VOICE ASBL

ACTIVITY REPORT 2002

Brussels, May 2003
INTRODUCTION

After the establishment of VOICE asbl as an independent NGO network last year, in 2002 the organisation entered into a process of consolidation both concerning its activities as well as its administration.

Over the last years, civil society organisations have on the one hand gained improved dialogue with the European institutions, while, on the other hand, the imperative of transparency and efficiency, exemplified in the EC’s new Financial Regulation, continues to create increased administrative demands for NGOs. This dynamic leaves civil society organisations with questions about their future role in a changing Europe. During 2002 VOICE and its members have therefore put a lot of effort into the consultation process on the revision of the Framework Partnership Agreement, as well as further building the partnership with ECHO through continuous dialogue and exchange.

Given the increasing number of complex emergencies on the international scene, the European Union is focusing on the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and new crisis management tools. Within this framework humanitarian aid runs the risk of becoming influenced by political considerations. The Convention on the Future of Europe started in February and may be an opportunity to guarantee impartial and apolitical European humanitarian aid in the future Constitution. Several of VOICE’s activities in 2002 have focused on following the CFSP and the Convention in order to draw attention to these developments as well as to influence the ongoing processes.

These changes are ongoing, and given the heightened attention to humanitarian aid in international politics, humanitarian NGOs will face many challenges over the coming years. The need for a solid and active European network of humanitarian NGOs therefore remains crucial!
On the administrative side, VOICE’s first challenge of 2002 was to establish a set of management tools in order to set work priorities for the network. The General Assembly in May approved the Strategic Plan 2002 – 2004 as well as the work programme and budget for 2002, and established internal regulations.

After several changes in the staff composition the secretariat closed 2002 with a competent and professional team of three permanent employees. The corpus of member organisations also stabilized in 2002, and by autumn VOICE noted an increasing interest in new membership among humanitarian NGOs.

VOICE was able to create a positive financial result by the end of 2002 and to put transparent and efficient administrative procedures into practice. Over the course of the year considerable effort was invested in settling unresolved matters with the CLONG (NGO Liaison Committee), and at the end of 2002 an agreement resolved all outstanding issues from the past.

At a time when the European Union is going through a lot of changes, humanitarian aid NGOs must be in a position to watch closely, to adapt to and to try to influence its developments. 2002 marked ten years of VOICE, and witnessed a network with new perspectives on the future, able to fulfill its role in representing its members’ concerns over the next years.

Kathrin Schick, Director, VOICE asbl

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**February Highlights**

- Meeting with OCHA NY
- Afghanistan Seminar, VOICE /EuronAid
- URD Seminar, Paris
- SCHA meeting
- Visit to MPDL, ICR, Caritas Spain, Ayuda en Accion, Spain
- MDM Conference on Gender, Madrid

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**STRATEGIC GUIDELINE 1: BUILDING PARTNERSHIP WITH ECHO**

**FPA Watch Group to monitor the development of the new Framework Partnership Agreement**

The Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) defines the contractual relationship between ECHO and its implementing partners. In 2001, when ECHO began revising the FPA, the ECHO partners designated VOICE as the facilitator for the consultation process between ECHO and its partners.

In 2002, VOICE continued to facilitate the process by holding a series of meetings of the FPA Watch Group (which includes some 30 NGOs elected to represent all ECHO partners) and its smaller executive body, the Task Force. Members of this group include VOICE members Action Contre la Faim, Care International, Handicap International, Médecins du Monde, and Mission East, who put substantial effort into the FPA
consultation process. All told, 9 meetings were held in 2002. The Watch Group met with ECHO in April and July, after which the process was temporarily stalled by ECHO’s need to adapt the draft text to the new financial regulation for the European Commission. This adaptation also implied that much of the past input was no longer relevant. In December VOICE, on behalf of the Watch Group, wrote a letter to the Commission expressing concern with the consultation process on the FPA.

Also in December, a new problematic concerning the FPA came into view: since the new FPA would not come into force before autumn 2003, the ongoing FPA had to be altered to comply with the new financial regulation, which would come into force on January 1, 2003. VOICE acted promptly to inform the ECHO partners about the implications of the financial regulation, in preparation for the transitional period.

**Annual ECHO Partner Conference**

VOICE as a network and several of its members worked together with ECHO on the preparations for the Annual ECHO Partner Conference, held on 14-15 October, where reports and workshops were planned on quality, human resources, and information technology.

VOICE used the occasion of the Partner Conference to celebrate its 10th Anniversary, by hosting a lecture on the issue of linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD). The Partner Conference also proved a useful occasion to raise VOICE’s profile and visibility among Europe’s humanitarian actors, and recruit new members.

**Strategic Partnership Dialogue**

In November 2002, VOICE, on behalf of ECHO NGO partners, participated with ECHO in the Strategic Operational Dialogue for Partnership. VOICE’s board members and secretariat gave a presentation on Partnership, Strategy, and Operational concerns, as input to ECHO’s Strategic Plan for 2003. VOICE made the following recommendations:

- ECHO should conduct a mid-term review of the Strategy in Summer 2003
- The Steering Group should be continued, with links to the Grant Facility
- Communication with representative partner networks should be more proactive

**Other Activities with ECHO**

- **DIPECHO Seminar**: VOICE invited its member agencies CARE Germany, Movimondo and Tearfund UK, to make presentations at a
Disaster Preparedness Workshop with an international profile, organized by ECHO on 17-18 September. The meeting focused on the Caribbean and Latin America, and VOICE was able to make a substantial contribution.

- **Desks and Global Plans:** Over the year, VOICE established regular contact with many of the ECHO desk officers, such as those responsible for Afghanistan, Palestine, Colombia, Angola and Congo (DRC), in order to keep members updated on these country situations through the newsletter. Additionally, VOICE used the opportunity to participate in Global Plan meetings on Angola and Congo.

- **Informal HAC meeting:** On 24 and 25 October 2002, VOICE was invited for the first time to attend the Informal Humanitarian Affairs Committee Meeting in Copenhagen. The meeting focused on Civilian and Humanitarian Aspects of Crisis Management, something VOICE has followed closely. In order to raise awareness among EU member states about the possible impact of the CFSP on the delivery of humanitarian aid, VOICE used the occasion to distribute the VOICE/World Vision Briefing on Crisis Management was very well received.

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**STRATEGIC GUIDELINE 2:**
**STRENGTHEN RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

VOICE followed EP meetings throughout the year, where relevant, paying particular attention to the Development Committee, which deals with humanitarian affairs. The following are some of the most relevant EP initiatives that VOICE worked on:

- **Palestine:** In light of the serious humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, VOICE, together with member agency Save the Children UK and the International Federation Terre des Hommes, started a lobbying campaign towards the European institutions in April. In response to the hindrance of relief efforts by the Israeli occupying authorities, it called for urgent action from the EU to ensure humanitarian corridors, respect for International Humanitarian Law, and full access for humanitarian workers to affected populations.

As a follow-up, in June, at an EP cross-party forum on the relationship between the developments in Palestine and the EU-Israel Association Agreement, VOICE raised the on-going issue of security of humanitarian aid workers in Palestine territories and restrictions of access to those most in need by the Israeli defence forces on NGOs.
Humanitarian Aid Reports 2000: The EP in 2002 took up the task of reporting on the Commission communication on the annual report on humanitarian aid 2000. VOICE followed the process closely, bringing its position to the July Development Committee meeting where MEP Marie-Arlette Carlotti was appointed Rapporteur. Subsequently, most of the concerns that VOICE had conveyed were addressed in the Final Report dated 10 December, and reflected in the accompanying Resolution. In January 2003, the Parliament, through its Secretary-General, recognized VOICE’s participation in the process by formally sending VOICE the final Resolution.

2003 Budget Crisis: The EP, tasked with preparing the next year’s EU budget, received a lot of attention from VOICE when it revealed a 27.5 MEURO (more than 5%) cut in the budget line B7-210 for 2003. This is the main budget line that ECHO uses to respond to crises through its partners, some 65% of which typically goes to humanitarian NGOs. Prior to the cut, the EP had proposed a raise in ECHO’s humanitarain aid budget for 2003.

In early December, VOICE’s Board wrote to the EP Budget Committee, stressing the effectiveness of ECHO aid distribution through NGOs, and pointing out ECHO’s ability to reach the intended beneficiaries directly through its NGO partners. The message was widely circulated also in the Development and Foreign Affairs Committees, and VOICE members ActionAid Alliance, Care-Netherlands, CISP, Diakonie Emergency Aid, and Medico International supported the initiative by further alerting relevant MEPs from their member states.

Although VOICE’s letter and surrounding lobbying efforts did not succeed in reversing the budget cut, the Chairman of the Budget Committee responded to VOICE assuring that in 2003, ECHO’s access to the emergency reserve would be made easier in order to meet emergency needs in a timely way if necessary.

STRATEGIC GUIDELINE 3:
PURSUE COHERENCE OF HUMANITARIAN POLICIES

Crisis Management Briefing
In May, VOICE, together with World Vision, prepared a briefing entitled “EU Framework for Crisis Management: What Role for Humanitarian NGOs?” The objective of the briefing was to facilitate a better understanding of the EU’s mechanisms for responding to crises, with a particular emphasis on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM).
The briefing proved so popular that several hundreds of copies were distributed over the course of the year.

**Civil-Military Relations**

To give further attention to the CFSP issue, VOICE provided the NGO perspective on cooperation with the military at the first “EU CIMIC Conference”, organized by the Council of the European Union in June. VOICE members Handicap International, Norwegian People’s Aid, Care International, and World Vision also attended. VOICE’s main message was that wherever possible humanitarian aid should be implemented through humanitarian NGOs in collaboration with international institutions and international organisations, that the military should be the last actor considered for humanitarian aid activities. VOICE’s position was widely supported by the other civilian humanitarian actors present.

**LRRD Working Group**

In October VOICE reactivated its Working Group on LRRD. Almost 25 VOICE members met there to express interest in being part of the group. The new WG met for the first time on 6 November in Brussels with more than 20 participants from 15 member organisations. Terms of reference were defined, and the group was tasked with influencing the debate on LRRD at the EU level. It started to look into the development of a common NGO position on LRRD stretching across the whole spectrum of Relief, Rehabilitation and Development.

VOICE succeeded in putting LRRD on the agenda for a future Dialogue meeting between the NGO community and Commissioner Poul Nielson. An ad hoc group consisting of Caritas Europa and CISP prepared a statement and represented VOICE at the 22 November meeting. After all, the LRRD issue was not discussed at this meeting, but as a result, a new dialogue opened up with the European Commission and LRRD became the major agenda item for the next meeting with Commissioner Nielson.

**Convention on the Future of Europe**

In order to strengthen the role of EU humanitarian aid in the future, VOICE has followed the process of developing a new Constitution for Europe. The main concern has been that within a reorganized Europe, humanitarian assistance could be in danger of being subsumed under crisis management procedures in order to strengthen the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). VOICE’s efforts have been based upon a wish to see a separate mention of humanitarian assistance in the future Treaty which
ensures that humanitarian assistance remains needs-based, impartial and non-political, preferably within an implementation structure like ECHO, which uses NGO partners to carry out much of the EU’s aid. In November, VOICE published a statement outlining the above ideas, circulating it in the EP, relevant EU institutions and member states.

**STRATEGIC GUIDELINE 4: TO STRENGTHEN THE VOICE NETWORK**

**Afghanistan Seminar**

On 14 February, VOICE and EuronAid together organized a seminar entitled “Afghanistan: The Road to Recovery and the Role of NGOs.” More than 50 European NGOs working in Afghanistan participated. The seminar also saw the participation of all EC services involved in Afghanistan, putting into evidence the need for LRRD in the context of Afghanistan recovery efforts. Security and Access were found to be key issues, and the participants agreed that due to the fluid state of developments in Afghanistan, regular evaluations which allow for adaptation and flexibility would be essential. The final report was widely distributed.

**VOICE Forum 2002**

The VOICE General Assembly, or “Forum”, took place in Brussels on 15-16 May this year. Besides the election of a new President, Arne Piel Christensen, and three new Board members, this year’s Forum set out long-term Strategic Objectives for VOICE covering 2002-2004, as well as a Work Programme for implementing these objectives. Due to the recent changes in the structure and status of VOICE, internal regulations were also discussed and approved. At the political level, a General Policy Resolution focusing on the important role of NGOs in the planning and the implementation of humanitarian aid, a Resolution on LRRD (Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development), and a statement on Palestine were approved.

The two-day Forum included an address by ECHO Director Constanza Adinolfi. The Forum, also an occasion for reflection and debate on humanitarian issues, looked into Civil-Military Relations, Forgotten Crises, and Quality and Partnership.
UN CAP Launch

For the second year running, VOICE organized a round-table debate in the context of the Brussels launch of UN’s Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals Process (CAP). This year’s theme was “Hope for the Future” – implying humanitarian assistance with a view to the long-term improvement of local situations. The VOICE event, held under the auspices of the Belgian Government, featured an intervention by the newly appointed UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello. VOICE member Action Aid Alliance then argued for a rights-based approach to humanitarian assistance while DanChurchAid, and MDM-Belgium shared field perspectives about DRC, Sudan and Somalia with UN staff. The lively debate, with over 60 participants, brought together a wide range of humanitarian actors from the NGO community, the UN, the EC, and governments.

October Highlights

- Child soldier conference, Brussels
- ECHO Partner Meeting
- SCHA Meeting
- Visit to German members, VENRO Humanitarian Working Group, Bonn
- DRC Conference on Forgotten Crises, Denmark
- Meeting Danish members: DanChurchAid, DRC, Mission East, Copenhagen
- Informal HAC Meeting, Copenhagen
- ICRC Colloquium on IHL, Bruges

Networking

- With the intention of reinforcing links and exploring possibilities for future collaboration and exchange of information, VOICE met with different representatives of OCHA, UNHCR and WHO/PAHO during the year, both in Geneva and Brussels.
- In order to strengthen the humanitarian community, VOICE also built relationships with other humanitarian NGO networks ICVA, SCHR and InterAction, with national coordination bodies in the UK and Germany, and with the Red Cross family.
- To increase its visibility, VOICE received numerous visits from universities, research centers and participants in the European Union Visitors Programme (EUVP), who sought VOICE expertise on NGOs, humanitarian aid and the European Union.
- At a Friends of Europe debate with Commissioner Nielson, VOICE argued on the panel for the role of NGOs as actors for change rather than simple implementers.
- As a member of the Editorial Board of the Humanitarian Affairs Review (HAR), VOICE regularly gave input and facilitated VOICE members’ contributions to the publication.
- Over the course of the year, VOICE regularly participated in the exchange with other Brussels-based networks, and VOICE closely
followed the development of a new European NGDO coordination structure.

Communications

2002 saw some innovations in VOICE’s communications approach. The major news was the development of the VOICE website, at www.ngovoice.org. The new website was up and running by the end of summer, featuring links to all VOICE member organizations, downloadable publications, information about past and future events, and a frequently-updated front page telling readers “what’s new” at VOICE.

VOICE’s Newsletter appeared nine times in 2002, featuring special sections on geographical hotspots like the Middle East, Palestine, and Angola.

Towards the end of the year, the secretariat began work on a new communication strategy for 2003.

STRATEGIC GUIDELINE 5: PROMOTING QUALITY AND STANDARDS

AIC Conference and Training of Trainers

VOICE conducted a training project for VOICE members, funded by ECHO, entitled “Improving the Quality of Humanitarian Aid in Conflict Situations – Training for Good Practice”, also known as “Aid in Conflict – Conflict in Aid”. The project, which aimed at addressing how to create conflict awareness and conflict sensitivity among humanitarian staff, involved more than 38 VOICE members from operational level, and other relevant NGO partners. A steering committee shaped the content of a two-day conference in May, which resulted in a comprehensive report including recommendations for good practice when delivering humanitarian aid in conflict contexts. The conference proved extremely popular, bringing more than 110 participants and attracting speakers from ECHO, the European Council, OCHA, IFRC, and universities. To further disseminate the findings and ensure its sustainability, in September VOICE held a training of trainers for NGO staff, together with Responding to Conflict (RTC).
Quality Groups and Initiatives

In 2002, VOICE maintained contacts with all the major humanitarian quality initiatives. Notably, VOICE, being on the Management Committee of the Sphere Project, has followed the revision of the Handbook and explored the possibility of training for VOICE members. VOICE invited French Groupe URD (Urgence, Rehabilitation et Developpement) to the Afghanistan Seminar and 2002 General Assembly. VOICE met with Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) in order to explore future opportunities for collaboration. With ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action) and People in Aid, VOICE has had regular exchange.

During autumn, VOICE was a partner of Bioforce and the University of Paris I in an ECHO-funded project on governance for humanitarian NGOs. This culminated in December with ETIKUMA 2002, the European Symposium on Humanitarian Ethics.

OVERVIEW OF VOICE RESOURCES

VOICE’s Members

The VOICE network is made up of some 90 operational NGOs active in humanitarian aid, most of which are partners of ECHO. This group amounts to some half of all ECHO partners. VOICE member NGOs are highly committed to quality, professionalism, and humanitarian principles.

VOICE’s members include small, medium and big NGOs from all over Europe, and work in crises throughout the world. Some are members of Church-based consortia, others secular “families”; some focus exclusively on short-term humanitarian interventions and rehabilitation while others may be involved in long-term development work also. But all are dedicated to saving lives and preventing suffering; bringing swift humanitarian relief to the most vulnerable populations. The result is that VOICE represents a true spectrum of the European humanitarian NGO community.

VOICE’s Board: the SCHA

At the 2002 VOICE Forum, three new Board members and a new President were elected. The 2002 SCHA (Standing Committee on Humanitarian Aid) consists of:

- Arne Piel Christensen, VOICE President
- Pierre Gallien, ACF, France (Treasurer)
- Anne Simon, CARE International (Secretary)

November Highlights

- VOICE Working group on LRRD
- EuronAid GA, Rome
- Round Table on European Convention
- Visit to French members ACF, MDM International, Paris
- VOICE Round Table for UN CAP Launch, Brussels
- NGO Dialogue meeting with Commissioner Nielson
- ECHO Strategic Dialogue Meeting
December Highlights

• Meeting with Swedish members: PMU Interlife, Church of Sweden Aid
• Visit From Coventry University, UK
• ETIKUMA Conference on NGO Governance, France
• SCHA Meeting

Outgoing members:

• David Church (President)
• Paddy Maguinness, Concern Worldwide
• Paul Meijs, DRA
• Jean-Luc Bodin, ACF (Treasurer)

VOICE’s Secretariat

VOICE’s Brussels-based secretariat consists of three permanent staff:

Director: Kathrin Schick

Administration Officer: Asja Hadzimusic

Communications Officer: Samantha Chaitkin

VOICE would like to thank David Church, Jennifer Tangney and Joanna Lacna for their dedication to VOICE over the last years, and wishes them the best for the future! Thanks are also due to the many volunteers who sustained the secretariat through a challenging transition period.
VOICE Members 2002

Austria
- CARE Österreich
- CARITAS Österreich
- Österreichisches Hilfswerk International
- SOS Kinderdorf International
- UMCOR Europe
- World Vision Österreich

Belgium
- CARITAS Secours International Belgium
- Handicap International Belgium
- OXFAM Solidarité – Solidariteit Belgium

Denmark
- ASF Dansk Folkehjælp
- Dansk CARITAS
- Diakonie Emergency Aid – Diakonisches Werk der EKD
- Johanniter Unfall Hilfe Bundesgeschäftsstelle
- Malteser Hilfsdienst
- Medico International
- World Vision Germany

Finland
- Nada Hope
- World Vision Finland

France
- ACF – Action contre la faim
- ACTED – Agence d’Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement
- AMI – Aide Médecinale Internationale
- Atlas Logistique
- CARE France
- CARITAS France (Secours Catholique)
- Handicap International France
- MDM – Médecins du Monde International
- Pharmaciens sans Frontières
- Première Urgence
- Secours Populaire Français
- Triangle "Génération Humanitaire"
- TSF – Télécoms sans Frontières
- Tulipe

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

Greece
- IISA – Institute of International Social Affairs

Ireland
- CONCERN Worldwide
- GOAL
- TROCAIRE
- World Vision Ireland

Italy
- AFMAL – FBF
- AIBI – Associazione Ameici dei Bambini
- ALISEI
- CARITAS Italia
- CESVI – Cooperazione e Sviluppo
- CINS
- CIPSI
- CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli
- COOPI – Cooperazione Internazionale
- COSV – Comitato Di Coordinamento Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario
- CRIC – Centro Regionale d’Intervento per la Cooperazione
- GVC – Gruppo Volontariato Civile
- ICS
- INTERSOS
- MLAL – Movimento Laici America Latina
- MOVIMONDO

Luxembourg
- CARITAS Luxembourg

The Netherlands
- CORDAID
- CARE Nederland
- ICCO
- WORLD VISION Nederland
- ZOA Refugee Care

Norway
- NPA – NORWEGIAN PEOPLE’S AID

Portugal
- AMI – Assistencia Medica Internacional

Spain
- ActionAid Alliance Spain – Ayuda En Acción
- CARITAS Spain
- CIR – Comite Internacional De Rescate
- Medicus Mundi
- MPDL – Movimiento Por La Paz, El Desarme Y La Libertad
- PTM – Paz Y Tercer Mundo

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

Switzerland
- ACT – Action by Churches Together
- CARITAS Suisse
- Lutheran World Federation
- MEDAIR

United Kingdom
- ActionAid
- CAFOD – Catholic Fund For Overseas Development
- CARE UK
- Children’s Aid Direct
- Christian Aid UK
- Concern Universal
- Health Unlimited
- HelpAge International
- HMD International Response
- MERCY CORPS Scotland
- Merlin
- OXFAM UK
- SCF – Save The Children Fund UK
- TEAR FUND
- WORLD VISION UK
United States

• International Rescue Committee