



ECHO Annual Partner Conference 05-11-2013

VOICE President Mr Nicolas Borsinger - speaking points

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Introductory comments: Today there has been discussion of challenges ahead and next year is a year of change. In 2014, we will need special efforts towards the change of European Parliament. Whatever you think about politics, I hope that you will vote in the Parliamentary elections of 2014, and mobilise other colleagues and friends to do so. The Parliament has a defining impact on the humanitarian budget, on the liquidity situation, on who will chair COHAFA in the future, and so on.

1. After one year as president of VOICE I have learned to appreciate the solid working relationship we have with DG ECHO. Over the last months we have always met an open door when we wanted to discuss issues of common concern. I would like to thank DG ECHO and its staff for the openness and frankness in which our dialogue is conducted and appreciate that a regular exchange has recently been established between the policy pillar and the VOICE secretariat.

2. This year the ICRC is celebrating the 150 years of IHL: last week I had the pleasure to join the ICRC president as well as the Commissioner and several colleagues in an event which reconfirmed the relevance of the humanitarian principles for our work in the field, but which at the same time did not fall short of raising a number of challenging questions when it comes to the dizzyingly changing nature of conflict and the never-ending struggle to ensure respect of the principles in the field.

3. *However important the principles are for the humanitarian endeavour, if funds are not available or accessible, the impact on ECHO partners and field operations is potentially suffocating.* For the VOICE network this matter has the highest priority. The VOICE Board has monitored the current liquidity shortage of DG ECHO over the last months. We welcome ECHO's straightforwardness today on this situation. It is most unfortunate that the political deadlock between member states and the European Parliament over the payments for 2013 and the MFF has had such serious consequences for the delivery of EU humanitarian aid. After Board members met with Mr. Sorensen and his colleagues two weeks ago we feel assured that ECHO – who in this matter is also subject to political struggles beyond its control - has a clear understanding of the multiple challenges partners face due to the current liquidity situation. .

We were relieved by the assurance of Mr Sorensen that challenges experienced by NGOs as a result of this situation will not affect their assessment for the new FPA.

I would also like to thank DG ECHO for all the efforts it is making to get through this situation as best and soon as possible. *For NGOs who work with DG ECHO, predictability and open communication is crucial, in order to make arrangements to get through this challenging period.*

4. VOICE members have already started to raise this issue in several member states and more advocacy will be needed at national level. While we can be proud that, through our common

advocacy efforts we managed to ensure the current funding level for EC humanitarian aid for the next 7 years, if member states do not fulfil the commitments they have made this achievement has little value. VOICE members CEOs will receive further information shortly to keep this issue to the forefront of Member States' concerns.

5. Thanks also need to be addressed to the FPA Watch Group, of whom many made relevant remarks today. The FPA WG throughout the FPA revision process has put down a lot of work so that the new FPA which will start in January 2014 might really be a step towards reducing the administrative burden for NGOs. However, the devil remains in the detail. While ECHO has made a concerted effort in that direction, the new demands for information and indicators in the Single form will put new challenges for partners. Much has been achieved such as simplifying reporting requirements and using more of NGOs own procedures. *However, challenges remain; in particular we now need some clear guidelines to ensure simplification in practice and ECHO needs to make an special effort of communication with its partners on requirements during the transition period.* The FPA Watch group on its side will monitor the application of the new FPA paying special attention to its new elements such as indicators and markers.

6. Today I was glad to hear commitment to new action relative to the European consensus. Hopefully we will see the evaluation of the Consensus Action Plan recommend another Action Plan, - the shape can be discussed - which can serve to renew member states' commitment to the Consensus. VOICE has recently commissioned a study on the NGO perspective on the Consensus, and preliminary findings show that many member states and NGOs refer to the Consensus mostly in relation to the humanitarian principles. The Consensus is, however, a much wider framework which constitutes good practice including LRRD, DRR and accountability. A renewed collective effort is needed to reaffirm the relevance of the Consensus, among governments, NGOs and other actors. Preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 should build on this framework and on the outcome of the Fit-for-purpose consultation, from which we still have had too little substantial information to date (but thanks Florika for the explanation received today). Many NGOs gave their input to the consolidated answer which VOICE provided for DG ECHO and expect their views to be taken into account.

7. Issues I have mentioned up to now, from principles to funding, are obviously of key concern to NGOs. But there are other ongoing discussions in the sector that are also relevant to note, especially as concerns the quality of humanitarian aid. This year, the SCHR Certification project has provoked a high and very well-deserved level of debate in the community. We are delighted that so many NGOs have engaged actively to share their views; the debate itself is of extreme importance whether or not we end up with a certification model in this round. The VOICE Board and secretariat has followed these initiatives closely and raised a number of issues to the SCHR Certification Project Steering group; amongst others, the importance of any certification model including all the humanitarian principles, not just impartiality and humanity, and the assurance that any certification model must be inclusive of a certain diversity of actors, including local actors. A model should also encourage capacity building and other measures towards professionalization. But, please be aware, that by nature certification is about exclusion.

8 Another issue I would like to draw your attention to was the subject of the VOICE event yesterday evening: the impact of donor counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action. Last night (in the report) a link between the humanitarian principles and

counter terrorism measures was argued, since both can be seen as seeking to protect civilians from politically motivated harm. Fine, but the impact of counter-terrorism measures on NGOs as humanitarian actors can be felt structurally, operationally and internally. It is clear that if the EU were to follow the same path as the US on this issue, the administrative impact on NGOs, besides the operational challenges, will be, to say the least, extremely burdensome. Together with DG ECHO we will have to continue to work to ensure that this never happens.

9. We recognise and are aware of the fact that there are hard times ahead. The only way through is to ensure a consistently high level of communication between ECHO and all of its partners. It is only in collective action that we achieve results.

Thank you.