

From the VOICE Secretariat

Humanitarian aid should be delivered according to the humanitarian principles of humanity, independence, impartiality and neutrality and it should be based on the needs of crisis-affected people. With the NATO engagement in Afghanistan, the concept of the so-called "comprehensive approach" was developed. This integration of development and humanitarian activities with military and diplomatic measures is increasingly gaining ground as a way of trying to stabilise countries in conflict. Several EU governments support this approach and see humanitarian aid as one of the tools of crisis management. This so-called instrumentalisation of aid, in other words the use of humanitarian aid mainly for security or visibility purposes, is already having an impact on the environment in which professional humanitarian NGOs operate.

This trend strongly affects the fundamental humanitarian principles on which humanitarian aid must be based. Writing from a variety of perspectives, the authors in this issue of VOICE Out Loud, reflect on the tension between the humanitarian principles and the instrumentalisation of aid by donors, affected countries and armed forces. Several articles discuss the consequences for field operations, making the compelling argument that the perception of independence of humanitarian aid is essential for the security of aid workers and crisis-affected populations. The background to the trend is also discussed, as is the need for dialogue between military and humanitarian NGOs and the need for collective advocacy towards donors. The issue also contains an interview with Ross Mountain, Director-General of DARA and former Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, who comments on topical issues such as the planned EU military mission in Libya, UN integrated missions and the role of the media.

This issue's 'field focus' concentrates on Côte d'Ivoire, while our 'View on the EU' looks into the ongoing discussions on the EU budget after 2013 and what should be taken into account for humanitarian aid. Lastly, the issue also contains the VOICE Position Paper on the EU military operation in support of humanitarian assistance operations in Libya.

VOICE OUT LOUD aims to contribute to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs and to give an insight into relevant humanitarian issues, relying upon the experience and input of VOICE members. It is addressed to European decision makers and other stakeholders of the humanitarian community.

VOICE

VOICE stands for Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies. It is a network representing 83 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.

FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT

Wolf-Dieter Eberwein, President VOICE page 3

THE ISSUE

IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

Whose aid is it anyway?
Elise Ford, Oxfam International page 4

No go for NGOs? Worrying trend presents new challenge
for aid agencies
Sandrine Chopin, Handicap International France page 5

The involvement of the military in humanitarian crises:
What is the issue and how to deal with it?
Juliet Milgate, Merlin UK..... page 6

The trend towards instrumentalisation of aid
Interview with Ross Mountain, DARA page 8

'Stabilising' fragile states: a debate that matters for humanitarians
Nick Martlew, Save the Children UK page 10

Colombia - The dangers of civil-military cooperation
in a forgotten humanitarian crisis
Rainer Lucht, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe page 11

A VIEW ON THE EU

The EU Budget after 2013: What is at stake for humanitarian aid?
Annette Wulf, Welthungerhilfe page 12

FIELD FOCUS

Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire: The response of the Danish Refugee Council
Géraldine Tardivel and Klara Haugen-Kossmann,
Danish Refugee Council..... page 13

VOICE POSITION PAPER

VOICE Position Paper on EU military operation in support
of humanitarian operations in Libya page 14

VOICE AT WORK

Humanitarian Issues at EU level page 15



FROM THE VOICE PRESIDENT



Instrumentalisation of aid can be defined as the illegitimate interference on the part of governments into the field activities of humanitarian agencies. The donors have the power to force humanitarian organisations in doing what they would not have done otherwise, such as collaborating with the PRTsⁱ. This kind of practice suggests that those donors who pursue such a strategy of instrumentalisation tend to bypass the principles they have committed to in the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, and – in the European case – the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, agreed upon in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

Some humanitarian organisations do not have a major problem of cooperating with donors by accepting their conditions, even if this means becoming part of the donor's security strategy. Those organisations might be criticised as accepting the status of a "political subcontractor". Instrumentalisation is a fact when the humanitarian actors that refuse to become the prolonged arm of the security policies of a state have to decide whether to comply or not. This is a hard choice as it means accepting or rejecting funding. Are these organisations naïve? Are the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality only the expression of an idealistic approach, desirable in principle, but impossible to achieve in reality? The answer is yes and no. Yes, because the experience of almost 150 years of the Geneva Conventions has shown that norms and reality do not match. The answer is no, because it takes time – nobody knows how much – before norms and principles are taken seriously and respected. One might add that experience shows that the principles work but only if the humanitarians are perceived as neutralⁱⁱ.

Leaving aside the necessity to compromise in reality, the term 'instrumentalisation' suggests that there is a counter-movement against the attempt to bring humanitarian work in line with foreign policy objectives. If it takes two to tango, then it takes two for the process of instrumentalisation: those who try to force humanitarian organisations to adopt the role of political subcontractors, and the humanitarian organisations themselves. The fact that the greatest portion of support to disaster affected people is provided by humanitarian organisations implies that they collectively possess considerable potential power. A necessary condition for transforming this potential power into real power is developing a collective counterstrategy.

In fact, a collective counterstrategy could be seen as a kind of instrumentalisation, but it would be a legitimate kind, which should rather be called by the more neutral term 'influence'. In contrast, instrumentalisation implies the illegitimate attempt to influence actors to comply with the objectives of the seemingly more powerful. The legitimate objective of humanitarian actors to influence donors is determined by international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles. What could this imply in practice? There are two major objectives which humanitarian organisations pursue. The first one is professionalization, in which major advances have undoubtedly been made. The other is a collective political strategy to generate public support for principled humanitarian action. The latter implies a sort of politicisation of humanitarian aid: certainly not in the field but as a political objective in the public sphere. In fact, the 2010 Eurobarometer shows that a great majority of the European populations support humanitarian aid as an important activity. Yet this support is permanently challenged. Linda Polman with her book "War games" has indeed done injustice to the humanitarian agencies at large. Yet at the same time her appearance on TV and radio to sell her book did not mobilise an equally massive public reaction from the humanitarian community. In this case a systematic "politicisation" campaign might have been desirable.

There is another aspect worth mentioning. The Columbia Journalism Review mentions in its report from March/April 2011 the negative stereotypes that exist about Africa. Their explanation for this stereotype is that International Governmental Organisations as well as NGOs have an interest in focusing, not on what has been achieved, but on what still needs to be done. This may be legitimate. Yet the basic problem behind this is that humanitarian NGOs may be tempted to try instrumentalising the media by overestimating the problems of particular humanitarian crises in order to get greater public attention and by hoping that this would incite donors to allocate more resources.

The above reflections show the complexity of the instrumentalisation debate.

ⁱ Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan.

ⁱⁱ As stressed by several VOICE members and DARA in the recent EP Hearing on civil-military relations (see www.ngovoice.org).

'WHOSE AID IS IT ANYWAY?'

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

'Failure to address the politicisation and militarisation of aid threatens the sustainability of humanitarian action and the principles which underlie it'

Figures and analysis provided in a new report by Oxfam on the politicisation of aid, *Whose Aid is it Anyway?*ⁱ, provides a strong evidence base to back concerns of the humanitarian community that the effectiveness of aid – both in meeting urgent needs and in tackling entrenched poverty – is increasingly being undermined by the pursuit of narrow military and national security interests.

The report showed that billions of US dollars in international aid which could have transformed the lives of people in the poorest countries in the world were instead spent on unsustainable, expensive and sometimes dangerous assistance projects, as international donor governments used aid to support their own short-term foreign policy and security objectives.

Effective international aid must have as its core objective the reduction of poverty or humanitarian need. Oxfam observed three worrying trends that may be jeopardising the effectiveness of aid in some of the most vulnerable places in the world. First, due to shifting national security priorities, some government aid donors are neglecting many of the poorest places in the world. According to Oxfam's research, since 2002 one-quarter of all development aid from the EU and its Member States to the 48 states labelled "fragile" by the OECDⁱⁱ has gone to just three countries: Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The link between aid and European strategic objectives is particularly clear in the case of Iraq, where EU aid has dropped dramatically - from \$4.7bn in 2008 to \$225m in 2009 - as some European countries have drawn down troops from Iraq, despite the country continuing to suffer from the aftermath of years of war and sanctions.

Second, in places where donors' military and security interests are focussed, poorly conceived aid projects aimed at winning 'hearts and minds', or buying the political or military cooperation of communities, have proved ineffective, costly, and have sometimes turned communities and aid workers into targets of attack. For example, Afghans in communities where Oxfam works consider schools built by NATO reconstruction units to be at greater risk of attack than those built by the Afghan government or NGOs. A World Bank review found that they were also on average 30 per cent more expensive.

Third, there is the trend towards the militarisation of the delivery of humanitarian aid. In Haiti, for example, when European militaries duplicated civilian relief efforts, rather than focussing on providing unique logistical capacity or security, the result was expensive and sometimes ineffective aid which also failed to contribute to Haitians' urgent security needs.

The stakes are high on these issues, as the EU moves forward on putting new systems and approaches in place following the recent shake up of the EU foreign policy architecture. The report highlights the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) as an outstanding example of delivering effective aid. Its 'Global Needs Assessment' index ensures that 'aid orphans' and forgotten states are not neglected. In 2010, for example, 17 per cent of ECHO's humanitarian aid budget was dedicated to twelve such crises. Such excellent practices must be preserved under proposals for the new multiannual EU budget for external action, alongside efforts to ensure the emerging system protects both humanitarian and development aid from undue influence of foreign policy goals.

At the time of writing, headline-grabbing proposals to launch an EU military-humanitarian mission "EUFOR Libya" underlines the danger of further blurring and politicisation within the EU model. While conditions have been put in place to ensure any mission respects UN guidelines on Military and Civil Defence Assets and will only be deployed upon UN OCHA's request, it demonstrates the need for the humanitarian community to be vigilant about the creeping militarisation of humanitarian operations.

The message from Oxfam's report is clear: failure to address the politicisation and militarisation of aid threatens the sustainability of humanitarian action and the principles which underlie it. For the EU, it could also fundamentally reduce the impact of EC aid and undermine the EU's reputation as a principled actor on the global stage.

Elise Ford
Head of EU office
Oxfam International
www.oxfam.org

ⁱ www.oxfam.org/en/policy/whose-aid-it-anyway

ⁱⁱ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

NO GO FOR NGOS? WORRYING TREND PRESENTS NEW CHALLENGE FOR AID AGENCIES

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

'Restrictions imposed on NGOs providing aid in risky areas could block essential work from taking place for people who have real need of assistance'

 A prerequisite to an effective response to human suffering is the right of NGOs to decide when, where and how they exercise their duty to assist vulnerable populations. Aid operations must be guided by the fundamental values of humanity, independence, impartiality and neutrality: every person in need should be granted assistance regardless of political, strategic, economic or other non-humanitarian interests.

NGOs must live up to their acronym and remain *non-governmental*, maintaining a clear separation between their activities and state action. Only this clear separation will guarantee acceptance among the population we wish to help, and therefore ensure the efficient provision of aid. Humanitarian action must not be instrumentalised to respond to political, strategic or military interests, which would undermine acceptance by populations in need, credibility, security and access.

Recent developments, alarmingly, have highlighted a **tendency by states to forget these fundamental principles**. An example is the "war against terrorism", notably in the Sahel region, where security strategies implemented by states in the name of the fight against terrorism have had an adverse impact on the security of aid workers and aid operations. Three months ago, two kidnapped French nationals were killed in Niger during a rescue attempt by French forces. The operation showed a possibly alarming new doctrine from the French authorities, consisting of prioritising military options – or at least sending a strong signal that they were willing to do so – instead of the preservation of hostages' livesⁱ.

This situation represents an important threat to the freedom of action of NGOs and the respect of the principles of humanitarian action. Should NGOs resign themselves to interrupting assistance, and pulling out from high-risk areas? The dangers experienced by national and international humanitarian staff when implementing activities in these areas are inherent. NGOs endeavour handle such risks as best they can and are, in general, very careful to integrate security and conflict assessments into comprehensive context analysis. Nevertheless, despite these dangers, it is their mandate to bring support to vulnerable populations in all circumstances. Humanitarian aid should not be impeded by states' security strategies, but on the contrary be facilitated, considering that aid and development assistance can make a fundamental contribution to enhance security in conflict-affected countries.

The French government demonstrates an **increased eagerness to discharge its responsibility concerning the security of NGO staff**. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sends regular warnings (not always substantiated and often not updated when the situation changes) about areas deemed "risky", asking NGOs to repatriate their volunteers and/or employees, despite giving funds for projects implemented in those very areas. In case of rescue operations carried out by the French State to protect its nationals, NGOs may be asked to reimburse if it is deemed that their staff deliberately exposed themselves to risksⁱⁱ.

The fight against "terrorism" has also led to a **tendency to sanction humanitarian aid provided in areas where non-state actors designated as terrorist groups may operate**. However, many humanitarian organisations inevitably work in sensitive areas where they can easily be in contact with actors that may be suspected to have terrorist affiliations – Sri Lanka, Somalia, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq and the Caucasus are all examples of areas where aid activities have been criminalised. Sanctioning aid because it is implemented in such areas is again clearly incompatible with humanitarian NGO's mandate and duty to give impartial help to any person needing assistance, especially in such conflict-affected contexts where populations are particularly vulnerable.

The legal consequences that may result from humanitarian assistance in risky areas must be clarified. As it stands, the issue is far from clear and open to abuse. This lack of clarity could have a substantial impact on the humanitarian community's capacity to operate.

Restrictions imposed on NGOs providing aid in risky areas could block essential work from taking place for people who have real need of assistance. NGOs may also be less willing to work with local partners, undermining an often essential ingredient of sustainable aid. It is likely to lead to mistrust among the public and donors; and worst of all, it may irreparably alter the relationship between NGOs and those people they seek to serve.

Sandrine Chopin
Paris delegate
Handicap International
VOICE Board member
www.handicap-international.org

ⁱThis issue was addressed by French NGOs in a letter on Sahel written to the Prime Minister in February 2011

ⁱⁱFor further details, see the French Law about foreign action of the State (Loi n° 2010-873 du 27 juillet 2010 relative à l'action extérieure de l'Etat, article 22); the issue was also addressed in a letter sent by the CNCDH to the Prime Minister on the 6th of April 2011.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE MILITARY IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES: WHAT IS THE ISSUE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH IT?

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

'It is important to (...) move (...) toward a more sophisticated understanding of the risks and any potential benefits of civilian-military coordination'

★ The humanitarian crises in Libya and the Ivory Coast and the ongoing reports from Japan following the earthquake and tsunami in March illustrate the growing complexity and diversity of hazards from man-made disasters and natural disasters facing today's global population, and the international humanitarian community in responding to these crises.

★ THE ISSUE: THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Within this context there are a range of challenges facing aid agencies. One of the most current and contentious is the role of the military in humanitarian response. Under International Humanitarian Law (the 1949 Geneva Conventions and additional Protocols) relief assistance by the military is not ruled out. Occupying military forces are required to ensure public order so that they can fulfil a range of responsibilities to provide basic public services including health.

In particularly unstable countries such as Afghanistan or in natural disasters, the military may often be the only player with the capacity to access civilian victims; following the Pakistan earthquake in 2005 the role of both foreign and the national military in providing transport was indispensable in the first week after the disaster. Overall, 80% of aid was delivered by military agencies and 20% by civilian agencies in Pakistanⁱ. In this case, and that of the Asian tsunami in 2004, the need for logistical support such as transport was beyond the capabilities of civilian agencies. The recent Humanitarian Emergency Response Reviewⁱⁱ, an independent review conducted by British Peer Lord Ashdown drew attention to the military's comparative advantage in specific humanitarian contexts such as these. Whilst such situations have turned the military into a de facto provider of humanitarian assistanceⁱⁱⁱ, from a humanitarian NGO perspective this raises significant concerns about the perceived neutrality of humanitarian assistance.

This concern has been further strengthened by the recent increasing tendency of donor governments to include humanitarian assistance as part of, or in the service of, broader political and military agenda has raised concerns amongst non-governmental organisations (NGOs). At the heart of the issue is the fact that humanitarian organisations and military forces have different

mandates; humanitarian organisations seek to provide life-saving assistance to affected populations based on assessed needs and humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, whereas military actors are deployed with a political or military objective. What has emerged is a blurring of the lines between these two distinct agendas.

★ THE IMPLICATIONS

The use of humanitarian assistance to achieve broader stabilisation objectives, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq (to win hearts and minds) has led to confusion between humanitarian aid and stabilisation aid. In Afghanistan, the provision of health and nutrition services by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) has "sown confusion about whether and to what degree humanitarian aid agencies are affiliated with the military"^{iv} impacting on humanitarian actor's perceived neutrality, the safety of humanitarian workers and the capacity of NGOs to address needs, owing to shrinking humanitarian space. From a health perspective, access to health facilities has been reduced rather than strengthened according to the Afghanistan Health Cluster as health workers and facilities have come under attack following PRT engagement.

★ WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS?

It is important to acknowledge the military presence in the humanitarian sphere and the need to move from the hitherto polarised ideological debate within the NGO community toward a more sophisticated understanding of the risks and any potential benefits of civilian-military coordination. In Merlin's view, the use of military assets depends on the context in which they are used; the objective or purpose of their use; and, the risks and benefits they may bring to the affected community and the international community response.

Substantial guidance and policy frameworks already exist to regulate the engagement of the military in humanitarian activities such as those developed by the Inter Agency Standing Committee^v (IASC). Working within the framework of the UN, the IASC has developed a series of clear frameworks that provide guidance: on the use of civil and military assets; the use of armed escorts for humanitarian convoys; and, on civil military

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

'The more military actors are entrenched in the conflict dynamics, the more the two worlds – military and humanitarian – should be kept separate'

relations in complex emergencies. These sit alongside the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines which provide additional guidance on the use of foreign military and civilian defence assets. Underpinning all of these is the 'principle of last resort'; the notion that military capabilities can complement civilian efforts in disaster response but only where they offer a capability for which there is no comparable alternative. But despite the existence of these guidelines, their application at operational level remains ad hoc and inconsistent and the need for a more nuanced operational interpretation has been identified.

★ FINDING SOLUTIONS

To assist greater understanding and operational decision-making the Global Health Cluster^{vi}, of which Merlin is an active member, has developed a position paper on *Civil-military coordination during humanitarian health action*^{vii}. The purpose of the paper is to guide country level health clusters on how to apply these IASC principles to specific humanitarian health operations. The paper has a number of key messages:

- That there is a marked difference between the requirements for civil-military coordination of responses to natural disasters that occur in a peaceful environment and those that occur in the midst of complex emergencies.
- Humanitarian actions should be guided by humanitarian principles and a proper assessment of the impact and evolution of the crisis and the corresponding needs of the population.
- Humanitarian action should not be used to advance security and/or political agendas.
- In complex emergencies, military forces and humanitarian actors have different agendas, strategies, tactics, mandates and accountability frameworks.
- International deployed military forces involved in peace operations or disaster response should provide direct or indirect health assistance to civilians only as a last resort.
- Health services provided by military actors must be in line with the assessed needs of the affected population.
- All actors – civilian or military - involved in the provision of health services should follow the national government's health policies and plans.

- Humanitarians must constantly review the evolution of the crisis and, when necessary, adapt civilian-military coordination modalities to emerging conflict dynamics and new roles played by the military.
- Maintaining humanitarian identity is paramount. Humanitarian actors should be aware of the perceptions of stakeholders and how different degrees of civil-military coordination change local perceptions of their impartiality.^{viii}

Central to this paper is a risk matrix to assess the risk to humanitarian health agencies and (some) military actors in specific scenarios (from peacetime to combat operations); appropriateness of type of intervention; typology of task (from indirect assistance such as transporting relief goods and personnel, infrastructure and logistical support to direct assistance including the distributions of goods & services) and determine the likely impact of civilian-military coordination on humanitarian principles. It is intended to be an analytical tool and is based on the assumption that firstly direct health assistance should be carried out only by civilian humanitarian agencies and secondly "the more military actors are entrenched in the conflict dynamics, the more the two worlds – military and humanitarian – should be kept separate in order to safeguard the actual and perceived impartiality of humanitarian actions"^{ix}

During our response to the 2010 Pakistan floods, Merlin used this risk matrix to assess civilian-military coordination risks and to facilitate the intense inter-agency debate among health cluster partners. Merlin recognises that this risk matrix is not a panacea to the problems highlighted – there are always limitations to any guidelines – but it is because these issues are so complex, and the concepts so challenging that this type of risk analysis matrix is needed. Military presence in the humanitarian sphere already exists and is likely to increase and the scale and intensity of (natural) disasters increases. As such, this guidance is an essential step in supporting humanitarian health actors on the ground to apply civilian-military guidelines consistently and appropriately to ensure the safe access to and delivery of life-saving assistance to affected populations.

Juliet Milgate
Policy Advisor
Merlin UK

www.merlin.org.uk

ⁱ Cosgrave, J. and Herson, M. (2008) *Perceptions of crisis and response: A synthesis of evaluations of the response to the 2005 Pakistan Earthquake in ALNAP 7th Review of Humanitarian Action* p. 196.

ⁱⁱ Ashdown, P. (2011) *Humanitarian Emergency Response Review*

ⁱⁱⁱ Randolph, K. and Ratcliffe, J. (2007), *Responding to Catastrophes: U.S. Innovation in a Vulnerable World*. Centre for Strategic and International Studies. p. 9.

^{iv} Rubenstein, L. (2010). *Humanitarian Space Shrinking for Health Program Delivery in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. United States Institute of Peace

^v The IASC is a body involving both the UN and NGOs

^{vi} A cluster is made up of humanitarian organisations and stakeholders working to address the need identified in a specific sector (e.g. camp coordination, health, protection, etc.). They exist at global and field level.

^{vii} IASC, *Global Health Cluster (2011) Position paper. Civil-Military Coordination during Humanitarian Health Action*

^{viii} *Ibid.*

^{ix} *Ibid.*



Interview with Ross Mountain

THE TREND TOWARDS INSTRUMENTALISATION OF AID

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

Ross Mountain is the Director General of DARA, an independent organisation committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian aid. Previously he has been Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Humanitarian Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and UN Assistant Emergency Relief Coordinator of UNOCHA.

This interview by VOICE took place in the European Parliament on 13 April 2011.

- **One of the key findings of the 2010 Humanitarian Response Index (HRI)ⁱ is the increasing politicization of humanitarian assistance in OECD/DAC countries, including many EU member states. Is independent humanitarian aid a myth?**

I do not believe that. Standards are valid and in many cases policies are very good. The people running humanitarian programmes at national level or at the European Commission are seeking to give aid on the basis of need, separate from other concerns, but other ministries often undermine that distinction. It is a worrying trend, which is growing in conflict areas, but there are still many examples where standards are applied—particularly when it is easier to apply them, such as in “natural” disasters.

- **What are the causes of this trend?**

Several campaigns such as the war on terror put great pressure on who gets aid. Somalia is a case in point. However, trying to subordinate humanitarian aid is counterproductive even for those who seek to use it for political or military purposes, and on top of that it is damaging and dangerous for humanitarian workers and for the recipients of aid. If, like in Afghanistan, humanitarian aid is linked with political action (or perceived as such) in an area where western donors are operating militarily, then it should not come as a surprise that the Taliban see humanitarian aid as an extension of that military approach. This puts at risk those receiving and those giving aid, which cannot be the objective.

- **Are European donors responsive to the HRI findings? What can they do to address this issue?**

The purpose of the report is to make assistance as effective as possible for beneficiaries. The solution that the report thus suggests is: “go back to basics, respect the humanitarian principles”. This is the most effective way to deliver what is needed for the victims. Moreover, it provides value for money: it is cost-effective, since it is based on needs. We are not inventing this. The donors themselves have subscribed to this approach in 2003, when they committed to the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative. The aim of the HRI is to strengthen the role of those who are allocating humanitarian aid in the different countries, so they can resist pressure for reallocating aid for other purposes. And yes, we are seeing responsiveness. For

example, the HERRⁱⁱ report in the UK is extremely clear on these aspects. When the report was presented, Andrew Mitchell, the Secretary of State, specifically said that there must be no blurring of humanitarian aid with other political objectives. Such leadership at political level is essential to combat the trend to politicization.

- **Do you see a difference between the European Commission and EU member states with regards to politicization of aid?**

Looking specifically at ECHOⁱⁱⁱ, they have proven to be a fierce defender of humanitarian principles, which we have been pleased to have confirmed in visits to Afghanistan, Palestine, and Somalia in particular. The challenge for EU institutions will be how this plays out when political action is labelled “humanitarian”. As the ICRC Representative commented, we may be in the same stream, but we are not in the same boat. The protection of civilians in Libya is a worthy objective. However, while humanitarian needs may be high in the rebel-controlled area at present, they may be even higher in Gaddafi-controlled areas in future. Colonel Gaddafi and his government thus need to understand the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian action; that humanitarian aid is not the arm of a partial foreign policy. Some EU Member States have as an explicit goal the removal of Colonel Gaddafi from power. Foreign policy and security objectives have instrumentalised humanitarian aid in different ways: from focussing on where to use humanitarian aid funds (e.g. strategically, only in a particular part of the country) to the grotesque, where food is delivered in return for information.

- **The Council of the European Union has agreed on an EU military operation in support of humanitarian assistance operations in Libya, on the condition that UNOCHA^{iv} requests it. What is your opinion on this move?**

It is an interesting development, but the full range of implications is not yet clear. Intervention is made dependent on needs and the specific request of the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, which is positive. However: which assets could be made available under which circumstances and to do what exactly? The view of OCHA is clear: at present military support is not needed and could indeed lead to misunderstanding of the neutral basis on

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

which humanitarian aid is provided. There are widely accepted international guidelines on military/civilian cooperation, which clearly state that military assets should only be used as a last resort.

- **The military intervention in Libya could be seen as being based on the concept of responsibility to protect (R2P). Which consequences might this have?** In the last decade, we have seen a movement from Internally Displaced People being regarded as the internal affair of a state, to -also through the R2P doctrine-, protection as a number one priority for peacekeeping missions, e.g. in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The media should also get some credit for this evolution. The media get very quickly to humanitarian situations, and put pressure on humanitarian aid actors to get there quickly. The downside is that if the media attention diminishes, so does the funding and the concern, leading to forgotten crises.
- **The US has a federal law that makes it a crime to provide 'material support' to foreign groups designated as terrorist organisations, which may undermine humanitarian access. The EU has also had discussions around this subject. Do you see a link between the view of humanitarian aid as a crisis management tool and criminalisation of aid?** This US Law is directly in contradiction with the principles and practice of impartial humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian aid needs also to be provided to populations under the control of unsavoury groups. How can an organisation certify that no penny goes to such groups? In Gaza, WFP^v needs to have two food pipelines because of certain donors' demands. In the humanitarian business, you need to have contact with whoever controls the populations on the ground. Denying assistance to affected populations who already suffer from being under control of a particular group is often to make them suffer twice.
- **The UN integrated approach poses problems to humanitarian actors as well, as it links a UN peacekeeping mission to political and humanitarian UN missions in the same conflict area. What can the UN do to avoid creating confusion?** I used to be very critical to the integrated approach out of concern that

political actors were likely to use humanitarian aid for political ends. But it is actually possible to reverse that equation: for humanitarian actors to use other parts of the mission to support humanitarian objectives. For example in the DRC, humanitarians gave advice to the UN military on where to place troops to protect civilian populations. Peacekeeping operations now have protection of civilians as a prime mandate and their senior officials are often in a stronger position than the UN Humanitarian Coordinator to press national authorities on access and protection issues. I recognise there is a downside to integrated approaches, but there is an upside too.

- **The media also plays a role in this instrumentalisation debate, for example by calling for a 'humanitarian-military intervention in Libya'. Do you see any change in their role?** We cannot blame the media for repeating terms used by political leaders. They are more active, with 24/7 media being on the rise worldwide, leading to more coverage of events, which is positive. We need to be able to deal with media in such a situation, but the humanitarian sector is not good at this. Often significant humanitarian action is undertaken but we are not able to get the story out. On the other hand, the media also identifies deficiencies - which should encourage us to do better. This media coverage is also leading to a broader knowledge and understanding of how humanitarian operations work.

★ CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is extremely important that humanitarian principles are understood more broadly than in the humanitarian community. This applies within the UN, member states and EU alike. Those charged with political mandates often do not understand the humanitarian imperative and why it is important to keep humanitarian action separate from political operations. There is thus a tendency to try to use humanitarian tools for political objectives. Those leading EEAS^{vi} missions also need to be aware of the basis on which humanitarian aid is organised. Humanitarian principles are not just defended as a matter of faith. It is because their application is what works.

ⁱ The HRI is an independent initiative that annually assesses donor commitments, using the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles as a benchmark.

ⁱⁱ Humanitarian Emergency Response Review commissioned by the UK Department for International Development.

ⁱⁱⁱ DG ECHO is the humanitarian aid and civil protection department of the European Commission.

^{iv} United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

^v World Food Programme

^{vi} European External Action Service

'STABILISING' FRAGILE STATES: A DEBATE THAT MATTERS FOR HUMANITARIANS

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

'The political impulse for visibility combined with military proactivity can threaten the distinction between stabilisation and humanitarian response, pushing decision-makers towards a military-led response to needs.'

At the London conference on 29th March, governments and regional bodies began planning for when the conflict in Libya ends – if and when that happens. The UK Foreign Secretary William Hague framed this planning under 'stabilisation', a deliberately broad term with growing significance in the international lexicon.

For the UK Government, stabilisation is 'the process by which underlying tensions that might lead to a resurgence in violence and a breakdown in law and order are managed and reduced, while efforts are made to support preconditions for longer-term development.'ⁱ The approach is operationalised through a cross-government Stabilisation Unit, bringing together development, defence, diplomacy, and intelligence. A similar 'comprehensive' approach to conflict-affected fragile states is used by the US, Canada, and other governments. The vast majority of learning on stabilisation is from operations in Afghanistan.

Supporters of the stabilisation approach argue that working across the UK Government should bring dividends of coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness. In addition, it may bring greater political clout to development and humanitarian considerations, and brings DFID (the UK Department for International Development) to the decision-making table.

Stabilisation relates to Save the Children's work – as a mixed mandate development, humanitarian, and child rights agency – in two ways. Firstly, fragile states are often characterised by deep poverty and suffering for children. Fragile states are home to one fifth of the population of developing countries but contain a third of those living in extreme poverty, half of children who are not in primary school, and half of children who die before the age of five.ⁱⁱ If you look at the progress needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals against actual progress made, fragile or conflict-affected states account for 72% of the MDG 'deficit' on the child mortality goal, and 77% of the 'deficit' on primary school enrolment.ⁱⁱⁱ An approach that focuses on improving effectiveness in fragile states could potentially benefit millions of children.

Secondly, those working on child rights and effectiveness can contribute to the way aid is designed. For instance, our research has shown that aid that targets the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of society is more effective at reducing child mortality^{iv}. This aid also has the likely side effects of reducing social and economic tensions, and therefore instability.

However, the stabilisation approach also poses risks to agencies who work in humanitarian response. Humanitarian action must be clearly separated from political, military, and security objectives to preserve aid workers' security and access to affected populations. Those who absorb humanitarianism into a political agenda neglect the evidence that independent humanitarian assistance is more effective in the most difficult situations.

Andrew Mitchell, the UK Development Minister, has acknowledged that stabilisation is distinct from humanitarian response.^v Still, the political impulse for visibility combined with military proactivity can threaten this distinction, pushing decision-makers towards a military-led response to needs (logistical, security, or humanitarian) that would be addressed by civilian actors more accountably, durably and cheaply, if sometimes more slowly. As one Major General said in a stabilisation seminar recently, sometimes the counter-intuitive suggestion is the best one: 'don't just do something; stand there!'

The political situations in fragile states themselves must also be considered. Interventions aiming for stability could reinforce existing imbalanced power relations, sowing the seeds of further future instability. Moreover, no country wants to be described as 'a stabilisation context'. A government may believe that chronic food insecurity, for instance, could be seen as an indication of state fragility. The government may therefore be reluctant to admit this problem and call for assistance, despite the fact that denying an emergency and obstructing assistance is a much greater concern than the emergency itself.

Lord Ashdown in the UK recently launched the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (HERR), an independent review of DFID's humanitarian response. He writes, 'DFID enjoys a position of respect and leadership in the international community for the work that it has done in the past and still does today.'^{vi}

As the UK Government finalises its 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy', it should safeguard this respect and leadership. DFID must continue to support independent, needs-based humanitarian, early recovery, and development work. This is a view shared by the HERR and by the communities we aim to serve.

Nick Martlew
Humanitarian Advocacy Officer
Save the Children UK
www.savethechildren.org.uk

ⁱ Stabilisation Unit, Guidance Note, p.2

ⁱⁱ DFID definition of fragile states; Save the Children (2010) 'Fragile States', p.4

ⁱⁱⁱ OECD (2011) 'Conflict, fragility, and armed violence are major factors preventing the achievement of the MDGs', p.1

^{iv} Save the Children (2010) 'A fair chance of life: why equity matters for child mortality', p.vii

^v Mitchell speech at parliamentary debate on humanitarian relief and Libya, 5 March 2011.

^{vi} www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/HERR.pdf

COLOMBIA – THE DANGERS OF CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION IN A FORGOTTEN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

THE ISSUE - IS INDEPENDENT HUMANITARIAN ACTION A MYTH?

‘One of the world’s largest civil-military operations in a humanitarian crisis is taking place in Colombia, but the dangers this poses to humanitarian action and the population is largely unknown due to lack of international interest’

Colombia represents one of the world’s largest, most prolonged and unresolved conflicts, whose victims outnumber many better-known humanitarian crises. According to CODHES, a renowned Colombian Human Rights Organisation, 5.2 million Colombians have been internally displaced since 1985, with 260.000 in 2010 alone. Even UNHCRⁱ indicated in 2009 that 3.7 million persons were in need of international protection, ranking Colombia highest in the world. Equally high are the violations of IHLⁱⁱ and of human rights committed by all conflict parties. However, the “international community”, and in particular the US and some European governments, have good ties with the Colombian government, one of the parties to the conflict, and strong economic interests in the country. Furthermore, beyond the supply of military equipment and advice to the Colombian army no foreign troops are directly involved, so the conflict remains an ‘internal’ affair. This combination makes Colombia a forgotten crisis with very little international political and media interest in the humanitarian disaster.

One of the world’s largest civil-military operations in a humanitarian crisis is taking place in Colombia, but the dangers this poses to humanitarian action and the population is largely unknown due to this lack of international interest. In 2009, the Colombian government developed and formalised a civil-military strategy: the “National Plan of Integrated Consolidation”. Its purpose is to secure, defend and consolidate the government’s control over the 14 fiercest conflict zones, by establishing so-called “Centres for Integrated Coordination and Action” (CCAI). These Centres closely link military and intelligence activities with humanitarian, rehabilitation and development “social programmes”, directly coordinated and organised through the civil government “Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional”. This strategy is influenced by and comparable to the better known “Comprehensive Approach” and the PRTsⁱⁱⁱ used by NATO in Afghanistan, but in this case with only national military involved.

What are the consequences?

- “Embedded” social programmes, are implemented in CCAI regions, where there is a concentration of armed conflict, a high level of crimes against civilians – including by the Colombian army –, and forced displacement of civilians. This displacement is linked to large-scale land appropriation for economic interests and investments.
- The forced or conditional participation of the population and civilian organisations in these social programmes, or their involvement in intelligence gathering put them strongly at

risk, as it links them to one side in the conflict.

- Humanitarian organisations and their local partners, committed to independent, impartial and neutral emergency and rehabilitation aid, risk jeopardising their safety and access if connected to these programmes. However, the Colombian government pressures international donors and humanitarian organisations to channel and coordinate aid through these programmes.

These findings were confirmed by a recent field study in the CCAI region of La Macarena, which looked at the effects of this civil-military programme approach on the population and civilian organisations. The study was carried out by five German NGOs with active presence in Colombia, including Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe. The research was conducted because BMZ^{iv} was promoting a development project as partner of this government strategy in one of the most conflict-affected regions of the country. Given the absence of protection and respect for civilians, as well as the abuse of aid and civilians in the conflict, the study questions the involvement of BMZ. As BMZ is also a large German humanitarian donor, supporting humanitarian programmes in Colombia, it should be careful to avoid supporting a blurring of lines between civilians and military in the conflict.

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe considers Colombia as one of its priority countries for humanitarian action, due the huge level of forgotten needs. Working through local partners, our relief and rehabilitation aid and protection measures support people in conflict areas as well as displaced families in host communities. As we are strongly committed to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality and to IHL, we have to observe our operational environment and lobby our donor community, particularly in conflict settings like Colombia, to help maintain our independence from political, economic or military interests. For Colombia we propose therefore:

- Donors should not support humanitarian relief and rehabilitation programs in CCAI regions which are embedded in the government’s civil-military strategy and run through corresponding institutions.
- Donors should not support development projects in cooperation with the Colombian government in CCAI regions, as long as i) the conflict is ongoing; ii) integrated civil-military approach continues; and iii) compliance with IHL is not guaranteed by the government and its armed forces.

Rainer Lucht

**Senior Policy & Strategy Advisor
Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe**

www.diakonie-emergency-aid.org

ⁱ The United Nations Refugee Agency

ⁱⁱ International Humanitarian Law

ⁱⁱⁱ Provincial Reconstruction Teams

^{iv} The German Federal Ministry for Economical Cooperation and Development Aid

THE EU BUDGET AFTER 2013: WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR HUMANITARIAN AID?

A VIEW ON THE EU

'Member states' citizens need to flag up to their national governments what is at stake, namely: Will the EU continue to live up to its role as the world's largest donor in humanitarian aid?'

 It is time to get committed. EU institutions and member states are currently launching the debate on the EU's finances and policy priorities after 2013, the so-called Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF). These discussions will determine the amount of funding that can be made available for EU external action (including humanitarian aid and development aid) for the next 7 to 10 years. Member states' citizens need to flag up to their national governments what is at stake, namely: Will the EU continue to live up to its role as the world's largest donor in humanitarian aid and as the partner "providing more than half of all international development aid"ⁱ also in the future?

The majority of European citizens support the EU's commitment to humanitarian aid and development assistance.ⁱⁱ Moreover, major natural disasters (the 2004 Tsunami, earthquake in Haiti, floods in Pakistan) have provoked unparalleled solidarity from European citizens in terms of donations to NGOs providing relief and supporting reconstruction. Individuals have donated these funds largely regardless of political considerations.

Reflecting the importance put on humanitarian aid by its citizens, for institutional funding support given to disaster-affected populations, the EU needs a separate humanitarian budget line. Why is that important? Because particularly in conflict situations, the humanitarian aid department of the European Commission, DG ECHO, needs to be able to talk to all parties to a conflict to improve humanitarian access and to make independent decisions on humanitarian aid, regardless of other EU external policies. This is also reaffirmed in Article 214 of the Lisbon Treaty and in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aidⁱⁱⁱ. Keeping the humanitarian aid budget separate and independent from the other budget lines under external action (such as neighbourhood policy) enables it to be spent in line with humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and on the basis of needs alone..

The scale and frequency of disasters have increased over the past decade(s), and effects of climate change promise worse to come. DG ECHO has regularly needed to use the special Emergency Aid Reserve over the past years in order to be able to respond to increasing humanitarian needs. It is not only a matter of solidarity but also of the recognition of global responsibility that the EC

humanitarian aid budget must be secured at 1 billion € annually under the future MFF, if not more, as this is what was spent in 2010. Such an increase of the core budget must be an increase in real terms, meaning not at the expense of member states' humanitarian aid budgets. DG ECHO and its partners (NGOs, UN and the Red Cross/ Red Crescent Movement) have proved their ability to respond to natural and man-made disasters in a swift, professional and coordinated manner. Moreover, the money is efficiently spent. Predictability in humanitarian funding is a key principle under the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative^{iv}, which is supported by the European Commission and EU member states. A clear commitment in the next MFF for a strong and independent humanitarian aid budget will serve this obligation, while at the same time promoting the EU as a good example to new humanitarian donors.

Looking beyond the acute relief interventions, humanitarian actors face the challenge of linking their responses into early recovery and longer-term reconstruction and development (LRRD). In still weak or fragile political and economic contexts, reconstruction efforts are largely supported by national and international NGOs, but there is, however, often a lack of follow-up funding after the emergency aid phase. The MFF discussions offer the opportunity to solve this well-known, but still insufficiently addressed problem. In the existing development aid architecture of the EU, NGOs have only very unpredictable access to thematic development cooperation funding, which can lead to undesirable interruptions in the follow-up of relief interventions. While food security and physical reconstruction (e.g. water supply, infrastructure) are central to reconstruction and development, also other aspects of rebuilding lives and communities require support (e.g. education, health care or the revitalisation of community and political life). These specific LRRD components should also be able to receive funding from the thematic programmes, solving at least partly this longstanding transition problem. Most of all, much more flexibility is needed to allow smooth transition into mid- and long-term development programming – or back to relief, in case the situation on the ground changes for the worse.

Annette Wulf
Public Funding Officer
Welthungerhilfe
www.welthungerhilfe.de

ⁱ European Commission: Public Consultation: What funding for EU external action after 2013?, p. 2

ⁱⁱ Eurobarometer on Humanitarian Aid http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_343_en.pdf and http://ec.europa.eu/development/center/repository/eurobarometer200910_en.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Official Journal of the European Union C 83/143 and <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:025:0001:0012:EN:PDF>

^{iv} <http://www.goodhumanitarianidonorship.org>

CRISIS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE – THE RESPONSE OF THE DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

FIELD FOCUS

'The current resources allocated for West Africa simply do not match the needs'

 The humanitarian situation in West Africa has changed dramatically following the presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire on 28 November last year. Between December 2010 and April 2011, the humanitarian crisis in western Côte d'Ivoire escalated, with 800,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) across the country and more than 130,000 Ivorians fleeing to Liberia. The number of refugees is also increasing in other neighbouring countries. The situation follows the political gridlock and unrest in Côte d'Ivoire sparked by the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to hand over power to his rival Alassane Ouattara who was internationally recognised as the winner of the election. The crisis is severely affecting the civilian population, particularly with regards to food security, protection, health and education. Despite the fact that the political situation now seems to have been settled with the arrest of Gbagbo, it remains to be seen how the humanitarian situation will develop over the coming months and what impact it will have on the region.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO), has been working in Liberia since 1998 and in Côte d'Ivoire since 2003, carrying out a regional rehabilitation and recovery programme. In the border areas of Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Guinea (Forestière), DRC is supporting local integration or return as well as reintegration of refugees, IDPs and former combatants. At the same time, assistance is provided to communities hosting the displaced or those who return, and to people otherwise affected by conflict and displacement.

During the past months, the organisation has had to re-direct ongoing activities into an emergency intervention, increasing support to refugees and host communities in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. The contextual knowledge and contacts gained through the regional presence over the past decade has been a crucial factor in DRC's ability to respond to this new crisis. Most of the communities targeted by the emergency activities have previously been involved in other projects, such as on food security, income generation, peace-building, small-scale infrastructure and water & sanitation. Therefore, the acceptance and recognition of DRC is high among beneficiaries as well as local authorities. Moreover, the activities are based on participatory consultations with the communities, take into account possible changes in the displacement context, and

attach importance to the development of local capacities, gender-sensitive planning and humanitarian accountability.

Current emergency activities in Liberia include repairing roads and bridges, improving access to water, promoting sanitation and hygiene and managing refugee camps. In addition, as DRC is the only INGO working on food security in north Liberia, refugees are now included in the ongoing food security activities with the local host population, such as distribution of seeds and tools for farming.

In Côte d'Ivoire on the other hand, the deterioration in the security situation forced DRC temporarily to suspend its activities. However, the programme will shortly be resumed, focusing on emergency needs for the many displaced people along the border with Liberia, and sharing expertise on peace building with other agencies.

In both countries a number of aid agencies are trying to address the multitude of needs. However, there is a limit to what they can do, given the enormous scale of displacement and the inadequate financial support for the Côte d'Ivoire crisis. The current resources allocated for West Africa simply do not match the needs. Only half of the USD 146 million requested in the UN appeal for Liberia has been funded so far, and for Côte d'Ivoire a bit more than half of the original USD 32.7 million target has materialised. On top of that, the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan for the area is currently being revised to a higher funding figure, as the humanitarian needs have obviously increased. More funds are crucial in order to be able to address the situation in both countries and to respond to the pace with which the humanitarian crisis unfolds. Therefore, we welcome the decisions taken by DG ECHO and several European and other donors to increase funding for this crisis. The opening of an ECHO office in Abidjan will also allow the European Commission to follow more closely the changing context as well as the field activities undertaken by INGOs and local NGOs.

Although the operational context is very restrictive, DRC will continue its action with its partners to support the vulnerable civilian populations in finding durable solutions to their displacement.

Géraldine Tardivel and Klara Haugen-Kossmann
West-Africa Office
Danish Refugee Council
www.drc.dk

EU MILITARY OPERATION IN SUPPORT OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS IN LIBYA

VOICE POSITION PAPER

Over recent weeks, the situation in Libya has deteriorated from one of initial civil protests to one of a complex conflict situation. As part of the response of the international community, the EU has allocated 40 million euros to meet the needs of people affected by the crisis.

On April 1 2011, the Council of the European Union agreed to the establishment of “an EU military operation in support of humanitarian assistance operations in Libya if requested by the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)”. Any such deployment would be named operation “EUFOR Libya”.

If this military operation is initiated, it will operate in accordance with the “Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies” (MCDA Guidelines). These Guidelines have been developed by member states of the European Union in collaboration with the humanitarian community. They clearly state that military and civil defense assets can be used to support humanitarian operations if they are requested by UNOCHA, and if all civilian alternatives have been explored and exhausted. Crucially, they also require that any military assets used under these criteria must remain under civilian coordination, and must respect the needs-based and neutral nature of humanitarian aid.

The VOICE network is pleased that EU member states have determined to ensure that any military intervention will respect these international guidelines as they support other key agreements that have been agreed to or supported by the European member states. Among others, the Lisbon Treaty clearly states that humanitarian aid is to be conducted in line with the principles of impartiality and neutrality. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, the OECD/DAC criteria, and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, all make it clear that EU member states and institutions are committed to upholding humanitarian assistance as impartial, neutral, and independent. This decision of the Council in relation to the possible deployment of EUFOR Libya reinforces these commitments.

While the situation on the ground remains difficult and unpredictable, the majority of known humanitarian needs are being addressed. At present humanitarian actors, including several VOICE members, are delivering aid inside Libya in a manner that is informed by humanitarian principles including the completion of needs assessments and the impartial delivery of aid. Humanitarian access, including to many conflict-affected areas, has been possible without military escorts or support due to an acceptance by all conflict parties of the neutral, independent and impartial nature of the humanitarian actors on the ground.

Consequently, we feel that there is no current need for EU military assets to be deployed in support of humanitarian aid. If this situation changes and a specific capacity gap were to be identified, it is the responsibility of UN OCHA to formally request these military assets if they consider that the humanitarian situation demands it. If such a deployment were to occur, it must be in a manner consistent with the MCDA guidelines, with clarity of roles and mandates for all parties.

The objective of humanitarian assistance is to save lives and to relieve suffering of people in need. Humanitarian agencies that are perceived as acting according to agendas other than their humanitarian mandate may lose their credibility in the eyes of other local actors as well as the trust of the population they are there to serve. This can severely restrict their access to the people in need and, ultimately, create security risks for their staff and for the aforementioned populations.

The Council Conclusions of April 1 stipulate clearly the conditions that need to be met for a potential EUFOR Libya deployment and these show welcome recognition of the European Consensus for Humanitarian Aid. VOICE, the network of European humanitarian NGOs, therefore finds it of crucial importance that these conditions are respected. The follow-up to the Council Conclusions needs to be well managed and monitored, while the EU continues to develop a common policy towards Libya. This would give a clear signal to the international community that the EU under Ms. Ashton is implementing the right separation between political and humanitarian support. It also demonstrates that the EU, as a major humanitarian donor, respects the core values of humanitarian aid and does not use it as a crisis management tool. For humanitarian NGOs acting independently of political considerations is an essential value. They will therefore continue to closely monitor the situation on the ground and remain open to increase their engagement in response to humanitarian needs.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

- ★ **VOICE members bring field reality to European policy makers** - VOICE members have been active in briefing European institutions on issues of concern for NGOs. For example, Concern Worldwide and Save the Children UK presented NGO views on the situation in Haiti and Sudan to the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid, which unites the humanitarian decision makers of the EU member states. Similarly, CARE International, Norwegian Refugee Council and Oxfam Novib briefed parliamentarians on the relations between humanitarian and military actors in the field and the threat of instrumentalisation of aid, using examples from Afghanistan, Libya etc. As the NGO perspective on the two major crises in 2010, Haiti and Pakistan, had not duly been taken into account at EU level, Handicap International France, Caritas Belgium, ICCO-Kerk in Actie and Concern Worldwide shared their lessons learnt through a VOICE event. This event was attended by over 100 participants from the different European institutions and the humanitarian sector. Moreover, on a regular basis, experts from VOICE member organisations come together to exchange in working group sessions, sharing expertise on disaster risk reduction, civil-military relations and humanitarian funding, in order to develop common advocacy positions.
- ★ **VOICE engages with European Parliament (EP)** - Through meetings with several MEPs, VOICE has sought to reinforce the network's messages. Moreover, VOICE has been monitoring and influencing the EP's response to the humanitarian Communications developed by the European Commission. For example, VOICE has been asked by the EP to react to the Communication on strengthening the EU's disaster response in a high-level panel. The main concerns raised were the need for clear mandates and roles for different actors in disaster response in order to be complementary; clear leadership and division of labour between DG ECHO and the European External Action Service, to preserve the specificities of humanitarian aid; and the importance of making a clear distinction in policy between disaster response within and outside of the EU. VOICE also monitored the EP's work on Haiti and the mid-term review of the Action Plan of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. The network's messages were taken into account in corresponding resolutions.
- ★ **Advocating for sufficient humanitarian aid funding** - The European Commission (EC) is currently drafting a proposal for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF; EU budget after 2013). This proposal will then be discussed by the member states and the EP, determining the priorities for the EU for the next 7 to 10 years. VOICE has been engaged in the consultation process, giving input through various channels and developing a position paper. The paper sets out to explain the added value of EC support to Humanitarian Aid, and its contribution to quality aid delivery and efficiency. It contains recommendations that must be taken into account during the negotiations on the MFF in order to maintain EC Humanitarian Aid in its current highly-valued form. The position was widely shared with relevant contacts in EU institutions and continues to be circulated at national level. *For more information on the MFF, please have a look at the 'View on the EU' section in this newsletter.*
- ★ **VOICE Board meets with Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response** - On February 28, the VOICE Board had a constructive exchange with Commissioner Georgieva and her Cabinet. The meeting covered key issues such as the discussions around the future EU budget; the risk of instrumentalisation of aid and security of aid workers; and technical issues, such as coordination in the field. In addition, the issue of funding of the transition from relief to rehabilitation and development was discussed.
- ★ **Humanitarian aid discussed at European development days on 6-7 December 2010**- VOICE was invited to participate in a television panel organised by its member Islamic Relief on the impact of recent humanitarian crises on the chances of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Commissioner Georgieva and the Vice-President of the European Parliament were among the other panellists. The VOICE Director shared messages concerning the experience of NGOs as the deliverers of the majority of humanitarian assistance in the field; the importance of a diversity of humanitarian civilian actors in the field (NGOs, UN, Red Cross); clear mandates and roles for other actors in mega-disasters; the need to invest in Disaster Risk Reduction; and the need for stronger EU advocacy when IHL is breached. The next day, VOICE was asked to talk at the launch of the Humanitarian Response Index by DARA, which comments on donor performance. Close to 80 people attended the launch, including participants from the EC, relevant national ministries and Permanent representations, UN agencies, Red Cross and NGOs, as well as media.



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VOICE out loud

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Editor: Kathrin Schick

Co-Editor: Inge Brees

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Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE)

43, Avenue Louise, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 - 541.13.60 • Fax: +32 (0)2 - 534.99.53

E-mail: voice@ngovoice.org

Website: www.ngovoice.org