



VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*) is a network representing some 84 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. Seeking to involve its members in information, training, advocacy and lobbying, VOICE is the main NGO interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness and promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

VOICE General Assembly
Brussels, 12th May 2009

General Policy Resolution
To the European Union, its Presidency, the European Commission and the European Parliament

The VOICE network,

APPRECIATING the 2008 adoption of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid – Action Plan, the framework it sets out for the implementation of the principles of EU humanitarian action, and the DG ECHO consultation of NGOs during its preparation and ongoing implementation;

WELCOMING the establishment in January 2009 of the Council working group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) as a key forum for taking forward the Consensus Action Plan and to strengthen the EU humanitarian aid policy;

GIVEN that in June 2009 the citizens of the 27 European Union member states are to elect their representatives to the European Parliament for the 2009-2014 term, and that the new Members of the European Parliament will need to play an active role in monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan and the respect of the letter of the Consensus;

COMMITTED to monitor the implementation of the Humanitarian Consensus by the EU Member States and the European Commission towards the mid-term review of the Action Plan in 2010, and to engage with the European Parliament in that process;

PREOCCUPIED by the evermore shrinking humanitarian space as evidenced by the challenges faced by international and national NGOs alike in countries such as Sudan and Sri Lanka as well as by the recent expulsion of NGOs from Sudan, of which the majority are implementing partners of the European Commission;

WORRIED by the increasingly deteriorating security conditions in which humanitarian workers operate in conflict-affected countries, with 160 aid workers reported to have been attacked in serious incidents and 122 to have been killed mainly in Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan¹;

EMPHASISING that, to safeguard humanitarian space and ensure the security of civilian humanitarian actors when assisting affected populations, respect for humanitarian principles - humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality - as enshrined in International Humanitarian Law and recognised by the Consensus are of fundamental importance;

STRESSING that, in increasingly complex crisis settings, the EU must, more than ever, persuade governments to recognise that humanitarian action is independent from any political consideration, civilian in nature, and has no other objective than to save lives and to relieve and prevent human suffering;

DRAWING ATTENTION to the expected further increase in frequency, severity and impact of natural disasters as consequences of climate change, and to the expected increase in humanitarian needs due to larger numbers of vulnerable people and amplified population movements;

WELCOMING the EU Strategy for supporting Disaster Risk Reduction in developing countries and noting the EC communication to the Parliament and the Council 'towards a comprehensive Climate Change agreement in Copenhagen' in December 2009;

¹ Center on International Co-operation in New York and the Overseas Development Institute in London. "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments", 2009.

CALLS UPON THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (Council, European Parliament and European Commission) AND ITS 27 MEMBER STATES

1. To provide that, under the Lisbon Treaty, the recently consolidated EU humanitarian aid policy structure is reaffirmed by the renomination of an EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid. The European Commission must maintain and enhance the linkages between the EU relief, rehabilitation and development policies. The European Commission should also take into account the broad field experience of professional civilian humanitarian actors and therefore continuously consult NGOs;
2. To ensure that the new European Parliament recognises the important role of the EU as a global humanitarian donor and policy-maker and the relevance of reappointing a Standing Rapporteur for EU Humanitarian Aid in the European Parliament Committee on Development. Being dedicated to following up on the EU humanitarian action, (s)he should monitor the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid in close collaboration with relevant humanitarian civil society stakeholders;
3. To act upon the need, especially in situations of armed conflict, for a clearer and enhanced dialogue between military and civilian actors. The EU, especially Member States with military forces operating in humanitarian environments, is to make sure governments understand that the foundation of all humanitarian action is to respect the humanitarian principles in all circumstances, and that the respective roles and mandates of military and civilian actors need to be clearly identified and defined ;
4. To strengthen the existing linkages between Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as both strategies aim at reducing vulnerability to disasters. Cooperation between policy makers and practitioners of DRR and CCA must be reinforced in order to improve effectiveness and increase the quality of humanitarian action. Adaptation should capitalize upon available knowledge and capacities in the disaster risk reduction and risk management fields, which have been drawn from successful community-based experiences in preventing, mitigating and building resilience of local populations to climate-related hazards.