan*, and especially TAKING NOTE that the Communication stresses adherence to the humanitarian principles in all areas of EU External Action;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the *Communication towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance*; ACKNOWLEDGING the importance of EU preparedness and that civil protection has a role to play that can be complementary to that of humanitarian aid; MONITORING therefore the upcoming legislation on European civil protection;

WELCOMING the *Implementation Plan of the EU strategy for supporting disaster risk reduction in developing countries 2011-2014*; and EMPHASIZING the need for corresponding commitment and action both at EU and member state level;

RECONFIRMING the effectiveness of the EU approach of implementing humanitarian aid through a diversity of professional humanitarian actors, and particularly NGOs - which are responsible for the delivery of the vast majority of all emergency responses and whose engagement also expresses EU solidarity with crisis-affected populations;

PREOCCUPIED by the increasing humanitarian needs and the restricted financial resources for meeting these at a time of increasing financial hardship;

CONCERNED about the trend towards broadening the objectives of humanitarian aid to include visibility or security;

DRAWING ATTENTION TO the shrinking humanitarian space, the increasing denial of access to crisis-affected populations and the increasing insecurity experienced by professional humanitarian actors;

RECALLING its recent position papers on *Humanitarian aid in European Commission external action funding (March 2011)* and *EU military operation in support of humanitarian assistance operations in Libya (April 2011)*;

PLEASED WITH EU citizens' wide support for EU Humanitarian Aid as demonstrated in the 2010 Eurobarometer;

EMPHASIZING that the only objectives of humanitarian aid are to save lives and to alleviate human suffering;

The large humanitarian crises in Haiti and Pakistan as well as forgotten crises such as Côte d'Ivoire and in the Sahel region have demonstrated that certain conditions need to be fulfilled to enable professional humanitarian actors to reach crisis-affected populations and to ensure the most appropriate response to address these populations' needs. The EU and its member states should use their leverage to ensure that these conditions are consistently met.

The VOICE network therefore calls upon the institutions of the European Union and its 27 member states to support the delivery of needs-based humanitarian aid through the following actions:

1. Ensuring respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and humanitarian principles:
 - The EU should continue to insist on the importance of humanitarian access to crisis-affected people and monitor and speak out on breaches of IHL.
 - In line with the commitments made in the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*, the EU and member states need to ensure that humanitarian aid is not used as a crisis management tool.
 - The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative could play a stronger advocacy role towards crisis-affected states, to emphasize the responsibility of governments to protect their citizens and to facilitate access to disaster-affected populations for professional humanitarian organisations.
2. Committing sufficient and timely funding to a diversity of professional humanitarian actors:
 - Based on the evolution of humanitarian needs, EC humanitarian aid requires at least 1 billion euro for each year of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework.
 - Consistent with Good Humanitarian Donorship commitments, a separate budget line for EU humanitarian aid is crucial to enable independent humanitarian decision making at EC level.
 - Funding, including pooled funding, should be disbursed in a prompt way - as required in sudden-onset crises - and should be flexible in terms of conditions and the range of use.
 - In order to meet the complexity of needs of crisis-affected populations, a diversity of funding mechanisms, including bilateral and pooled funding, needs to be available to NGOs, the Red Cross movement and the UN.
3. Mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction (DRR) into development, recovery and humanitarian policies:
 - Issues such as DRR, climate change adaptation and poverty reduction are currently addressed in separate policy frameworks and funding lines. The EU needs to ensure better connectivity between these frameworks to achieve a more holistic approach to addressing the common risk factors which lead to local vulnerability. This is essential to reduce the impact of disasters on vulnerable communities.
 - In line with the widespread recognition of the necessity of DRR, DRR mainstreaming in development, recovery and humanitarian programming is needed at both EU and member state level.
 - The implementation of the EU strategy for supporting DRR in developing countries should be actively pursued by Member States, with greater emphasis being placed on building resilience at a local level.
4. Ensuring the complementarity between professional humanitarian actors and other actors involved in disaster response:
 - The EU should work to establish clear mandates and roles to ensure complementarity between professional humanitarian actors and others potentially involved in disaster response, such as civil protection and the military. This should be based on the international guidelines on the use of military and civil defence assets in disaster relief (Oslo and MCDA guidelines). Moreover, in emergencies *outside* the EU and in order to safeguard the impartiality of humanitarian actors, it is particularly important in a conflict situation to maintain a clear distinction between humanitarian action and civil protection or military interventions.
 - Strong and qualified leadership is needed for every major crisis to ensure effective coordination of the humanitarian response. In the quest for efficiency and effectiveness, EU member states need to make full use of their position in relevant UN fora to ensure that experienced and skilled Humanitarian Coordinators are rapidly deployed, and that their performance be effectively managed.